



PROJECT MUSE®

---

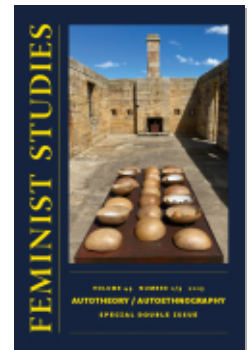
Pleasures of the Hunt / We Must Be Creatures: Toward an  
Ecofeminist Hunting Ethic

Cynthia Belmont

Feminist Studies, Volume 49, Number 2-3, 2023, pp. 202-232 (Article)

Published by Feminist Studies, Inc.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/fem.2023.a915906>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/915906>

CYNTHIA BELMONT

# Pleasures of the Hunt / We Must Be Creatures: Toward an Ecofeminist Hunting Ethic

*I don't know how a stag turns  
into a stream, an arc of water.  
I have never felt such accurate envy.*

*Not of the deer:*

*To be that porous, to have such  
largeness pass through me.  
—Jane Hirshfield, "The Supple Deer"*

*I was no longer freed from the earth, but  
toiling and overburdened, as befits a human  
being. And it seemed a good thing to me, and  
I gladly assumed the heavy load.  
—Marlen Haushofer, *The Wall**

DRESSING FOR WORK AT DAWN THIS MORNING, my vision skimming the window was snagged and pulled outside, drawn by a gaze: in the gray October yard, twenty feet or so from the house, was a young white-tail doe watching me. You get used to this, living in the forest—creatures manifesting in your line of sight. The doe was visiting our apple tree, as the local deer do, working their circuit, even weeks after the last

apples have fallen, in hopes of a surprise, some gift of sweetness that might appear because you never know, and you really don't since trees drop what they will when they will. She was staring in at me, watching my backlit form put on clothes, her body expression cautious, curious. Vigilant. What was she witnessing? What was I doing here, inside my human place? What was I going to do next, and could I do it from there, at that close range?

We watched each other for a few seconds, and then I moved my arm and she turned and ran for the woods, so I was not so much inside after all; returning her gaze through the window, I might as well have been outside, or almost outside, or coming outside, or reminding her that I could.

Nearly dressed, I felt glad that I had not been naked when I saw her because then I would have had knowledge of some (impossible to know) knowledge of hers of me, and that might have felt a little bit like shame, and what would that have meant? What would it mean to be caught unclothed by a deer? I follow Derrida here, naked, facing his cat, considering what it means for *who he is*: "The animal looks at us, and we are naked before it. Thinking perhaps begins there."<sup>1</sup> And now I turn and take a detour around this masculine (if not masculinist) section of his path, because I'm not a man with phallic anxiety facing a female domesticated feline; I'm not a man with "pussy panic," as Susan Fraiman calls Derrida's interspecies relation in that moment.<sup>2</sup> No, my shame, my "I," would not be about latent fear of the subjugated Other, but it might be about inhabiting a female/feminine body that is constituted as an inherent site of shame within a patriarchal culture. If, facing the doe naked, I would have been (courtesy of Jack Halberstam) "not dressed for conquering," it's also true that I'm never unequivocally dressed for conquering, in the sense that Halberstam's (masculine, male) sovereign has to *become*

- 
1. Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 29.
  2. Susan Fraiman, "Pussy Panic versus Liking Animals: Tracking Gender in Animal Studies," in *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth*, 2nd ed., ed. Carol J. Adams and Lori Gruen (New York: Bloomsbury, 2022), 289.

vulnerable through being undressed, rather than, as in the female/feminine body, already being so.<sup>3</sup>

From the doe's perspective however, I might have been dressed for conquering no matter what I was (not) wearing, being a member of a predator class from which she ran. I feel no shame for that, having already been constituted as such by the deer; free, untamed, healthy whitetail deer run from humans. And I have no answer to the questions posed here outside of my physical entanglement with the deer in my ecosystem — "wild" creatures who share the land, our home — an entanglement that might be organized around themes of appreciation, sharing, and eating. One thing, perhaps the most intensely physical thing, that I am in my relationship with deer is a hunter. A *girl* hunter, I always say, because my position with respect to hunting is a specifically gendered, marginal one. Queer girl hunter. And I ask from this position: when we in this culture think about hunting, if we think about hunting, when we talk about hunters, whom do we mean?

\* \* \*

Hold still, hold still. Still. Four hours in and I'm still holding still, as the day warms into the thirties, chickadees bustle for seeds at the edge of the woods, and the hunger is growing difficult to accommodate. My hands and feet are cold. Soon my hunting partner Jason and I will call it for the morning and drive the few miles into town to have a hearty diner lunch and a shot of fortifying bourbon before walking back out to our blinds. Jason is stationed a hundred yards to the north across the field. I see through his door flap his blaze-orange body fidgeting. Twenty minutes longer, say. Now fifteen. Ten more. Just keep trying. One thing you learn as a hunter is how to disregard several orders of physical discomfort and hold still.

You learn how to move through anticipation and readiness into the flow of quotidian thought, through stretches of intense observation of the landscape, punctuated by testing and retesting rifle placements, into lassitude, boredom, and its various, mostly corporeal states of agitation,

---

3. Jack Halberstam, *Wild Things: The Disorder of Desire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), 129.

then past all that, to another place in the psyche where the mind opens like a drawstring bag, spilling bright marbles of associative thought until the last few conscious ideas roll out and it's empty, you've finally lost it — your organized mind — and you are just calm, watching the grasses gently waving, different sorts of grasses of different heights becoming distinct within a vague consciousness, letting your vision relax into the gnarled, blackened shapes of downed aspen boughs and then into the standing trees at the forest verge, which brighten through the morning into the individual trunks and branches of daytime or darken to indefinite masses as afternoon becomes evening, minute by minute, deepening toward last light.

In my experience, it's often in periods of inhabiting this last, fully relaxed, emptied state that deer tend to walk out of the woods. In the gray dusk, suddenly a gray shape is standing where there was apparently nothing before, for hours, or days — in an opening that did not register as an opening before it was filled. A mirage maybe, a miracle certainly. When this happens, it feels very much like you've been given a gift, some sort of reward for your patience and grit. But it's critically important to me not to mistake this feeling of good fortune for something willed by the deer. From within my white American culture, which has no living philosophical or other tradition around subsistence hunting to guide my thinking or feeling or to make my killing meaningful in the social order or a shared spiritual frame, I do not believe that any creature gives their life to me. I only feel passionately, with certainty, that no one I might encounter in the woods wants to die or to be eaten — that all creatures want only to live.

This essay is about deer hunting as gendered ecofeminist practice, written from a rural queer ecological perspective — a defense of such hunting, in fact, as embodied biophilic praxis. Hunting is a profoundly experiential topic for me and within my Wisconsin Northwoods communities, and I'm wary of critics, especially white critics who live in sub/urban contexts, far removed from hunting subcultures; I approach their arguments skeptically because it's too easy for anti-hunting positions to run to colonialist, anti-rural thinking, gender-based assumptions, and avoidance of consideration of the consequences of critics' own behavior. As an ecofeminist, I'm especially dismayed by three moves in contemporary ecofeminist vegan theory: indiscriminate categorization of "hunting"; reductive views of the human as eater; and erasure of Indigenous

hunting while also invoking colonial language and instrumentalizing Native people in service of abstracted arguments. So, this essay is about epistemic privilege, ontology, and voice. It's also about the worship of deer from a creaturely point of view — the practice of reverence for food as a sacred site of pleasure and connection with the land and its creatures, including humans. And it's about women's bodies — eternal sites of alienation and desire. I want it to be clear how these things are related; I want to recover subsistence hunting for ecofeminism.<sup>4</sup> I want to imagine an ecofeminist hunting ethic — an ethic that makes subsistence hunting make sense not only to me, but to other feminists who operate from embodied, post-humanist positions of care, compassion, and interconnection. This endeavor may not be easy given that some ecofeminists/material feminists may bring to the topic of subsistence hunting a resistance based in (among other reasons) aversion to historically masculinist enterprises, a conviction that killing is inherently an act of hierarchical domination or marginalization, and, for vegans in particular, an antipathy that is “motivated by a visceral repugnance” to the idea of eating another creature.<sup>5</sup> I ask the reader, in any case, a Derridean question that I believe we must all ask of ourselves: as an eater, who do you think you are? And how do you procure the considerable amount of protein that is required for you to thrive, and who else procures it for you, from where, in what sorts of agricultural contexts, and what technologies and tools are used to move it from an idea to your plate?

One thing I am is a treaty person: I hunt on “my” (stolen from the Anishinaabeg) land and the land of friends, especially one well-situated field owned by a couple who are trying to regrow native conifers and encourage forest diversity in their chunk of the cutover; it's difficult to nurture pines and cedars with whitetail deer populations maintained at high levels by the Department of Natural Resources. I use a rifle because I like long guns and because a large copper bullet provides the best opportunity for a fast, clean kill. I do not, however, endorse American gun

- 
4. While subsistence hunting is legitimized within some environmental ethics (e.g., utilitarian conservation ethics, Aldo Leopold's *Sand County Almanac*) and some feminisms (e.g., Mary Zeiss Stange's *Woman the Hunter and Heart Shots*), no pro-hunting perspective has yet been advanced within ecofeminism.
  5. Marti Kheel, *Nature Ethics: An Ecofeminist Perspective* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 238.

culture, the gun lobby, the rampant proliferation of handguns and military-style rifles in the United States, unregulated/underregulated access to guns, or the catastrophic culture of violence within which gun tragedies and mass shootings flourish, causing tremendous suffering. Context matters. My local Northwoods hunting community, seated in two politically blue counties that feature powerfully conservationist Anishinaabe reservations (Bad River and Red Cliff) and share an ardent place-based identity around Lake Superior and the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, runs a full gamut from far-left environmentalist subsistence hunters (such as the fellow Northland College professors with whom I hunt), who use rifles and shotguns for hunting and trap-shooting while being strongly opposed to American gun culture at large, to right-wing gun enthusiasts and trophy hunters.<sup>6</sup> This community includes predominantly Indigenous and white locals and transplants whose relationships to land, culture, creatures, hunting, and guns are diverse, historically situated, and intersecting. I first learned to *see* a forest floor as a place where deer write their lives in paths, sign, and bone from my friend Deb (*Mashkiiziibii*, Bad River Band of Ojibwe), who taught me how to look for shed (bucks shed their antlers every year after the rut, and it's a gift to find them before the mice and squirrels have gnawed them down). I first learned the value of hunting at midday (versus only in the morning and evening, when deer are most active), a supreme exercise in patience, from the white, conservative, NRA-loyalist owner of our local shooting range. One of his employees, an expert in long-range shooting who has helped me sight-in pre-season, is a white, queer military veteran, vocal advocate for tribal sovereignty, and pro-Second Amendment progressive who regularly carries a concealed weapon and believes in strict gun regulation. In short, the Northwoods is the place where my understanding deepens, its people's various and unpredictable social locations and worldviews conflicting and enmeshed within rural complexity. Despite our significant political and philosophical differences, we have much in common:

- 
6. Northland is an environmental liberal arts college with a distinctive mission of commitment to social and environmental justice and a culture of experiential engagement with the outdoors. So many faculty, staff, and students hunt that Campus Safety maintains an on-campus gun storage room for students. Many are vegan and many have relationships with local farms as laborers and shop at the local food co-op — all ways of living a commitment to this mission and participating in our college culture.

we use modern weapons to hunt, we share many aspects of hunting culture, from clothing to processing methods to the fact that our children are released from school for the whole of Thanksgiving week in service of the hunt; and we appreciate the land and waters in our manifold ways, especially Lake Superior, which unites us as our primary Earthly reference point and source of the water of which we're physically composed.

Some of my fellow hunters prefer to use compound bows (or even, rarely, longbows) instead of guns, or to alternate between them. Someday I might learn to use a bow too, but in the meantime, my old .30-06 is comfortable. I also have a .22 for rabbits, though I'm not in the habit of using it; the ratio of meat to life lost doesn't feel worth it. *Feel*—because all our protein-procurement decisions are ultimately based in emotion, as our emotions are shaped within and through our relations with other creatures; as Mel Y. Chen says, “If affect includes affectivity—how one body affects another—then affect . . . becomes a study of the governmentality of animate hierarchies.”<sup>7</sup> As ecofeminists are well aware, emotion should be at the center of theorizing about animals, food, the environment, and any other topic of interest to ecofeminism.

Deer and rabbits are creatures for whom it's easy to feel—thoughtful, gentle, lovely, even the rabbits chewing on my garden, even the thick-necked rutting bucks, even the rack-ribbed does dying of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) due to the extraordinary concentration of deer in Wisconsin, since white colonists and “resource” extraction companies cut down the habitat for elk, caribou, and moose in the mid 1800s, replaced it with food crops, and killed off most of our supposed competitors, the other predators. Deer eyes are liquid—soft, dark pools, brown like a tannic Northwoods river running over stones. Deer are magical in their special abilities, such as the ability to survive and flourish in intensively developed/managed landscapes and to camouflage using their fur color, body shape, and carefulness of movement, and in their extraordinary grace.

A deer's life is not more valuable than a rabbit's, though a deer is much bigger and has many fewer progeny. *Each life is of the utmost value to the creature who is living it.* Crucially, my life is not more valuable than a

---

7. Mel Y. Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 12.

deer's: you learn existential humility quickly when you almost die in your early thirties (necrotic gallbladder) and when your sister — only sister, little sister — does die in her forties (breast cancer). My life is supremely valuable to me because, having almost not been alive anymore, knowing how easy it is not to be alive, I could not be more grateful for my life.

Specifically, I'm trying to live a *creaturely* life. Not an *animal* one — I'm trying to release the "animal" from my vocabulary. Derrida opposes the singular "animal" to "living creatures": "men would be first and foremost those living creatures who have given themselves the word that enables them to speak of the animal with a single voice and to designate it as the single being that remains without a response, without a word with which to respond"; "we have to envisage the existence of 'living creatures.'"<sup>8</sup> *Creatures*. Not "critters," apologies to Donna Haraway but (notwithstanding her intention that it function "promiscuously") "critter" feels desexualized to me, undignified, tamed, contained — folksy, like Americana, and lacking a requisite wonder.<sup>9</sup> I accept the complex etymology of "creature," including its "semiotic barnacles,"<sup>10</sup> which stick to every word; you can't just "scrape off"<sup>11</sup> the encrustations of history, and also, barnacles are creatures — they are welcome to join my "holobiont"<sup>12</sup> as on a gray whale. To me, to live creaturely, like a barnacle, means living in place, in appreciation of place, being responsible to my place, including to the others who live here; all other free creatures on Earth, including those who migrate, live in place(s), making their living where they are — they are not willingly estranged from their places. It means knowing where I live: the kinds and lifeways of other creatures and plants in the contexts of seasons and weather, signs of health and distress — things that other creatures already know. It means always working on producing less waste; avoiding the use of poisonous chemicals in our bodies, the garden, and our water; turning away from industrial plant and animal

---

8. Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 32, 47, 50.

9. Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (London: Duke University Press, 2016), 169.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. Donna J. Haraway, "Symbiogenesis, Symptoiesis, and Art Science Activisms for Staying with the Trouble," in *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*, ed. Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, Elaine Gan, and Nils Bubandt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 26.

agriculture and toward local and organic food; growing and preserving as much of that as we can; and generally trying to live as respectfully as possible. Mainly, it means being thoughtful about our consumption and attentive to the lives we live among — resisting carelessness, awareness-avoidance, and other patterns of ignorance and alienation that accompany an anthropocentric worldview and species-based imperative to hierarchical domination of all other life on Earth, as well as those humans who are marginalized and so considered less human.

*Creature* then, and a gendered one: “creature” is a sexy word, a mythic word of imagination, empowerment, shapeshifting, and story-making, as in chimera, satyrs, sirens, monsters of all kinds — departures from the expected, embodying difference, enchantment, and mysterious origins. Creatures are anti-assimilationist, unconventional, magical, and queer. And also: creature comforts. What are those? Fire, blankets, hot food. A mug of warmth on a winter afternoon. Lying on sand listening to waves. The most essential pleasures. “Creature” is sensuous, earthy, a word I can slip into like a dress and feel at home, and it means something *created*, which can acknowledge genders as both discursive and lived, as substantial and *creative*. It already means both animal and human — *creation*. These days, in the environmental humanities we are using “more-than-human” to refer to the rest of the world, but this still centers “human” as a category, and I want to be decentered, I want to be less than that. I want to be less and I am less, and we are all less, ask anyone with a body, and by this I mean anyone who becomes aware, through illness, accident, or ongoing physical challenge, that we are just embodied creatures living as other creatures do — eating, making our dens, watching the sunlight in the leaves, even if what we’re eating are Impossible Burgers, our den is a studio apartment, and our leaves are on a screen. Because that is what it takes these days — illness, injury, some special circumstance — to attentively inhabit the creaturely body for any stretch of time; it takes being forced into recognition that despite the spandex workout clothes, computer-based jobs and entertainment, and investment strategies, we have transcended nothing. Sunaura Taylor writes, “it is not that we are *like* animals or that the *idea* of animals is integral to who we are — although both claims are true. It is that we *are* animals. A

fact so boringly commonplace that we forget it — perpetually.”<sup>13</sup> Taylor explains that she and other people with disabilities may be especially able to recognize and inhabit their creaturehood because in an ableist society, they are sometimes “transgressing boundaries . . . of the ways in which one is supposed to inhabit a human body,” of the normative standards of the human. They may be especially able to relate to other creatures as well: Taylor says of her dog, “I feel a visceral understanding of his movements.”<sup>14</sup> From a disability perspective, forgetting one’s creatureliness is a luxury that able-bodiedness affords.

I want to be restored to my status among the creatures, reminding myself daily of dear life through attentiveness, seeing each ash, balsam, or red pine not just as a “tree” or member of a species or subspecies but as an individual inseparable from the others; seeing each woodpecker, chickadee, or sparrow as a member of overlapping interspecies communities, through bodily practice that reflects the many concepts in ecofeminism and material feminism that mean similar things — transcorporeality, embodied materialism, eco-logics, naturecultures, vital materialism, animacy, reworlding. Jane Bennett writes, “I believe that encounters with lively matter can chasten my fantasies of human mastery, highlight the common materiality of all that is, expose a wider distribution of agency, and reshape the self and its interests.”<sup>15</sup> That reshaping — that’s what I’m after. Mary Phillips says, speaking of poststructuralist approaches such as Stacy Alaimo’s, “the recuperation of body and its visceral inhabitation in the world has to be part” of the ecofeminist project since “embracing the vulnerability of the body is a recognition of precarious, corporeal openness to the material world which can foster an ecocentric ethics wherein the vulnerability of nature is also recognized.”<sup>16</sup> I want this; I want to be undressed for conquering. I want to be mortified. I’ve gone to the Pacific Ocean for that my whole life — to get out into big surf and be carried by the ocean, thrown, slammed into the sand to grope up heaving,

---

13. Sunaura Taylor, *Beasts of Burden: Animal and Disability Liberation* (New York: New Press, 2017), 115 (emphasis in original).

14. *Ibid.*, 116.

15. Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 122.

16. Mary Phillips, “Developing Ecofeminist Corporeality: Writing the Body as Activist Poetics,” in *Contemporary Perspectives on Ecofeminism*, ed. Mary Phillips and Nick Rumens (London: Routledge, 2016), 58, 61.

nostrils salt-stung, eyes burning, to recall that I am small and water is the force of life. If you develop a love of this feeling as a child, it never leaves you, you crave it, this elemental physicality. Today I also go for this feeling to Lake Superior, which is vast, deep, and brutally cold even in July, and to Northwoods snowscapes, big forests — to land-based pursuits, including hunting, which puts me out in the elements and right next to death, where we all are anyway.

*Creaturely* means *in the body, on the land*. Are we living creaturely? That is the question.

\* \* \*

Some ecofeminist vegan thinkers are not categorically opposed to the recognition of humans' ecological locations as eaters of other animals and, concomitantly, the practice of subsistence hunting. Greta Gaard's critical ecofeminism, for instance, can accommodate ecofeminist philosopher Val Plumwood's ecological animalist/critical bioregionalist, semi-vegetarian "contextualized ethic of human interidentity as embedded with ecological others, accepting our place in the food chain as both eater and eaten" — this "interidentity" being kin to my "creature"; Gaard states that contextual moral veganism (CMV) is "capable of...in diverse contexts, placing humans in the food chain as both eater and eaten, pointing to context-specific moral directions that strive to produce the least suffering and greatest care for all involved: humans (industrial, rural, agricultural, Indigenous), animals, plants, ecological entities."<sup>17</sup> While she does not explicitly support subsistence hunting, Gaard's CMV at least acknowledges the possibility of ethical consumption of other creatures.

Other ecofeminist vegan philosophical positions are more limited, as reflected in the latest collection of such writings — *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth* (2022), edited by Carol J. Adams and Lori Gruen — a second/expanded edition which, as it features many key figures, I take to be representative of the field today, and with which, despite its virtues in critiquing contemporary food systems, I'm disappointed due to its troubling approaches to subsistence hunting. First, its categorical dismissal of "hunting," which is endemic

---

17. Greta Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism* (New York: Lexington Books, 2017), 39, 38.

to the collection: Claire Jean Kim asks, "What is the difference between dogfighting, on the one hand, and hunting, horseracing, Seaworld [*sic*], the zoo, meat eating, and other institutionalized forms of animal usage? All of these involve commodifying other animals and reducing them to instruments of human ends, and all involve extreme measures of psychic and physical violence against them."<sup>18</sup> But each of these institutions is contextually specific, and their specificities matter a great deal, as Kim herself shows in her analysis of dogfighting and racialization. Sea World, for instance, is a distinct site of commodification and abuse with distinct cultural and economic imperatives, environmental impacts, and consequences for the creatures involved, including the human audiences. Meanwhile, what kind of "hunting" does Kim mean? Trophy hunting (for taxidermy and acquisition of prized parts)? Commercial hunting (for the sale of meat, parts, and hides)? Conservation hunting (for ecosystem health)? Subsistence hunting (for food)? Massacring wolves because your masculine idea of what it means to be an American landowner is threatened by the idea of a competitor? Indigenous hunting traditions that connect communities to the land, honoring intergenerational teachings and embeddedness in ecosystems? "Hunting" means little as a general category, especially given its inclusion in Kim's list, which otherwise covers enterprises in which animals are held captive, enslaved, and tortured for entertainment purposes. For many subsistence hunters in my community and beyond, hunting constitutes *resistance* to the institutional ethos of hierarchical domination that supports such commercial instrumentalism.

Unlike, for instance, trophy and commercial hunting, subsistence hunting is inherently *anti*-commodification and does not "reduce" anyone to anything unless to constitute another creature as edible is to "reduce" it, which some vegan philosophers seem to assume, though reduction is not a requirement nor a given in order to eat anything, be it a carrot or a deer.<sup>19</sup> The discussion of edibility within vegan philosophy

---

18. Claire Jean Kim, "Michael Vick, Race, and Animality," in *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth*, 210.

19. Nor is "marginalization" relevant to whitetail deer hunting, as some ecofeminists might argue: whitetail deer are extremely populous in Wisconsin due to human activity, to the point that the spread of CWD is causing them tremendous suffering. They cannot be considered a "marginalized" group based on numbers or survival advantage within contemporary rural habitats.

could occur only in a culture that has killed off its apex predators so that humans can't imagine being eaten anymore, or (based on Adams and Gruen's collection) they imagine it within a context of criminal mental illness or an abstracted, decontextualized game of pondering burial rites or "cannibals." But human edibility is not a game in the Northland: here, the idea of being eaten is real enough that one of my neighbors will only run with dog companions, as protection from wolves, and one neighbor stopped running entirely after a cougar was sighted on a neighbor's yard cam. Although no one *is* ever eaten, large predators do live among us, so we're able to conceive of ourselves as edible; as the saying goes, "If you've been in the woods, you've been watched by a cougar." I wish we had enough cougars around for this to be true, but regardless, humans are still—even if we're living in downtown Chicago—relatively slow Pleistocene creatures with no built-in physical defenses, and we're easily reminded of this fact in the right circumstances. And we are not reduced for being edible, though we may feel small when we imagine a cougar draped on a branch above us, and, anyway, reduced from what to what? *We have always been edible.* Telling her story of almost being eaten by a crocodile, Plumwood says, "Large predators . . . creatures that can take human life . . . present a test of our acceptance of our ecological identity. When they're allowed to live freely, these creatures indicate our preparedness to coexist with the otherness of the earth, and to recognize ourselves in mutual, ecological terms, as part of the food chain, eaten as well as eater."<sup>20</sup> People who live in ecosystems that have lost the otherness of predators are denied part of the experience of creatureliness. Likewise, living amidst large predators can dignify the idea of edibility for us all, without moral judgment. My own inherent edibility, within a comprehensive food web that includes "wild" creatures, human agriculture, and microorganisms who consume us throughout the life cycle, is essential to the ethical context in which I situate my hunting. While, as some vegans might argue, I don't technically *need* to hunt, I *choose* to hunt at an ethical intersection of: (1) contemporary ecosystem management within a context of CWD and Northwoods forest ecology; (2) material feminist investment in intimate, "visceral" knowledge of my protein to the degree

---

20. Val Plumwood, "Prey to a Crocodile," *AI SLING Magazine*, 2002, <https://www.aislingmagazine.com/aislingmagazine/articles/TAM30/ValPlumwood.html>.

possible; (3) an ecofeminist refusal to eat creatures whose lives are subject to hierarchical domination as critiqued in ecofeminist philosophy;<sup>21</sup> and (4) a creaturehood whose edibility is a central feature. "Reduction" is not a feature of my ecofeminist hunting ethic.

More disturbing than its indiscriminate representation of hunting is the lack of recognition in Adams and Gruen's collection of the centrality of subsistence hunting in many Indigenous foodways.<sup>22</sup> While the authors include mention of Indigenous people's struggles to resist and protect their communities and homelands from colonization and exploitation,<sup>23</sup> colonizers' abuses of Indigenous people regarding gender diversity and sexual practices,<sup>24</sup> and the fact that colonizers impose their diets to the detriment of colonized people's health and well-being,<sup>25</sup> there is no acknowledgment that many Indigenous communities hunt, fish, and trap creatures; there is no recognition of the sacred roles of creatures from buffalo to deer to caribou to seal to salmon (just to name some key species on this continent) within diverse Indigenous traditions. It appears that ecofeminist vegan philosophy as represented here is anti-colonial right up to but not including the point of many Indigenous

- 
21. See, for example, Plumwood's master model of the value-hierarchical structure of dualistic marginalization, characterized by five linking postulates: "backgrounding," "radical exclusion," "incorporation," "instrumentalism," and "homogenization," in Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
  22. While I am speaking back, as a white ecofeminist, to white ecofeminist misrepresentation and omission of Indigenous cultures and concerns, in no way am I linking this critique to my own hunting. I write from a position of solidarity with Native people and politics.
  23. Carol J. Adams and Lori Gruen, "Ecofeminist Footings"; Leah Kirts, "Upsetting Boundaries: Trans Queer Interspecies Ecofeminisms"; Mia MacDonald, "Maximum Plunder: The Global Context and Multiple Threats of Animal Agriculture"; Fiona Probyn-Rapsey, "The Animals Call It: Climate Crisis, Gender Crisis, and Ecofeminist Listening"; Shamaru Shantu Riley, "Ecology is a Sistah's Issue Too"; and Richard Twine, "Ecofeminism and Veganism: Revisiting the Question of Universalism," all in *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth*.
  24. pattrice jones, "Eros and Mechanisms of Eco-Defense" and Kirts, "Upsetting Boundaries: Trans Queer Interspecies Ecofeminisms" in *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth*.
  25. Adams and Gruen, "Ecofeminist Footings" in *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth*.

foodways, in which eating creatures who are kin is common.<sup>26</sup> The Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission says, for example, “salmon are *at the center* of the diets, cultures, and religions of Columbia Plateau tribes” (emphasis added).<sup>27</sup> Within my local context, Northland College Ojibwe language instructor and Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute Associate Director Dylan Bizhikiins Jennings recently hosted an event at the College in which he and other local Anishinaabe hunters invited the College community to learn about and participate in *Wawaash-keshi Gabeshiwin*—deer camp; they talked about Anishinaabe hunting traditions, had the students help with butchering a buck and cooking the meat, and hosted a venison feast. We stood gathered quietly around the buck’s lean body hanging from the gambrel, his red muscle and bone opaque in the cold snowy night, a challenge to the students, staff, and faculty to think about many things from which our culture is typically alienated. Bizhikiins explained that his people give the finest meat, that which is first removed from the deer, to the elders in their families, and if they already have some, it is passed to other elders in the community so that all the older people can have some of this, the best food. This is not a tale of long ago; this is Anishinaabe culture right now Up North. Unfortunately, vegan philosophy as represented in Adams and Gruen’s collection cannot conceive of such a culture.

Lori Gruen, following Deane Curtin, endorses what is framed as an outer-limits version of CMV “that recognizes both the moral centrality of a vegan diet and contextual exigencies that impede one’s ability to live without directly killing or using others.”<sup>28</sup> This framing is deeply presumptuous, particularly with respect to Indigenous foodways. In whose diet is veganism “morally central?” Why is “direct” killing less ethical than indirect (invisibilized) killing? Can there be no respect for creature-eating without its being a matter of “exigencies” and “impediment?” Rather, it is hegemonic white culture, racism, and capitalism that create

---

26. This anthology is unexceptional in this regard: another prominent recent collection, *Through a Vegan Studies Lens: Textual Ethics and Lived Activism*, ed. Laura Wright (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2019), also cannot accommodate Indigenous creature-eating.

27. “Tribal Salmon Culture,” Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, 2021, <https://critfc.org/salmon-culture/tribal-salmon-culture>.

28. Lori Gruen, “Facing Death and Practicing Grief,” in *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth*, 164.

impediments to Indigenous people's ability to follow their traditional diets. An ethos of creaturely flesh as emergency ration/last resort cannot speak to subsistence hunting/fishing cultures, including Indigenous ones, many of whose traditional foods are now threatened by the emergency of global climate change in addition to other pressing challenges. Unfortunately, CMV as represented in Adams and Gruen's collection therefore cannot genuinely engage with issues of tribal sovereignty and environmental/climate justice, including food security and food sovereignty. I find this omission deeply problematic, as any enterprise calling itself "ecofeminism" should be actively anti-colonial, for all the reasons that Gaard's "Toward a Queer Ecofeminism," Sturgeon's *Environmentalism in Popular Culture* and *Ecofeminist Natures*, Ray's *The Ecological Other*, Thomas's *The Intersectional Environmentalist*, and others have made clear; likewise, "non-intersectional veganism is dangerous as it further reinforces colonial mindsets."<sup>29</sup> I suggest that CMV scholars think further about the limits of the applicability and relevance of their ethic by exploring the information provided by organizations such as the Global Food Justice Alliance, Indigenous Food Systems Network, Indigikitchen, the Native American Food Sovereignty Alliance, and Indigenous Climate Hub.

Strikingly, the collection's one sustained gesture in the direction of Indigenous foodways is Ralph Acampora's consideration of the ethics of subsistence hunting through a comparison with "cannibalism"; in his scenario, a non-contextualized "you" "comes into contact with" a "lost tribe" of "folk — *who appear in most ways human* if not exactly humane" because they are "cannibals" (emphasis added).<sup>30</sup> Acampora details with sly mock seriousness their belief system and rituals that parody reductive views of Indigenous cultures, from the "totems" whose "actual referents are far removed in the present distribution of species" to the "rich . . . traditions linking the clans of the lost tribe back to an imagined evolutionary consanguinity that they take to be 'realissimo,'" to the "Rite of Ingestion" that "features a prayer of forgiveness to and appreciation

---

29. Leah Thomas, *The Intersectional Environmentalist: How to Dismantle Systems of Oppression to Protect People and Planet* (New York: Little, Brown, and Co., 2022), 133.

30. Ralph Acampora, "Caring Cannibals and Human(e) Farming: Testing Contextual Edibility for Speciesism," in *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth*, 145.

for the sacrificed specimen”;<sup>31</sup> the “cannibals” “offer ritualistic apologies” for their killing because “they feel (perhaps subconsciously, and yet sufficiently) shameful.”<sup>32</sup> “Are the ‘caring cannibals,’” he asks, “a lost tribe merely in the sense of spatial or temporal remoteness — or have they lost their moral bearings as well?”<sup>33</sup> I put it to the editors of this anthology: have Adams and Gruen lost *their* moral bearings in including this article (again! in this second edition)? Acampora’s philosophical exercise openly ridicules Indigenous people, suggesting through the analogy that those who hunt are not fully human and that their lifeways are shameful. Further, his exercise capitalizes on the colonial word “cannibal,” which originated as the Spanish word *canibales* that Columbus used to describe Indigenous people in the New World “who were rumored to be eaters of human flesh”; “their purported barbaric cannibalism, some of which was entirely fabricated as a rationale for conquest,” became foundational to perceptions of Indigenous people, as “cannibal” was popularized to describe Caribbean societies.<sup>34</sup> Acampora’s arch, witheringly ethnocentric “lost tribe” scenario is intended to put a final nail in the coffin of CMV’s ability to conceive of respectful subsistence hunting, based on the vegan argument that if one eats other creatures, one can only avoid a charge of speciesism if one is also willing to eat and be eaten by humans — an anti-ecological claim that, rather than clarifying anything, evades Derrida’s question of who humans are/as creatures.<sup>35</sup> It’s against this background that Acampora supports Marti Kheel’s “edifying discourse of encouragement” whereby Indigenous and rural people are “invited” to stop eating creatures: “It would appear . . . that nature ethics . . . could consistently advocate herbivory to my hypothetical lost tribe (as well as to actual peoples who may practice subsistence hunting of other animals).”<sup>36</sup> The suggestion that vegans “invite” Indigenous people to give up their traditions is unconscionable from an ecofeminist point of view,

---

31. Ibid., 146.

32. Ibid., 147.

33. Ibid.

34. Sarah Everts, “Europe’s Hypocritical History of Cannibalism,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, April 24, 2013, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/europes-hypocritical-history-of-cannibalism-42642371>.

35. Importantly, no human societies rely on human flesh for subsistence.

36. Ralph Acampora, “Caring Cannibals and Human(e) Farming: Testing Contextual Edibility for Speciesism,” 152.

given the enduring missionary project of cultural imperialism, and Aca-mpora's uncritical use of phrases such as "multicultural tolerance" and Curtin's "exotic cultures" illustrates a lack of familiarity with contemporary social justice movements. This problem continues in Twine's article, which seriously considers a universalist vegan position (universalism being impossible in any other contemporary ecofeminist enterprise given ecofeminism's commitment to intersectionality and centering marginalized perspectives), again citing "multiculturalism" as a poor ground for vegan ethics.<sup>37</sup>

Vegan philosophy exists on a continuum, and though I do believe that many vegans (not only ecofeminists or professional philosophers) may not hold particularly nuanced views of hunting, I don't believe that the majority consciously occupy colonial or anti-Indigenous mindsets or would be unsupportive of tribal sovereignty. I remain hopeful that ecofeminist vegan scholars can work past such tendencies in their field toward alliances with Indigenous nations, with subsistence hunters, and with all others who are swimming upstream against hegemonic food systems and their many miseries.

\* \* \*

Confused by the glimmering mirror of sun and sky, a grouse flew into a window on the back of our house and died. So here's what you do with a freshly dead grouse. You lay them upon the ground, breast up, wings spread, and you stand on the wings on either side of their body and you pull up on their feet and the whole grouse instantly comes undressed, everything exterior slides right off with almost no effort, leaving a neat pink breast with the feathered wings astride, which looks, with its two perfect halves, like a Mexican *Milagro* winged heart, which means *miracle*. Then you cook it and savor the rich deliciousness. For me, it's impossible to imagine a more ethical way to procure protein. At the same time, it's impossible to imagine surviving this way, since that grouse was an apple out of season — a miracle dropped at my feet.

---

37. Twine, "Ecofeminism and Veganism: Revisiting the Question of Universalism," in *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth*, 199.

Skinning a grouse is like skinning any creature but easier. Feathers or fur, you find that the barrier between inside and outside is so thin it barely exists. I wish women who live in embattled relationships with their bodies knew this — what the creature is who you are, how fine is the line. Gutting a deer brings this home, as my hands reach in elbow-deep past the cut diaphragm, past the ribcage, rooting around in the visceral mess to grip the noisemaker ribbed windpipe locked in the throat. You cut through it by feel, you pull, and everything inside the deer comes out in a vital tangle, leaving a fur cavern. You are once again grateful that your insides are (for now) still inside your body and not lying on a metal table in the ER.

Grouse, deer, rabbit—we're all put together basically the same. Hunting and scavenging remind you of this as you get down to the innards, sorting through organs for the edible ones, in the grouse's case the hard little garnet of a heart, the gizzard globe. Another thing you do with a dead grouse is slice open their gizzard to see what's inside. What you find, as when you examine any bird's nest or bear or coyote or fisher droppings, is a miniature landscape of where you live: inside the gizzard is a colorful mash of neat little white quartz gems, seeds, and bits of nut, bud, and leaf—forest and field. The grouse lives on the land and the land is the grouse, and of course when we eat the bird, we become part bird, part land, transcorporeally. So then you pull out the leathery yellow lining and fry the gizzard for a treat.

What we do in our culture is create windows for grouse to crash into. Windows and windows and windows. What do we see when we look through them at the land? Is it ever a reflection of ourselves? Derrida: "I import a full-length mirror . . . into the scene."<sup>38</sup>

I'm a girl creature. Also a member of a class called "women" but not myself a woman—as a queer person, I've never been able to identify with the term "woman," which feels essentializing, as if my body is supposed to be grave and proper or available to a man or to have menstrual blood flowing in its veins. In my mid-fifties, I still don't "feel like a woman," whatever that feels like, though I do still feel like a girl. I understand the work involved in femininity—its pressures and pleasures—and why the pressures must be resisted in favor of the pleasures. And

---

38. Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 50.

I wish women could see their bodies as creatures demanding empathy. I try to talk to a friend, also a girly girl, about feeling creaturely, about relating to one's body as a practice of gratitude to be alive — because she's entering perimenopause and starting to battle with her body in new ways and I believe that a creaturely existence could be an antidote to women's body dysmorphia — but it's impossible, she can't really engage. The culture is too strong. What would it take for each of us to come to creatureliness? Taylor writes, "I feel animal in my embodiment, and this feeling is one of connection, not shame. Recognizing my animality has in fact been a way of claiming the dignity in the way my body and other . . . vulnerable bodies move, look, and experience the world around them . . . It's an assertion that animality is integral to *humanity*."<sup>39</sup> I believe that we all have inside us access to such animality — a creatureliness that can be life-affirming. I think of Sylvia Plath, who wrote in her journals, "Being born a woman is my awful tragedy . . . I was doomed to sprout breasts and ovaries . . . to have my whole circle of action, thought and feeling rigidly circumscribed by my inescapable femininity."<sup>40</sup> In her poem "Tulips," Plath says while struggling with mental illness in her hospital bed:

The tulips should be behind bars like dangerous animals;  
They are opening like the mouth of some great African cat,  
And I am aware of my heart: it opens and closes  
Its bowl of red blooms out of sheer love of me.<sup>41</sup>

Plath *says* that the wild, ravenous tulips should be behind bars because their hunger for life frightens her — she who wants to die, to be rid of her body — but she *shows* that her creaturehood is a voice within her, communicating that her body loves her and wants her to live. And so should we all feel, so I wish we all could feel.

\* \* \*

---

39. Taylor, *Beasts of Burden*, 115 (emphasis in original).

40. Gail Crowther, "Sylvia Plath, Safe Spaces, and the Violation of Women," *Gail Crowther* (blog), November 21, 2021, <https://gailcrowther.com/2021/11/21/sylvia-plath-safe-spaces-and-the-violation-of-women>.

41. Sylvia Plath, "Tulips," in *Ariel* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965).

Girl hunter — I'm ever-surprised that I'm not made to feel awkward or unwelcome in hunting-related settings in Northern Wisconsin; as Kheel's *Nature Ethics*, Brian Luke's *Brutal*, and Andrée Collard and Joyce Con-tucci's *Rape of the Wild* (among others) have shown, mainstream hunting is a historically masculin(ist) enterprise. Fortunately, Northwoods men understand that women hunt, fish, build things, fix vehicles, and are generally capable; I know many women who hunt, most of whom grew up in hunting families where it was taken for granted that you teach the girls as well as the boys, and I know families who are currently raising their girls to hunt. I still feel like a girl, however, being the only non-male hunter in most public contexts. I still feel different, feminized, even in my puffy blaze-orange overalls, because these remain masculine spaces, spaces where my ecofeminist hunting ethic may not be shared by many others, even the subsistence hunters, some of whom may still conceive of this self-provisioning in masculinist ways — as "sporting," as conquest, as competition for the biggest buck. How do other hunters conceive of the lives and deaths of the deer whom they kill? What do they see as their place in the woods? I can't know or assume.

Girl hunter — when I kill a mature doe I'm killing someone who has probably been a mother and might be a mother now, her children might be watching from the woods, and I refuse to refuse the intrusion of these thoughts, as masculinist hunting requires.<sup>42</sup> I feel witnessed anyway when gutting, witnessed by the forest, as if, having no inherited spirituality around hunting, I lack the capacity to make this ritual meaningful enough — not in some cosmic accounting but just in the moment, kneeling in the stillness, slicing open a hot red bowl of belly as wind brushes snow from the trees. The Anishinaabe hunters in our region say that after a deer is killed, the spirit lingers in the area for a while, watching to see how they are treating the body, if they are doing it the right way, with respect, with care, not being wasteful. I deeply appreciate this idea but I don't get to just take it. Instead, what I take from this situation is renewed awareness of my culture's spiritual impoverishment in its relationship to food, other creatures, and killing, and refreshed commitment to living with discomfort, as I am opposed to hegemonic, anthropocentric

---

42. In *Ecological Masculinities: Theoretical Foundations and Practical Guidance* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 201, Martin Hultman and Paul M. Pulé discuss the requisite emotional "hardening up" of masculine/breadwinner hunting.

American food culture and also to appropriation of others' worldviews. There is nothing for this spiritual void but to wrestle with it—that *is* my position.

In general, the risk of hunting is that I will have to face any suffering that I cause, despite my best efforts, because I'm procuring my own sustenance instead of having others do it for me. In contrast, when others procure my food, *I cannot know what suffering might have been involved*, but *I can assume that some suffering was involved*, since at the very least, even small-scale organic farming requires the displacement of creatures from their homes.<sup>43</sup> Facing the possibility of suffering at my hands is the hardest thing I do in my life — looking someone directly in the face whom I am going to kill. Along with some other ecofeminist vegans, Adams seems to believe that it would be difficult or impossible for people to eat meat if we had to confront the creatures we eat instead of erasing them into "absent referents."<sup>44</sup> While I *feel* (and certainly hope) that she's right regarding factory farming and contemporary American grocery shopping, I'm *certain* that she's wrong regarding subsistence hunting. Rather, I would *very much more* like to eat creatures whose provenance I know firsthand, for emotional as well as environmental reasons. A queer ecological view of embodiment (as well as the worldviews of cultures the world over) can accommodate such an apparent paradox of knowledge and desire. As Sandilands and Erickson say, "Desire is always surpassing the frames established for it, and a queer politics of desire allows us to become open to what exists beyond the discursive frameworks that have been established for these experiences."<sup>45</sup> It is indeed possible to bridge the epistemological gap between known creatures, such as pets, for whom we should care, and unknown/anonymous creatures, such as industrial, agricultural, and laboratory animals, of whom we are ignorant; one way to do this is to eat directly from the land.

---

43. One deer feeds my family of three about one fifth of our annual dinner protein; the rest we must procure otherwise.

44. Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (New York: Continuum Books, 1996), 48.

45. Catriona Sandilands and Bruce Erickson, "A Genealogy of Queer Ecologies," introduction to *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, ed. Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 37.

Speaking of bridging gaps, it turns out that so-called “herbivores” consume animal bodies — not just antlers — and even kill to eat. *National Geographic* reports that deer have been observed “eating fish, dead rabbits, and even live birds.”<sup>46</sup> *Northwestern Naturalist* recently published a study showing that snowshoe hares scavenge the bodies of other hares as well as grouse and their main predator, lynx.<sup>47</sup> How can this be? “Herbivores” have been hypostatized, but in fact these creatures’ desires are more complex; it’s likely that many animals whose eating practices scientific categories have long taken for granted are equally uncooperative with such taxonomies. Scandalous — just as the idea of gay/lesbian/queer animals was when Bruce Bagemihl and scholars in queer ecologies started illuminating the “biological exuberance” of diverse animal sexualities and genders. Why is the idea of a deer eating a live bird so shocking? Because we are in love with our trophic levels — our classifications and exclusions. But it seems that we creatures are potentially all on a spectrum of omnivory as we are also on a sexual and gender spectrum. There are more things in heaven and Earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy, and therefore we must, as a stranger, give it welcome: the prey who is also predator. This “strange stranger” of Timothy Morton’s is even more “uncanny, familiar, and strange” than we might have guessed.<sup>48</sup> Where is the ever-vanishing point at which some species of creature is finally innocent of cruelty and murder and can therefore represent purity? Fraiman says that when Adams underwent her philosophical “shift over to the side of the animals,” it was about “disavowing the identity of meat eater in order to identify, instead, with the eaten.”<sup>49</sup> Contrarily, Josephine Donovan’s feminist care theory does not “endorse that humans emulate . . . other animals in establishing their own ethic”; rather, in order to avoid the naturalistic fallacy, humans must apparently occupy

---

46. Delaney Ross, “Never Before Seen: Deer Spotting Eating Human Bones,” *National Geographic*, May 7, 2017, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/article/deer-eating-human-forensics-decomposition>.

47. Michael J. L. Peers, Yasmine N. Majchrzak, Sean M. Konkolics, Rudy Boonsstra, and Stan Boutin, “Scavenging by Snowshoe Hares (*Lepus americanus*) in Yukon, Canada,” *Northwestern Naturalist* 99, no. 3 (December 2018): 232–35.

48. Timothy Morton, “Guest Column: Queer Ecology,” *PMLA* 125, no. 2 (March 2010): 277.

49. Susan Fraiman, “Pussy Panic versus Liking Animals: Tracking Gender in Animal Studies,” 300. This identification is not universally shared by vegans.

a special category of difference that is defined by resistance to identification with other creatures.<sup>50</sup> A vegan philosopher “I” could possibly avoid this dilemma of either over-identifying with an unstable/meaningless category of “the eaten” or under-identifying with other creatures, whom it would behoove us to remember are much more like than unlike us, by pursuing epistemic and ontological embedment within a particular local food community, rather than in abstracted, categorical ideals. Overall, as Rebecca Tuvel says, “If the liberatory goals we strive for *depend* on attending to the figure of the animal alongside other forms of oppression, then we must think . . . beyond and between not only race, sex and gender binaries, but, crucially, the animal-human binary as well. A Derridean approach that multiplies differences and limits wherever possible can help illuminate the fabricated nature of claims about these so-called essential facts of our identities.”<sup>51</sup> Recognizing their fabricated natures, we’re going to have to undo our categories of meat eater and eaten. Here as everywhere, taxonomic thinking is a barrier to perception and understanding, as is well established in ecofeminism. Categories such as meat eater and eaten are windows that we believe enable vision when in fact they may prevent kinship with the rest of the world, even as “nature” is constantly, fatally, slamming into them with its fleshy, feathered materiality.

In suggesting a theoretical parallel between omnivory and queerness *as terms of resistance to formal schemas of classification, reclaimed from those classification systems*, I am not trying to create a new alliance or metaphor or to suggest a political likeness between queer creatures and meat eaters but rather to work against any such categorical reduction. Indeed, it is vegans, not meat eaters, who are marginalized within a hegemonic carnist culture because they’ve taken time to learn about the industrial food system and developed a powerful oppositional stance and praxis. Instead, I am saying that rather than categorizing, humans should be coming to the rest of nature in awe, curiosity, and fellowship. I am saying that ecofeminist philosophy must resist taxonomies that

---

50. Josephine Donovan, “Caring to Dialogue: Feminism and the Treatment of Animals,” in *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth*, 57.

51. Rebecca Tuvel, “‘Veil of Shame’: Derrida, Sarah Bartmann and Animality,” *Journal for Critical Animal Studies* 9, no. 1/2 (2011): 228.

ultimately center culture over nature and humans over other creatures. And as creatures, we might properly reserve judgment of each other's behavior in accordance with the real complexity of creaturely behavior.

\* \* \*

I worship my food. We should all be worshipping our food. No one has to have a special relationship to land to do this. If we don't bring an attitude of reverence to the table, what are we doing? *Beings die for our food*. How can we eat corn or kale or oysters or chicken with no curiosity about where and how these beings lived and who cared for them and who brought them from their lives into death for us to consume? Shouldn't we be approaching all our eating as a spiritual act? More broadly, to be epistemologically and emotionally disconnected from local soil and water, to be alienated from the others who live with us on the land, and to be absent from our inevitable relationships with the bodies that feed us is a way of life that is hegemonic within American culture, that is forced upon us, especially those of limited means, and that would be shameful for me, at this point, given my rural context, race/class privilege, and experiences with killing and processing animals and plants for food. My perspective is not about pastoral romanticism or elite wilderness experiences. In the Northwoods, while people of all classes have access to public and private lands and waters, including National Forests and Lakeshore, and are able to hunt, fish, forage, garden, and farm, we are also living with high cancer rates due to legacy chemicals in our water and soil resulting from extractive industries' exploitation of this "resource"-rich, high-poverty area. For the people of Northern Wisconsin, this is real life, however poorly understood it might be by those living in other contexts.

You can't take the human creature out of the land, because all our "resources" come from somewhere, and you can't take the land out of the human creature. Our bodies know this, and when they become sick because we are poisoning them with our chemicals and heavy metals, our technological attempts at transcendence, they try to tell us about it—they try to communicate, not *like* creatures but *as creatures*—speaking their own languages. They say *anxiety*. They say *autoimmune disorder*. They say *cancer*. They say *death*. The body is a den in which lie the chemicals we have created to live here with us, within us, and they do, they are our kin, dwelling alongside us in our most intimate cellular spaces.

My sister died of breast cancer in 2018, and that shadow hangs over me. Hormones. Aging. BPA, PFAS, Roundup—all of it going into my body every day. Fear. Gratitude. I've been listening harder than ever these past few years, trying to live well. To live creaturely. For whatever else we think we're doing here on Earth that is more important than that is an illusion. An illusion that is, fundamentally, a form of insanity in its removal from the planet in and around our bodies.

The land is our family, say the Rastafari activists working to protect Fondes Amandes, an ancestral forest reserve, in the wonderful documentary film *Earth Water Woman*. Gaard says, "It appears there is both a moral direction and moral destination in . . . contextual and relational practices of eating, living together, and sharing souls. We can honor all our relations and still move in a moral direction that reduces suffering across species and bioregions."<sup>52</sup> My relations—the garden, the big white pines, the dragonflies and wasps, mushrooms, deer. We all drink this water and eat what grows in and on this soil. I plant my carrots, I nurture them, I feel for them, I appreciate their incredible queer diversity of shapes and arrangements of varied limbs that are sometimes intertwined, carrot wrapped around carrot, rooted together in secret underground entanglements that are outed only when I tear them from their home. If the carrots I eat aren't drinking from the same watershed and growing in the same regional soil, then they are distant relations—still worthy of honor and, ideally, an understanding of their origins. This is something to strive for, as one is able—something to celebrate when we can achieve it in this culture of alienation, fragmentation, and denial, for there can be no absent referents when one is engaged in conscious transcorporeal intimacy with one's food. As Alaimo says, ethics and pleasure meet in "the recognition of one's specific location within a wider . . . kinship network." The key is to "receive our 'place in the family of things.'"<sup>53</sup>

I am *a creature*, and just as importantly, a squirrel or a rabbit or a deer is *a person* because a person is someone, and someone is a creature who has a life, a will, a place, and a community, and it's entirely evident that all creatures have these things if you spend time learning about and appreciating them. Robin Wall Kimmerer says in the chapter of *Braiding*

---

52. Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, 40.

53. Stacy Alaimo, *Exposed: Environmental Politics and Pleasures in Posthuman Times* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 30.

*Sweetgrass* called “The Honorable Harvest”: “The taking of another life to support your own is far more significant when you recognize the beings who are harvested as persons, nonhuman persons vested with awareness, intelligence, spirit — and who have families waiting for them at home. Killing a *who* demands something different than killing an *it*.”<sup>54</sup> While Kimmerer is speaking specifically of Anishinaabe hunting and gathering, she extends to us all a hope and wish for a shift to this ethic: “Imagination is one of our most powerful tools. What we imagine, we can become. I like to imagine what it would be like if the Honorable Harvest were the law of the land today.”<sup>55</sup> I wish to move continually in such a direction, within an ecofeminist frame and without falling into cultural appropriation, foregrounding instead of backgrounding my dependence on other lives, revering instead of instrumentalizing those whose lives I take.<sup>56</sup> A deer *is a person*, and so is a crow and a garter snake and a bumblebee. I look out this window in my office/dressing room onto the November snow and I think about the queen bumblebees who are hibernating in their dens in my vegetable garden, each the mother of a whole annual colony now dead with the cold, each tucked into her little dirt cave under the straw and leaves, sleeping a winter sleep that is a plan for continuance, a plan for a life, for when she dug that cave, she dug it to save her life, to see herself through toward Spring.

Facing the doe through this window that morning, this is who I was: a creature separated from another creature by a window of culture. I thought about shame, toyed with the idea, and was glad to have narrowly avoided it. Truly, there was no need. But if I was going to be ashamed of something, it would be the windows I live behind, all the conceptual barriers of contemporary life.

I hang a Christmas card in our kitchen each year that features Santa Claus kneeling in the snow with forest creatures gathered around him — raccoons, chickadees, cardinals, field mice, a squirrel, a goose, a hare, and a buck — as he distributes corn, wheat, and carrots from his

---

54. Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 2013), 183 (emphasis in original).

55. *Ibid.*, 184.

56. See Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* for detailed explanation of “backgrounding” (denied dependency on the other), “instrumentalism” (in which the other is merely a resource), and the other linking postulates.

sack, feeding the deer from his palm. I'm drawn to this image of Santa because it reminds me of how my family tries to live on "our" land, as food and ornamental gardeners and forest stewards: growing and protecting plants and fungi that contribute to the livelihoods of many creatures, insects, and other plants; supporting forest diversity and well-being in relationships of reciprocity. As Kimmerer says, "The Honorable Harvest . . . does not say *don't take*, but offers inspiration and a model for what we *should* take. It's not so much a list of 'do not's' as a list of 'do's.' *Do* eat food that is honorably harvested, and celebrate every mouthful. *Do* use technologies that minimize harm; *do* take what is given," and also, "a harvest is made honorable by what you give in return for what you take" (emphasis added).<sup>57</sup> Unfortunately, it's hard to imagine the Honorable Harvest becoming the law of the land as long as Jesus and Santa are Americans' principal models for giving—heroic men who, confusingly, give everything and take nothing. Also, there are no "carnivores" on the Christmas card, meaning that no one in Santa's circle of kindness is constituted as edible. All the creatures present are getting along for Santa's visit, and the ones who couldn't get along weren't invited. Who wants to think about hawks ripping voles apart at Christmas? But: some food is plant, some fungus, some flesh; some is alive and some dead and some rotten; some is eaten slowly by mushrooms, and some is cocooned until it's time; some is implanted with larvae who will hatch to eat them from the inside out, and some is fully conscious when their abdomen is clawed open, and with some, it's the tongue the hunter goes for first, as with orcas eating live baby whales. Some food is grown in a massive field, and the farming machinery is so big that the driver can't see the frogs, toads, mice, voles, and insects being churned into the blades, and then it's trucked across habitat-destroying roads under whose billion wheels mammals, birds, and amphibians die and die and die, and then that food is considered "cruelty-free." Gruen says that while vegans must "get perspective on their complicity in the pain and death of others," they are "certainly farther out on the web [of causal networks] than those who consume animal bodies, who kill animals directly."<sup>58</sup> This claim is untrue. The

---

57. Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*, 186–87, 194.

58. Lori Gruen, "Facing Death and Practicing Grief," in *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth*, 167.

only difference is that the pain and death are out of sight and thus much more easily out of the vegan's mind. The use of spatial distance from the source of one's food as a measure of ethics is also questionable, as a bioregional transcorporeal ethos would, rather, suggest nearness — an imperative to eat knowledgeably and from familiar sources to the degree possible. In any case, as Kimmerer says, no one can evade "the need to resolve the inescapable tension between honoring life around us and taking it in order to live"; the real question is then, "how do we consume in a way that does justice to the lives that we take?"<sup>59</sup> This tension, this understanding of the difficulty and disquietude of conscientious eating and the impossibility of resolving it into something seamless, a certainty of virtuous practice — this question of what constitutes justice — is perhaps a place where vegans and subsistence hunters could meet, since all of us must resist falling into the consumerist trap that Kimmerer also connects with Santa fantasies: "the illusion that the things we consume have just fallen off the back of Santa's sleigh, not been ripped from the earth."<sup>60</sup> We are not Santa — no one is Santa.

I do provide though, at the holidays, I do:

*The steak we are eating is dusky rare, scantily peppered, stripped from the deer hanging in our garage, from alongside her spine. I shot her this afternoon and now she hangs... where the car usually sits, dripping from her enormous cavity...*

*She was... a mature northern whitetail doe... mother of how many springs of fawns, denizen of pine, birch, and cedar woodland on the South Shore of Lake Superior. Her hooves left deep dewclaw prints in the snow. Her eyes froze quickly and the frozen night-vision pupils of deer are radiant icicles shaped like star sapphires in black domes of sky...*

*It's opening Saturday of hunting season, Thanksgiving week, and what we are eating is gratitude, praise, since deer live in no other way. Grazing, dashing, listening—dear life is evident in every poised, decorous movement of their bodies that are amply meaningful because each whitetail is an individual with a personal history known to the others and to the woods where they are trampled, marked, gnawed...*

---

59. Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*, 177.

60. *Ibid.*, 199.

*In the coming days our kitchen will be about one thing, and that is taking care of her carcass—sectioning quarters, severing roasts and steaks from the silverskin that would make them gamy, sorting scraps for sausage and dog food, packaging with clean white paper and tape. My lover does all this herself, my lover is patient and her hands are strong and red and precise with the boning knife. Blood everywhere, smeared on the counter, clotting in buckets, mixing with hers in the cuts on her hands. She will cook all this meat over the course of the year, starting with tonight's steak, each preparation a reminder of this day.*

*The sharp spicy singular smell of deer blood evokes iced hay crackling under my boots. It evokes . . . crows gathering on a blowdown in the flat bright of midday, pink tongue drooping from a dainty muzzle, bourguignon that my lover makes that is the finest food on Earth . . .*

*This season's blood is a story of a grand dame. Queen of the woods. Like every doe who walks free on venerable trails, licks the salt from the new day, and feeds us where we are.*<sup>61</sup>

\* \* \*

Every doe is the center of her own story, continuing on with or without companions or fawns, season to season. She is not there for the taking, she is not destined for anyone's use, she is there, alive. And still, knowing this, it is possible to hunt, kill, and eat her. Iris Murdoch says in *The Sovereignty of Good*, "Goodness is connected with the acceptance of real death and real chance and real transience and only against the background of this acceptance, which is psychologically so difficult, can we understand the full extent of what virtue is like. The acceptance of death is an acceptance of our own nothingness which is an automatic spur to our concern with what is not ourselves."<sup>62</sup> In our misogynist, homophobic, transphobic, racist, colonizing, ableist country, where female-bodied people lack autonomy over their own reproductive power, experience victimization and violence, and suffer miserably with self-diminishment and rejection of their only, sacred bodies, I don't support telling women

---

61. Cynthia Belmont, "Early Thanksgiving," in *Flash Nonfiction Food: 91 Very Delicious, Very True, Very Short Stories*, ed. Tom Hazuka and Kathryn Fitzpatrick (Norwalk, CT: Woodhall Press, 2020), 48–49.

62. Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge, 1971), 100–01.

or any marginalized person to see themselves as nothing. I don't support telling that to any person at all, because it's not true — we are not nothing. We are part of the most important things — the ecosystems and communities where we live, and the living world. Goodness is connected with *that* awareness and with acting upon it — with praxis, including recognition and acceptance of the death we face, the deaths we cause, and the impossibility of ever being virtuous enough.

Despite what masculinist hunting looks like or anyone's assumptions about what subsistence hunting is or should be, in my experience it's principally about omnivorous accountability, humility, pleasure, and companionship. It's not easy; my hunting friends and I talk about how one day we might not be able to stomach it anymore. We say that if hunting ever starts to become easy, we'll know that it's time to stop. I believe that its difficulty arises in part from the fact that while we have a strong regional hunting *community*, this is not the same as living in a larger, comprehensive hunting *culture*, where its products and knowledges are enmeshed with other parts of life, so that hunting is *understood* to be *right*. In American culture, where personally procuring your protein is unusual, even quaint, it's difficult. But it's also necessary to face your killing, whether direct or indirect. However painful it may be, this is what's required if you reverently inhabit the land, your relationships with other creatures, and the honor of being an edible and eating creature lucky enough to be alive.

### *Acknowledgments*

Many thanks to Greta Gaard for her consummate collegiality, kindness, and professionalism in reaching across a considerable philosophical divide to offer energetic constructive criticism; to the wonderful *Feminist Studies* editorial panel for being so accommodating and for their invaluable suggestions; and to Angela Stroud for her incisive reading of several drafts and her support in all things.