Narrative Theory Unbound

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This essay brings together four extremely short stories—anecdotes, really—about animals and animality. The creatures we will meet include a cat, a baboon, a pony, and an assortment of scholars. Settings range from a bathroom to a barbecue, from the plains of Kenya to small-town New York. In their original contexts, my tales are all first-person, autobiographical fragments located within larger critical or theoretical arguments, where they serve variously as introduction, conclusion, digression, or illustration. Extricated and assembled here, I call upon them as allegories of sorts, but not the kind in which animals stand in for people. They are scenes, rather, of animals in relation to people. I offer them as figures for different ways of imagining this relationship, a topic currently preoccupying scholars across the disciplines in the burgeoning area of “animal studies.” I also examine them as specifically gendered narratives—gendered in a way related but not reducible to the gender of their actual author. Other narrative features at work in their coding as “masculine” or “feminine” include the gender of the narrator, the gender of the principals, the affective tenor of the episode, and what we might

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1. My reference is to “animal studies” in its broadest, contemporary sense to mean the sprawling, multidisciplinary field known by some as “animality studies” or “human-animal studies,” and not to be confused with the scientific usage meaning lab studies involving animals. For simplicity’s sake, I will generally be using “animal” to mean “nonhuman animal.”
see as the “comic” or “tragic” arc of their miniature plots. I am interested, too, in the way their short, personal, specific, and quotidian nature lends all of them a “feminine” cast, especially given their interpolation within contrasting scholarly narratives generally assumed, by definition, to be sustained, objective, abstract, and thereby “masculine.”

In addition to considering my stories as gendered narratives, several other aspects of my project resonate with feminist procedures and aims more broadly speaking. My ultimate goal is a feminist critique of the way gender operates to value some paradigms in animal studies over others—according less prestige to those marked as “feminine.” As a counter to this biased pattern of academic reception, I also model the feminist strategy of recuperation: recovering the contributions of a particular woman as well as, in this case, the larger feminist context for her work on animals. Finally, it is typically feminist to demonstrate not only the stubborn salience of gender categories but also, within and across texts, their complexity and instability: that “women” refers to a highly differentiated group; that “masculine” and “feminine” do not always adhere to male and female bodies. We will circle back later to these general, theoretical issues, but first I want to explore them by means of particular readings, tracking the effects of gender in animal anecdotes by four scholars: Continental philosopher Jacques Derrida, primatologist Barbara Smuts, feminist-vegetarian theorist and activist Carol Adams, and feminist philosopher of science Donna Haraway.

**Story #1: Derrida’s Cat**

I begin with Jacques Derrida’s memorable anecdote in “L’Animal que donc je suis (à suivre).” Originally given as a talk in 1997, “L’Animal” was published five years later in English as “The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow).” Derrida does not, of course, proceed in linear fashion from begin-

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2. This critique is more fully elaborated in a longer version of this essay, “Pussy Panic versus Liking Animals: Tracking Gender in Animal Studies,” *Critical Inquiry* (2012). There, my four stories frame an extended reading of work by animal studies scholar Cary Wolfe, whose prominence in both the 2009 animal issue of *PMLA* and a subsequent piece in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* suggest his role as leading spokesperson for the field. Noting that Wolfe has been nominated to define what *counts* as the new animal studies, I take him to task for two things: suppressing important ecofeminist precursors in favor of Jacques Derrida, whom Wolfe names as animal studies’ founding father; and formulating his “posthumanist” work on animals not only at the expense of ecofeminism but also in explicit opposition to emotionally and politically engaged work on gender, race, and sexuality.

ning to end. He prefers instead to tease us with multiple versions embedded in thickets of puns, repetitions, speculations, and asides. We are warned from the outset that there will be nudity. The basic plot, we learn soon enough, involves a cat who has occasion to look at our philosopher—indeed, to study him coolly as he stands there naked, and not from the side either. Gazed upon so directly by this unabashed creature, Derrida reacts with embarrassment, compounded by shame at feeling so: “And why this shame that blushes for being ashamed? Especially, I should make clear, if the cat observes me frontally naked, face to face, and if I am naked faced with the cat’s eyes looking at me as it were from head to toe, just to see, not hesitating to concentrate its vision—in order to see, with a view to seeing—in the direction of my sex” (373). The cat in question, he will soon stipulate, “is a real cat, truly, believe me, a little cat. It isn’t the figure of a cat” (374). The “sex” in this scene, we can only assume, is likewise “real” as well as densely symbolic—and it is, moreover, specifically male. It flinches slightly before the animal’s riveted gaze; for while the cat looks without touching or biting, Derrida informs us “that threat remains on its lips or on the tip of the tongue” (373). The cat’s look and man’s blush will recur as a kind of refrain—a personal note recurring in the midst of extended theoretical speculations. A subsequent account elaborates on what is apparently a daily ritual: “The cat follows me when I wake up, into the bathroom, asking for her breakfast, but she demands to be let out of that room as soon as it (or she) sees me naked” (382). This passage leads directly to Derrida’s stinging taxonomy, classing together those philosophers unable to acknowledge an animal’s gaze. Later he will tie this refusal by post-Cartesians to be seen and addressed by animals to the Holocaust-like violence against them in the modern era (394–95). Citing Descartes, Kant, Heidegger, Lacan, and Lévinas as examples of those belonging to this category, Derrida inserts a striking proviso “(all those males but not all those females, and that difference is not insignificant here)” (382–83).

It is Derrida himself, then, who cues my efforts to articulate the “not insignificant” difference of gender as it functions in discussions of animality. Toward the end of his remarks, attention to gender increases, and its closing paragraphs take the further step of imagining an unashamed “I” capable of presenting himself “in his totally naked truth. And in the naked truth, if

4. I use “gender” to indicate a logic organizing “Animal” above and beyond Derrida’s characteristic play with the markers of sexual difference. For examples of feminist commentary on “sexual difference” in Derrida, see Leslie Rabine, “The Unhappy Hymen Between Feminism and Deconstruction” (1990); Derrida and Feminism, ed. Ellen K. Feder et al. (1997); Feminist Interpretations of Jacques Derrida, ed. Nancy Holland (1997); and Anne-Emmanuelle Berger, “Sexing Differences” (2005). As these various works demonstrate, a critique of individual texts does not preclude an appreciation for what Derridean concepts have to offer feminist theorists.
there is such a thing, of his or her sexual difference, of all their sexual differences” (418). Maneuvering beyond binarized to pluralized sexual differences, the conclusion of “Animal” thus echoes the well-known reverie at the end of “Choreographies”: “I would like to believe in the multiplicity of sexually marked voices . . . this indeterminable number of blended voices” (108). I would like to believe in this too—and yet, despite several such de-binarizing moves in “Animal,” I cannot forget the image of a self-consciously masculinized human, in his bathroom without a stitch, shamed by the gaze of a cat whose femaleness as well as realness is specified early on (375). Like the cat, I cannot help looking—in order to see, with a view to seeing—in the direction of the narrator’s “sex.” What does it mean to insist on seeing gender doggedly at work in “Animal”? What are the narrative elements that go to shape the gender identities, codes, and politics implicit in this and other works of animal studies? How is this body of scholarship, defined by its interest in animality, nevertheless saturated with notions about masculinity, femininity, and feminism—even (or especially) when not directly engaged with these categories? To pursue these questions, let us juxtapose Derrida’s tale with an autobiographical snippet by Barbara Smuts.

Story #2: Barbara & Damien

Like Derrida, Smuts tells of an encounter between human and nonhuman animals in terms that are both highly personal and incipiently paradigmatic. Responding to J. M. Coetzee’s The Lives of Animals—a fictional academic debate about animal rights—Smuts begins by observing that “none of the characters ever mentions a personal encounter with an animal” (“Reflections” 107). Deliberately eschewing “formal scientific discourse” (108), she prefers to draw on her own experiences as a scientist and pet owner. Ours is the first of two remedial tales, in which Smuts shifts from more general observations into precise mininarratives showing the possibilities of human–animal intimacy. In both cases, their self-contained, suspenseful story-ness is introduced by the phrase “one day,” followed by a slowed-down, moment-to-moment chronology along with an increase in spatial particularity and sensory detail. 5 And now for the story that concerns us here. “One day,” while living with and studying baboons in Kenya, Smuts finds herself fingertip to fingertip with a juvenile member of the troop. Her hand resting on a rock, she is surprised by

5. The second story tells of establishing a connection with a female gorilla, which culminates in an unexpected embrace (“Reflections” 114). Smuts’s is one of four responses published alongside Coetzee’s work in a 1999 volume edited by Amy Gutmann.
a gentle touch before turning to recognize “a slight fellow named Damien.” As Smuts goes on to explain, “He looked intently into my eyes, as if to make sure that I was not disturbed by his touch, and then he proceeded to use his index finger to examine, in great detail, each one of my fingernails in turn. . . . After touching each nail, and without removing his finger, Damien glanced up at me for a few seconds. Each time our gaze met, I wondered if he, like I, was contemplating the implications of the realization that our fingers and fingernails were so alike” (“Reflections” 113).

As I need hardly observe, in Smuts’s story, proper names and gendered pronouns serve to denominate the narrating human female, the encountered animal male. With its first-person, female speaker, it inverts what I have depicted as the relatively stable, normative gendering of Derrida’s couple—a gendering that means to bare and implicate the speaker’s masculinity along with his humanity, but which also has the further effect of staging a seemingly primal confrontation between masculinized human and feminized animal. The two stories differ, moreover, in depicting and ranking the senses. True that Derrida’s cat is accorded the power of the gaze: the singular, discerning “point of view” traditionally tied to cognition and reserved for humans. Yet the bathroom transaction overall—explicitly visual (and visually explicit) but definitely not tactile—leaves intact the old rationalist hierarchy valuing vision/mind/cognition over touch/body/emotion. Illustrating a tendency common to animal rights advocacy, though also routinely criticized, Derrida’s cat is granted provisional subject status in implicitly humanist terms—ones that continue to reflect the premium placed by our own upright species on the “higher” faculties. Smuts’s account, by contrast, effectively challenges this hierarchy—not only by prioritizing the meeting of fingertips, but also by undoing the opposition between touch and vision, showing instead how these senses overlap and collaborate to bridge the distance between baboon and biologist. As Smuts carefully notes, Damien’s gaze adds another level of

6. Derrida knows his anecdote has the ring of a primal scene but insists he doesn’t intend it as such (380). A further effect of Derrida’s masculine first-person is slippage between “man” in the precise sense and “Man” as a false generic meaning “human.” Uncertainty as to whether such slippage has occurred is a recurrent feature of “Animal” itself up until its last three pages, due in part to the discursive tradition Derrida engages; for an extended analysis of this equivocation, see Guenther. The problem gets worse in the layers of commentary and metacommentary surrounding Derrida’s writing on animals, in which “Man” as representative human is all too easily renaturalized. See Fordham UP’s overview of The Animal That Therefore I Am (2008), touting Derrida’s critique of the distinction “between man as thinking animal and every other living species.” Leonard Lawlor’s This Is Not Sufficient is frequently ambiguous in its usage; at still one more remove, David Wood’s blurb for Lawlor is not—Wood praises the author for tracing Derrida’s “indictment of man’s violence to (other) animals.” (By contrast, Cary Wolfe makes a point of avoiding “man” as a false generic.)
contact but doesn’t supersede his touch: he raises his eyes to check in visually without breaking the tactile bond. The intimacy thus sustained brings me, finally, to the most striking divergence between these two animal tales: their distinct affective tones and emotional conclusions.

As we have seen, Derrida’s encounter is suffused with anxiety and, as he tells us repeatedly, a double dose of shame. This is certainly a reasonable response to our history of defining animals as killable, and Derrida’s self-ironizing essay is superb in its wish to hold us accountable. The difference in the emotional and ethical emphasis of Smuts’s story is nevertheless telling. The real-time pacing of her narrative, detailing each moment of tactile and visual contact, seems to replicate and reciprocate in formal terms the tentativeness, attentiveness, and tenderness of Damien’s gestures toward her. The interaction it models is based on mutual care, in the sense of heightened awareness as well as solicitude. The emotional stance it describes is relaxed, wondering, open to animal overtures and meanings—this in contrast to Derrida’s account of his nervous, sheepish impulse to cover himself. Indeed, as Donna Haraway has commented, Derrida’s concerns about being exposed are so overwhelming that the cat herself is soon all but forgotten (When 20).

This dynamic, whereby interest flips into incuriosity, would not surprise Silvan Tomkins, for whom retreat from another’s gaze is the very definition of shameful response. As Tomkins explains, the shame response is marked by a lowering of the eyes that “calls a halt to looking” (Sedgwick and Frank 134). “Such a barrier,” Tomkins continues, “might be because one is suddenly looked at by one who is strange, or because one wishes to look at or commune with another person but suddenly cannot because he is strange” (135). Tomkins argues, moreover, that lowering one’s eyes and bowing one’s head in shame entail a loss of human dignity, since “man above all other animals insists on walking erect” (136). All of this would seem to be applicable in Derrida’s case, including Tomkins’s observation that shame is frequently experienced as shameful, compounding the original effect (137). As far as human–animal relations are concerned, Derrida’s shame thus appears to cut both ways: undermining his sense of human superiority, it puts him on a par with a four-legged creature; at the same time, registering animal

7. Haraway comments, further, that Derrida’s apt criticism of Western philosophers fails to look for possible counterexamples in areas outside the humanities: “Why did Derrida not ask, even in principle, if a Gregory Bateson or Jane Goodall or Marc Bekoff or Barbara Smuts or many others have met the gaze of living, diverse animals and in response undone and redone themselves and their sciences?” (21). Haraway precedes me in then placing Derrida in dialogue with Smuts. Citing Sex and Friendship in Baboons (1999), she contrasts Derrida’s limited curiosity about his cat to Smuts’s innovative research method of socializing with baboons on their own terms (23–26).
“strangeness,” it calls a halt to their communion. What then are we to make of the apparent shamelessness of Smuts's visual and tactile communion with a baboon? Given women's historically embattled relation to full human dignity and entitlement, is it any wonder she finds Damien less “strange” than Derrida finds his little cat? And might she not, for the same reason, be less susceptible to shame at being ashamed, the second-order humiliation brought about by compromised erectness?

Derrida's French title plays on “je suis” in its double sense of “I am” and “I follow”: “L'Animal que donc je suis (à suivre).” So saying, he names himself an animal while also questioning the putative precedence of human animals before all others. Smuts, meantime, spent years scrambling to keep up with a very mobile troop of baboons. Before leaving these two figures, I want briefly to differentiate their shared dedication to following animals. Derrida's riffs on following animals include tracking animals in the philosophical record; acknowledging our historically predatory relations to animals; and challenging our temporal/ontological priority as humans. Theoretically compelling, all this remains nonetheless at odds with Derrida's image of a cat following him into the bathroom, petitioning for breakfast, only to be left behind as he flies off in pursuit of more abstract game. The result is to keep Derrida, however unwillingly, in the position of alpha animal—putting the philosopher before the feline, the call of the mind before that of the body, and both at the expense of genuine mutuality.

Smuts has, of course, the perhaps too easy advantage of immersion in fieldwork with actual animals. Notably, however, her work with baboons involves far more than literally tracking them across the savannah. As Smuts explains, she learned to keep physical pace with the baboons only by trusting them emotionally and deferring to them cognitively: “Abandoning myself to their far superior knowledge, I moved as a humble disciple, learning from masters about being an African anthropoid” (“Reflections” 109). Following the lead of animals on these multiple levels would come to characterize Smuts's research method overall. Disregarding the protocol of maintaining a “neutral” distance from her subjects, she put herself in baboon hands, yielded to their expertise, and took her cues from them about baboon sociality as well as survival (109–10). Back at the ranch, influenced by her work with primates, Smuts's relationship with her dog, Safi, is similarly guided by principles of negotiation and mutual accommodation rather than ordinary human dominance (115–20). “Because I spent years following baboons around,” Smuts says,

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8. Derrida himself makes some suggestive remarks along these lines later in "Animal," when he contrasts the shame of the mythical Greek hero Bellerophon with the shamelessness of women (413–14).
“I realized that nonhumans tend to have a superior grasp of wild places” (119). It is therefore sometimes Safi who takes them for a walk, sniffing out their route while her person happily brings up the rear (119). In short, the “following” that for Derrida means chasing down the abjection of animals by Western philosophers, for Smuts has meant letting go the lead, drawing closer, apprenticing herself to animal ways of being and knowing.

Clearly some of the variation in these animal stories by Derrida and Smuts may be chalked up to disciplinary training and disposition—no surprise, we might say, that a philosopher would be less in touch with real animals than an ethologist. Disciplinary paradigms also explain Smuts’s assumption (in her scholarship) that animal behaviors are naturally tied to reproductive expediency. For a feminist in the humanities like myself, Smuts’s evolutionary reasoning, fraught with sociobiological associations, has very little appeal; I get far more leverage from the discursive views of gender (and identities in general) that Derrida’s work has helped to formulate. Disciplinary factors aside, however, what interest me here are differences I would parse in terms of gender. Needless to say, I do not mean by this that Derrida’s relation to animals is somehow inherently, inflexibly male—or, as my previous point suggests, necessarily less feminist in all of its ramifications than Smuts’s. Rather, I offer the examples of Derrida’s anxious man and Smuts’s interactive woman—his tale of tragic alienation, hers of comic consummation—as tropes for differences between “masculine” and “feminine” approaches to animals and animal studies that are often but not always aligned with male and female morphology. I will also, before we are done, cite examples of divergences within these categories.

If they are not biological, how might we account for the frequent differences, referenced and in some ways illustrated by Derrida, between male and female narratives about humans in relation to other animals? We need not look very far for a sizeable body of scholarship responding to this question in highly theorized, historicized detail. More than twenty years ago, a cohort of ecofeminists—including Josephine Donovan, Brian Luke, Connie Salamone, Marti Kheel, Andrée Collard, Dean Curtin, Alice Walker, Deborah Slicer, Greta Gaard, Lori Gruen, Lynda Birke, Karen Warren, and Carol Adams—undertook to interrogate deeply embedded humanist assumptions

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9. In *Sex and Friendship in Baboons*, for example, Smuts notes that a psychologist might seek explanations for male–female baboon friendships in individual histories, but for “a biologist interested in the evolution of behavioral tendencies, the question can be rephrased as follows: How might having a friendship with a male increase the reproductive success of a female baboon?” (81). She herself then proceeds to pursue the biologist’s question.
about gender and animality.” Broadly speaking, these include the beliefs that women and animals are linked together as avatars of nature; that they are similarly debased by their shared association with body over mind, feeling over reason, object rather than subject status; that men are rational subjects, who therefore naturally dominate women and animals alike; that masculinity is produced in contradistinction to the feminine, animal, bodily, emotional, and acted upon; that degree of manliness is correlated to degree of distance from these and other related categories—physicality, literalness, sentimentality, vulnerability, domesticity, and so forth. None of this is news to seasoned feminists, certainly not to poststructuralists bent on deconstructing all such sets of binary oppositions. It is therefore surprising that even someone like Derrida, known for his strategic identification with the feminized, animalized margins, should still in “Animal” flinch at the “threat” connoted by his little cat. Or perhaps it is not surprising, given Derrida’s own emphasis on our inability completely to escape this dualistic logic. As a result, men working in the area of contemporary animal studies—men siding with animals—may indeed feel threatened by “castration,” may worry lest their manliness suffer from proximity to a feminized realm. They may, in short, be susceptible to a kind of gender/species anxiety I am tempted to call, with a nod to Eve Sedge- wick, “pussy panic.”

A likely though not inevitable response to such panic is emphatic disavowal of all further, feminizing associations—emotionality in particular—along with the principled affirmation of masculinizing ones. In her incisive 1990 essay, “Animal Rights and Feminist Theory,” Donovan identified this gender dynamic at work in two books foundational to the contemporary movement for animal rights as well as to animal studies: Peter Singer’s *Animal Liberation* (1975) and Tom Regan’s *The Case for Animal Rights* (1983). Donovan begins by citing passages in which each writer explicitly sets off his own carefully reasoned, academically credible defense of animals from the emo-

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10. I am using “ecofeminism” as a broad umbrella term for analyses linking men’s domination of women to the exploitation of planetary resources. It is not, however, a homogeneous category. Adams and Donovan disagree, for example, with those like Karen Warren and Val Plumwood who protest threats to species and ecosystems while ignoring violence against individual animals. They also distinguish themselves as “care” ecofeminists from those like Plumwood and Haraway who countenance meat-eating (*The Feminist Care Tradition* 12–13). For a comprehensive overview of ecofeminism—its roots in 1980s activism, its broad range of scholars and diversity of approaches including materialist ones, its internal debates and development over the last thirty years—see Greta Gaard. Gaard shares my chagrin at the discrediting of ecofeminist scholarship, even as its contributions are appropriated and esteemed under other rubrics. Whereas my focus is the neglect of ecofeminism by Derridean animal studies, Gaard addresses its similar mischaracterization and dismissal as “essentialist” by the feminist academic establishment.
tionally motivated, easily dismissed concerns of “animal lovers.” Speaking for himself and his wife, Singer insists they have never been “inordinately fond of dogs, cats, or horses.” “We didn’t ‘love’ animals,” he repeats, noting that the presumed sentimentality of animal rights views has led to their exclusion from “serious political and moral discussion” (qtd. in Donovan 34). Regan is similarly anxious to counter “the tired charge of being ‘irrational,’ ‘sentimental,’ ‘emotional,’ or worse.” He doesn’t specify what could possibly be “worse,” though I have tried to suggest where his fears are likely to lie. Regan thus advises scholars defending animal rights to make “a concerted effort not to indulge our emotions or parade our sentiments. And that requires making a sustained commitment to rational inquiry” (qtd. in Donovan 35).

As Donovan demonstrates, both men make a point of distancing themselves from “inordinate” feelings clearly coded as feminine, while allying themselves instead with a mode of “serious discussion” and “rational inquiry” no less clearly marked as masculine. It is not that women are inherently kinder to animals, Donovan explains—many are not; nevertheless, those who take up the cause of animals are often more willing to acknowledge the emotional aspect of their advocacy (35–36). Indeed, as designated outsiders to the realm of rationality, women (with less to lose) have often led the way in challenging rationalist frameworks altogether and recuperating their assemblage of subordinated terms—the feminine and affective along with the animal.\(^\text{11}\)

Regan and Singer, by contrast, are driven by gender norms to make a show of demonizing feeling, thereby basing their defense of animals on the very rationalist schema that spurns animality in the first place. As Donovan concludes, “Unfortunately, contemporary animal rights theorists, in their reliance on theory that derives from the mechanistic premises of Enlightenment epistemology (natural rights in the case of Regan and utilitarian calculation in the case of Singer) and in their suppression/denial of emotional knowledge, continue to employ Cartesian, or objectivist, modes even while they condemn the scientific practices enabled by them” (45).\(^\text{12}\) What I take from Donovan’s analysis is the following maxim: the more a male-identified scholar is devoted to animal liberation, the more pressure he is under to assert his nonlove for ani-

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\(^\text{11}\) For a recent example, see Rosi Braidotti: “Becoming animal, minoritarian . . . speaks to my feminist self, partly because my sex, historically speaking, never made it into full humanity, so my allegiance to that category is at best negotiable” (531). Marianne DeKoven, another long-time feminist theorist, also links her work on animals to her positioning by gender: “Women and animals go together,” and her involvement with animal studies derives “in part from that pervasive cultural linkage” (366).

\(^\text{12}\) Though Singer’s reliance on Jeremy Bentham (whose criterion for animal rights is not reason but suffering) might seem to exempt him, Donovan argues that utilitarianism remains a pervasively rationalist framework. See also Luke 291–92.
mals. Thinking to find some less panicked narratives regarding our relations and obligations to nonhuman creatures, I turn now to my final two stories.

Story #3: Adams’s Pony

Author or editor of more than half a dozen volumes theorizing the relation between hierarchies of gender and species, Carol Adams is best known as the author of The Sexual Politics of Meat. The Sexual Politics of Meat appeared in book form in 1990, but its origins go back to 1975, when an essay-length version (written for a class taught by feminist theologian Mary Daly) was published in The Lesbian Reader. As Adams tells it, the experience leading her to bring feminist and antiracist commitments into dialogue with animal advocacy involved the murder of her beloved pony, Jimmy. Her account of conversion to passionate feminist vegetarianism through Jimmy’s death is threaded through her corpus, appearing with slight variations in at least three different contexts.13 Like Derrida’s watchful cat anecdote, it functions as a kind of origin story, emotional touchstone, and paradigm for her work on animals. The time is 1973; the place is Forestville, New York. Adams is already a feminist, alert to the politics of personal life, but still an oblivious consumer of meat. She has just returned to her small hometown from a year at Yale Divinity School when, in the midst of unpacking, she is interrupted by loud knocking—a frantic neighbor has come to report that Adams’s pony has been shot. Running to the back pasture, Adams finds Jimmy on the ground, blood trickling from his mouth. “Those barefoot steps through the thorns and manure of an old apple orchard took me face to face with death,” she recalls. “That evening, still distraught about my pony’s death, I bit into a hamburger and stopped in midbite. I was thinking about one dead animal yet eating another dead animal. What was the difference between this dead cow and the dead pony whom I would be burying the next day?” (Sexual 11–12). From that moment on, her view of meat is fundamentally altered.

I have several observations to make about Adams’s story as a figure for her overall project. Both confirming and troubling my earlier, gendered generalizations about Derrida versus Smuts, it also sets the stage for some closing thoughts about our fourth animal story and rather different tale of feminist eating. Adams’s epiphany comes, first of all, as both disruption and continuation of her theological training. Hers is a feminist theology, but as the blood,

13. See Neither Man nor Beast (162–63), a brief mention in “Caring About Suffering: A Feminist Exploration” (Beyond 171), and the preface to the tenth-anniversary edition of The Sexual Politics of Meat (11–12).
thorns, and martyred animal of this story imply, Adams rejects the patriarchal aspects of Christianity while retaining its iconography of suffering along with its ethic of neighborliness and care for the meek. Caught in spiritual transit, still unpacking the baggage of her year at Yale, she is brought home by this act of violence to her calling as an independent activist-scholar—one for whom the rites of academia will always be less compelling than the justice issues raised in her own backyard. “Hailed” in what we might be tempted to think of as an Althusserian manner, Adams is abruptly called into subjectivity not by a police officer but by a sympathetic neighbor, who effects her interpellation as a dissenting rather than obedient citizen. In contrast to Smuts, fingertip to fingertip with Damien, Adams’s paradigmatic animal encounter brings her “face to face with death.” And this is true across Adams’s corpus: more often than not, the animals we encounter there are neither canny companions nor prurient pets but, as Adams would say, the decaying corpses we euphemistically call meat. Made suddenly aware, the night her horse is shot, that she is feasting on dead cow, her first response is similar to Derrida’s: a shrinking back in shame at the “strangeness” of animals, a self-ironizing performance of the nonrecognition enabling animals to be killed for human use. Like Derrida, her subsequent work proceeds in a critical mode; instead of celebrating intimacy with animals, she, too, is more interested in tracing the discursive patterns that help to authorize human violence against them.

Yet unlike Derrida, who blushes for being ashamed, Adams’s shame does not simply double back on itself. In her case, shame as an acknowledgment of our estrangement from animals yields quickly to a second impulse: “I also recognized my ability to change myself: realizing what flesh actually is, I also realized I need not be a corpse eater. Through a relational epistemology I underwent a metaphysical shift” (Neither 163). Exposed in her shame, the female protagonist is moved not to cover but rather to examine and reimagine herself. The result is a narrative swerving in conclusion from tragedy to comic redemption. It would be another year before Adams would actually convert to vegetarianism, some seventeen years before her “feminist-vegetarian critical theory” would be (as it were) fully cooked. But the basis for these have been laid in the “metaphysical shift” described here—a shift over to the side of animals, disavowing the identity of meat eater in order to identify, instead, with the eaten. It is, I would note, a shift inextricable from its occurrence in the early 1970s, underwritten by the civil rights and antiwar movements and, above all, by the radical wing of the second-wave women’s movement. Thanks to her formation as a 1970s feminist, Adams is primed to recognize the emotions of shame, grief, and sympathy as sources of knowledge; to imagine herself in relational rather than autonomous terms; and to
bring a sophisticated analysis of patriarchal structures to bear upon human–animal relations.

To summarize the way gender operates in Adams’s work: there is no pre-existing, mystical alliance with animals on the basis of her womanhood. Instead, at a moment of crisis in 1973, she makes the conscious choice to be schooled by them and to reposition herself on their side, in keeping with an ecofeminist epistemology. As she will later put it: “I do not value animals because women are somehow ‘closer’ to them, but because we experience interdependent oppressions” (Beyond 173). Smuts, by contrast, does not invoke feminist frameworks, and her emphasis on animal agency and interspecies mutuality might seem to be the inverse of Adams’s focus on animal victimization and grief at animal suffering. There are, however, resemblances as well as differences between the two women. Both affirm our “sentimental” ties to nonhuman animals; both claim our liking of and likeness to other animals (in some, though certainly not all, respects). For Smuts, the similarity of Damien’s hand and hers reveals our shared ability to navigate our environments and foster friendship through touch. For Adams, the similarity of Jimmy’s objectification and her own points to the way animals and women share the position of “other” within a specific discursive and political context.

Story #4: Dining with Donna

Like Adams, Donna Haraway makes good on the ecofeminist and deconstructionist critique of dualistic thinking through work that combines upfront feelings with forceful analysis, political commitments with scholarly ones, care for animals and animal-lovers with theoretical contributions to animal studies. Though gender is not foregrounded in her most recent writing on animals—The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness (2003) and When Species Meet (2008)—Haraway takes every opportunity to mention her own, long-standing feminism and the pioneering, ongoing importance of feminist scholarship in thinking about species. As she observes in a 2009 interview, “People like Lynda Birke and Carol Adams and others have been for thirty years or more doing feminist theory in the mode of animal studies that gets at the levels of violence and destruction visited on working animals” (“Science” 159). Haraway and Adams are also on the same page regarding animal theorists whose disdain for older women and their domestic animals so obviously stems from masculine anxieties. Citing Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in “Becoming-Animal,” Haraway describes their revulsion from “the old, female, small, dog- and cat-loving” as an egre-
gious example of “misogyny, fear of aging, incuriosity about animals, and horror at the ordinariness of flesh” (*When 30*). And despite her reputation as a high-flying postmodernist, Haraway is another theorist who takes a hands-on approach, a thinker very much in touch with the material world. In the opening paragraphs of *When Species Meet*, Haraway introduces herself as a biologist impressed by the lubricating properties of slime, “a creature of the mud, not the sky” (3). Later in the book, we follow her and her canine partner Cayenne into the world of dog agility training, a sport in which most of the humans are women over forty, and “contact zone” refers not only to a technical aspect of the course but also, for Haraway, to agility training as a site of intense bodily and cultural exchange, mutual though not symmetrical, between people and dogs (208–16). Her visceral and intellectual involvement with the female subcultures of dog trainers and breeders suggests another point of comparison with Adams, who works closely with the subcultures of advocates for battered women and fair housing. For both feminist theorists, these women-centered, extra-academic communities with little cultural capital are not written off but valued as sources of inspiration and knowledge.

That said, Haraway and Adams have widely divergent views on two of the most vexed animal issues: meat-eating and animal experimentation. Haraway is highly critical of factory farming, but she looks instead to humane husbandry rather than vegetarianism. More risky and uncomfortable still, as she herself acknowledges, Haraway makes a conditional case for the use and even killing of animals for scientific research (*When* 68–93). Beyond their disagreements on these specific issues, Haraway and Adams are further discrepant in the general emphasis and affect of their animal texts. As I have observed, the emphasis for Adams is typically on animals as victims—disappeared as subjects, feminized and fragmented as objects, so that meat-eating humans are permitted to ignore the violence of their table. In keeping with this view, the emotional tenor of her writing is a mix of sorrow, anger, and compassion. Haraway’s emphasis, on the other hand, is on animals as workers and collaborators, creatures with imagination, agency, and influence, even in the context of unequal relations to humans. Like Smuts, her interaction with them is unashamed and fearlessly tactile. Full of wonder, scientific curiosity, and affection, her animal writing tends toward the celebratory, even ecstatic. “Ms Cayenne Pepper continues to colonize all my cells” (15), she declares in the opening pages of *When Species Meet*. For Haraway, moreover, dogs are by no means the only “companion species” to belie the boundaries of our humanness at a cellular as well as conceptual level. As she explains, “I love the fact that human genomes can be found in only about 10 percent of all the cells that occupy the mundane space I call my body; the other 90 percent of
the cells are filled with the genomes of bacteria, fungi, protists, and such” (3). Haraway argues, too, that our humanist sense of mastery and autonomy is usefully undermined by technology as well as by animality—by our prosthetic as well as intra-organic ways of being. Challenging the tendency of most ecofeminists, including Adams, to indict science for crimes against nature, Haraway distinguishes creative from destructive uses of science and places us in a companionate relation to the “cyborg” as well as to nonhuman animals. “Ecologies are always at least tripart,” she explains: “human, critters other than humans, and technologies” (“Science” 155).14

And now for my final animal anecdote, recounted by Haraway as a “parting bite” at the end of When Species Meet (293–94). This is no Smutsian tale of intimacy with a dog or baboon in a wild zone remote from other humans, but rather a story of sitting down to dinner with colleagues. The year is 1980, and Haraway has just given a job talk, clinching her appointment as a feminist theorist at UC Santa Cruz. As she tells it, two women arrive at the restaurant fresh from a birth celebration held in the “feminist, anarchist, pagan cyberwitch mountains” (293). Led by a midwife, it had culminated in a feast, prepared by the husband, consisting of onions and . . . placenta. This second group of diners is soon entirely caught up by an intense but inconclusive discussion of “who could, should, must, or must not eat the placenta” (293). Conflicting anthropological, marxist-feminist, historical, nutritional, philosophical, and vegetarian arguments are animatedly canvassed, and after many hours the only thing clear to Haraway is that she has “found [her] nourishing community at last” (294).

What does Haraway’s story of feminist eating, ostensibly without reference to species other than our own, have to do with ferreting out gender in animal studies? What are its implications both for theorizing animal–human ties and for specifying the sexual politics of this project? There is, first of all, the placenta as a figure for what Haraway regards as a fundamental aspect of our creaturely lives: our dependence for nurturance, both before and after birth, on bodies other than our own; our need as animals to feed not only with but on one another; our interpenetration by organisms that tumble inside us regardless of whether we are pregnant or carnivorous; the phenomenon, in short, of overlapping ingestions, gestations, and embodiments. All of which is

14. As author of the influential “Cyborg Manifesto” (1985), Haraway is often identified with “posthumanism.” As framed by Wolfe, a posthumanist approach to animals is motivated less by politics or sentiment than by the theoretical goal of deconstructing humanism, and Wolfe includes Haraway along with only a handful of figures representing thorough “posthumanist posthumanism” (What 125–26). Haraway herself has insisted, however, “I am not a posthumanist” (When 19); likewise, while interested in Derrida on animals, she also describes herself as “not a Derridean” (“Science” 157).
to say that, while for Adams, no one should be considered “meat,” one lesson
to be drawn from Haraway’s account is that we are all somebody’s “meat”—
even before we are food for worms.

Our two scenes of feminist eating may be contrasted in another way as well. Whereas for Adams eating a burger answers all questions, for Haraway eating a placenta does nothing but multiply uncertainties—chief among them, for my purposes, the conundrum of how “gender” figures in this story. What do we make of the husband, standing (as I picture him) with spatula and grill—so like and unlike your average suburban dad? There is something strange but fascinating about forking up a bite of placenta; we can't help recoiling, and we can't stop talking about it. Digesting placenta, we are made to consider our resemblance to other mammals—only, perhaps, to be reminded of our peculiarity as humans, hemmed in by culinary, familial, academic, and narrative protocols. By deliberately birthing/eating like a non-human animal, do we render ourselves more or less animalistic? In short, if the placenta as an organ confuses self and other, inside and outside, eating the placenta adds further confusion regarding the “biological” and “cultural,” along with our human relation to these categories. Haraway remarks that “kin relations blurred” (293), and for me even the apparently natural, definitively “female” act of giving birth is defamiliarized and denaturalized by this narrative, transmuted into something less reliably gendered. If everyone was once inside a placenta, now male and female guests alike have a bit of placenta inside of them. Finally, while Haraway’s “parting bite” helps to blur notions of “gender” as well as “species,” it also brings something else into focus: the exciting, passionate, cross-disciplinary, and open-ended character of feminist conversations circa 1980, precisely the moment they began to infiltrate the academy, leaving no discipline unchanged. Despite their many differences, Haraway thus echoes Adams in at least two ways: not only in generating work on animals that remains warmly engaged with activist, athletic, and scholarly communities of women but also in recalling and insisting upon the formative context of 1970s feminism.

Feminist Narrative Theory

Returning to my opening remarks on the feminist character of my work on
narrative, we have seen that my comments on Derrida, like those of Donovan on Singer and Regan, take the form of feminist critique. In a longer version of this essay, my address is ultimately less to Derrida himself than to Cary Wolfe, leading figure among recent animal scholars who look to Derrida's
“Animal” as the founding document of their field (see note 1). Trading on the cachet still associated with Derrida, Wolfe offers what I see as a revisionary history, distancing himself from earlier animal scholarship and its frankly political ties to late-century liberation movements, including the second-wave women’s movement. Disputing this origin story, I turn to Adams with the goal of recovering her neglected contribution and that of ecofeminism generally. I also contrast Derrida’s little story with three others written and narrated by women, stressing their relative lack of shame or anxiety in affiliating emotionally and politically with other animals. At the same time, I have been at pains to differentiate among my female figures—noting their divergent affects, epistemologies, and political positions—while also indicating the uses of Derrida’s work for feminist theory. Further emphasizing the instability of gender categories, I attribute Derrida’s “pussy panic” not to his biological maleness but rather to the risk he takes of “feminization” within a social and discursive context strongly dichotomized by gender. This risk is heightened by the anecdotal form and content of his story: its status as a short, personal narrative, deviating from a lofty theoretical mode to dwell instead on daily, bodily rituals of bathing/feeding. Derrida pauses to tell us the cat in his story is “real,” and at that moment he drops, however briefly, into a mode of realist narrative.

Derrida’s shift from a high-status genre associated with mind/abstraction to one associated with body/literalness, brings me to a final, feminist aspect of my readings: their challenge to a host of conventionally gendered oppositions, including those underlying our judgments of narrative forms. Contesting, for example, the dichotomy between mind and body, I begin by agreeing with those who understand the terms of such binaries as intertwined rather than antithetical. As a feminist, I would note not only the hierarchical relation between these two terms but also the way embodiment is marked as “feminine” and subordinated thereby to a notion of masculinized intellect. Beyond this deconstructive project, however, I am also out to vindicate the subordinated “feminine” half of such pairings. Elaborated by 1980s “difference feminists” (Nancy Chodorow, Carol Gilligan, Adrienne Rich, among others), this move has more recently been regarded with suspicion as incipiently essentialist. I want to insist that it need not be so. Accordingly, my recuperative project encompasses not only female figures but also feminized categories—categories which, functioning pejoratively in relation to women, are even more damning when associated with men. These disparaged categories include the bodily, animal, tactile, emotional, vulnerable, small, dependent, nurturing, and intimate, among a great many others. Over against the lauding of autonomy, my readings would therefore redeem relationality as
both ethical stance and scholarly method—Smuts’s reciprocity with Damien, Adams’s choice to identify with animals, Haraway’s insistence on overlapping bodies, and Derrida’s wished-for communion. In contrast to the premium placed on “objective” intellectual inquiry, I have also sought to illustrate the way feelings of shame, anxiety, sorrow, anger, and love necessarily infuse scholarship by men as well as women.

As a further aspect of redeeming categories disparaged as “feminine,” I have also wished to redeem feminized modes of narrative—modes devalued, for example, as slight, personal, confessional, gossipy, sentimental, comic, popular, miniature, middlebrow, domestic, narrow, local, and/or literal. In the preceding pages, I have pointedly preferred the light to the heavy, the comic to the tragic trajectory, and I have argued specifically for the significance of anecdotes feminized by their brevity and intimacy. Though I deploy them in part allegorically, I have also valued them for their attentive, detailed, domestic materialism. Brevity aside, the stories I cite resonate closely with a particular novelistic idiom. Pausing over the minutia of daily life, they invoke the mode of domestic realism that has long attracted me to certain nineteenth-century novels. Indeed, the political/aesthetic sensibilities informing the discussion above are pretty well summed up by the famous passage from George Eliot’s Adam Bede, in which the narrator stops to celebrate “faithful pictures of a monotonous homely existence” (223). In keeping with Eliot’s dictum, a key goal of my own project has been to parse and appreciate humble accounts of everyday life wherever they appear: “old women scraping carrots with their work-worn hands . . . their brown pitchers, their rough curs” (224)—or, as the case may be, old men washing up, their susceptible bodies, their unfed cats.

Works Cited


