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From Phallic Binary to Cognitive Wager: Empathy and Interiority in Lois-Ann Yamanaka's *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers*

"Homemade sight. He can't build it."
Lois-Ann Yamanaka, *Wild Meat* 269

Sämi Ludwig

This paper argues that Yamanaka's use of distressing imagery of sexual violence and violence towards animals can be understood in ways that go beyond the deconstruction of various binaries of power. In its concrete references this imagery takes relationships of difference from a merely symbolic dimension towards one of performance and pragmatics. This shift manifests itself most forcefully in the many examples of empathy that are based on the attribution of interiority to the Other – in this case mainly animals, who are turned from objects to be acted on into subjects with feelings and a potential for self-expression. This entails a concern for the reframing of phallic authority, which is ultimately expressed in a blinding of the father that changes his relationship with his daughter. The "downward" empathy with animals is hence complemented by an "upward" empathy that allows for a reorientation beyond binary semiotics, i.e., for a new "view" of dialogic reality construction and more egalitarian relationships based on a cognitive model.

In Asian American criticism, much has been written about mother-daughter relationships. This may have to do with the coincidental synchronicity of a surge of feminist criticism at the very time, in the early seventies, when Maxine Hong Kingston's classic *The Woman Warrior* almost single-handedly created a new category of ethnic writing with a book that featured a central and highly fascinating mother-daughter rela-

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tionship. More books on Chinese mothers and daughters would follow, hailed by a feminist criticism which focused on this issue in a way that often neglected, for example, Kingston's equally important father-book, *China Men*. Lois-Ann Yamanaka's novels are based on that other perspective, the daughter and father axis.[1] As Monica Chiu observes, "all of Yamanaka's female protagonists yearn for their fathers' respect, incur their displeasure, and eventually heal the father-daughter rift, the common skeletal thread to her narratives." She continues: "Mothers . . . are less prominent and therefore less influential, a stark change for Asian American literature long wedded to exploring mother-daughter relationships" (97). This foregrounding of the relationship with the father signals a strong concern with patriarchy, but as my reading will show, the often highly distressing examples of sexual violence also imply a concern with various dimensions of phallic power and uneven binary relationships.

I shall argue that there is more than scandal in Yamanaka's treatment of phallic imagery, namely a subtle intelligence, a logical argument in the way she develops an alternative set of concerns and pragmatic relations.[2] If we look at the particular ways in which these power relationships are deconstructed and at the details of the imagery and the metaphors used in this process,[3] we find that Yamanaka creates a model beyond the logic of binary oppositions and the control of language.[4] To be sure, her adolescent narrators grow up in a phallocentric environment, but they can escape phallogocentric determinism[5] because Yamanaka pushes our understanding of their experience beyond a symbolic or semiotic dimension of language and logic towards one of performance and multidimen-

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[1] We can still find traces of Kingston's influence on the micro-level of Yamanaka's imagery dealing with juvenile agency, animal empathy, identity confusion, etc.

[2] As I will show, this goes beyond Shoshana Felman's notion of "scandal" based on "radical negativity" (see Hayles 37). My approach rather traces the positive conceptual constructions emerging from the very scandalous imagery that is concretely used as new frameworks of understanding. See footnote 3.

[3] For a detailed discussion of this latter approach, see "Metaphorics: An Objectivist Semiotics of Imagery" in my introduction of *CONCRETE LANGUAGE* (24-30), which is strongly influenced by Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* and cognitive linguistics.

[4] See Hélène Cixous's discussion of binaries in "Sorties": "And all of the couples of opposition are *couples*. Does this mean something? Is the fact that logocentrism subjects thought – all of the concepts, the codes, the values – to the two-term system, related to 'the' couple man/woman?" (264).

[5] On the phallus as a symbol of lack that creates misrecognition of Otherness, see Jacques Lacan. On the move from binary phallocentrism to a language of phallogocentrism, see Hélène Cixous's "The Laugh of the Medusa" (253). It must be pointed out, however, that her *écriture féminine* goes beyond the "symbolic" in ways that ignore the performative in the pragmatic sense.

sional pragmatics. It is precisely this real experience of violence which provides the many details that point to nothing less than an alternative paradigm in terms of which the Other can be understood.

Such an approach does not cancel old theoretical insights, but it contextualizes them in a different framework. The emphasis is on real living beings rather than on abstract concepts.[6] As I will show, the basic gesture of Yamanaka's approach is one of empathy.[7] It breaks up the subject-object imbalance by attributing interiority to the weak part of the binary and thus allows "it" to be more than a thing, namely subject and agent in his or her own right. Like the Scarecrow in *The Wizard of Oz*, the Other gets a brain. Thus Yamanaka's protagonists can move from a phallic logic of binary predicaments towards a more egalitarian performance of dialogic interaction.

All of this is highly complicated. My exploration of Yamanaka's envisioning of healing through non-phallic modes of interaction will first acknowledge how she makes different axes of binary dominance such as Human/Animal, Man/Woman, and Parent/Child overlap in a way that leads to all kinds of logical paradoxes. As we shall see, the disturbing details of these abusive encounters point towards empathy in many animal encounters.[8] Moreover, the blinding of the father ultimately forces a new kind of constructed and interior "vision" upon the supposed center of power.[9] Such paternal reorientation is at the same time embedded in a strong criticism of capitalist consumerism and an emphasis on creativity – self-representation that shifts from "store-bought" to "homemade" identity in order to escape the hegemonic chain of out-

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[6] Rather than finding a new approach within the lacunae of determinist language, merely in its negativity or alterity, such an approach is based on pragmatics. On this alternative also see Mey's discussion of the "pragmatic turn" in linguistics (20). On binary relationships in pragmatics, see Paul Watzlawick et al. on "symmetric" vs. "complementary" interaction (*Pragmatics of Human Communication* 67-69).

[7] A recent study on empathy is Kleen, whose approach is, however, more hermeneutic and focused on reading rather than concerned with interactional pragmatics.

[8] Though my approach agrees with many tenets of ecofeminism and its connecting masculine supremacy with human supremacy over animals and nonhuman nature (see Warren, Greta Gaard, Adams and Donovan), this agreement does not include issues of the religion and spirituality (as in Adams or Diamond and Ornstein) or global militarism (as in Mies and Shiva). My "environmental" approach rather orients itself in an interdisciplinary theoretical extension towards pragmatics and cognitive psychology.

[9] This interiority is also emphasized in a distinctive change towards an empathetic focalization of the father from within. From an outside source of power he turns into an experiencing subject.

side control. The commitment is clearly with an experiencing subjectivity that precedes systemic abstractions.[10]

In the story of Bully, who gives the book its title, vague hegemonic impositions translate down to real binary relationships, in this case, the Human/Animal axis, a powerful binary that has received much attention in postcolonial discourse.[11] Because the father of this poor, pidgin-speaking family in Hawaii has a hard time making ends meet and they are sick of the smell of wild meat, he buys a calf. This shift from hunting to raising livestock in the backyard significantly changes the children's encounter with the animal. When Calhoon, the little sister of the main protagonist Lovey, names him Bully, the "father says: 'Don't name him. Don't you dare call him that. We going eat um and how you going eat if you name him?' But every day now, Calhoon and me go to play with Bully" (80). Obviously the problem is that Lovey and Calhoon now are friends with an animal raised for slaughter, an element of bonding that is at odds with the primary purpose of the power binary: "What I like most is the sound of Bully eating and the way a cow smiles. I also like his smell" (80). To anticipate my later argument, note how Lovey focuses on non-visual aspects of "sound" and "smell" and on Bully's interiority as an eater and a being that can "smile." The children identify with this "little bull," who is, like themselves, under their father's control.[12] Later, when it comes to the slaughtering, even Hubert, the father, has second thoughts: "I no can kill Bully, mean, the cow – was my house too long" is what he tells his friend Gabriel (81). Moreover, he has a naming problem himself when he, too, calls the calf "Bully" and cannot control his own feelings of empathy. In the evening, "Calhoon

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[10] On this cognitive issue of agency, also see my discussion of "private" vs. "public" negotiations in Chang-rae Lee.

[11] For a short survey, see Armstrong, who mentions that the element of "speechlessness" in the animal is often compared to Spivak's "subaltern" who cannot "speak." Thus there is an analogy between the Human/Animal binary and the Colonizer/Colonized binary. On positive valuations of and identification with animals in postcolonial discourses, see Woodward. Nyman's collection of postcolonial animal tales traces precisely this tension. A great variety of perspectives can be found in Berger, Birke, Haraway, Ingold, Lewinsohn, and Wolch and Emel, or Tyler and Rossini. The animal as "Other" is also important in Jungian archetypal psychology, where it suggests separation from the collective consciousness. Thus Cirlot quotes C.G. Jung's statement that animals "stand for the non-human psyche, for the world of subhuman instincts, and for the unconscious areas of the psyche" (13) and observes himself that the Sumerians already used the "concept of the animal as the 'adversary', a concept which later came to be attached to the devil" (86).

[12] On a similar identification of children with animals in the context of parental control, also see my discussion of the monkey feast in Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (*CONCRETE LANGUAGE* 114-19).

fixes up her hamburger all the way Big Mac." But her imitation of the commercial role model fails: the "first bite tastes strange, no sheep or goat" (82). She asks, "This is a Bully burger, isn't it, Daddy?" The expression "Bully burger" is funny in an ironic way since it includes the proper name of the cow, and this is what makes it inedible. Nobody in the family wants to eat hamburgers that night. The story of Bully is a lesson about our relationship with the living Other, about attachment, empathy and emotional hurts.[13]

Trying to figure out these relationships of dominance and empathy in her encounters with animals leads young Lovey into further complications of the gender binary Man/Woman. Thus in a chapter entitled "Dominate and Recessid Jeans," we learn about her two rabbits, Lani and Clyde. Breeding her Dutch bunnies, Lovey observes: "It's important to make a chart of each mating to see who dominates" (62). Here is her interpretation of Mendel's laws:

> I see Clyde on Lani's back. Her eyes pull out of her head. His claws dig into her side. Her ears pull back and her head too as Clyde moves up and down. Clyde dominates. Lani recessids. When he's through, Lani runs to the corner of the cage very scared. She breathes hard in and out with flaring nostrils. Clyde sits there and rubs his face with his paws. *Never, never let somebody dominate.* (63, original italics)

This is one of her first introductions to heterosexuality – from her pets she learns that such relationships are subjected to power difference, i.e., to a phallic binary. The very confusion in Lovey's mind, which mixes different binaries in her empathy with animals, also manifests itself when her pet goat Nanny is brought to the zoo and mounted by the billies: "I can't do a thing. Stand there and watch" (163). Lovey is paralyzed by this sexual initiation that suggests rape more than love. Yet things are worse with Nanny's brother, Billy the ram: "They shot him up the ass for many reasons. They wanted his front quarters for mounting. He was a handsome mouflon after all. They wanted his hindquarters for smoke meat. And they made Jerry, Cal, me, and the older boys watch. Father said that there is a lesson in all things . . ." (162). Father even slices off Billy's testicles and lets the boys hold his "Billy-balls coin bag" as a trophy (162). This is a world of masculine competition that only

[13] Earlier we already find Lovey practice different attitudes toward animals with ants: "I kill five ants in a row. I let one talk to another, then I kill them both mid-sentence. I let one crawl on my finger to become a pet. Watch him go around my finger twice. Cross the bridge of my finger to the other hand. Then lower him into a drop of rain, I watch him swim and try to breathe. Then I kill him" (36). She is playing God with a living Other, exploring the role of power.

leaves room for winners and losers, a telling example of male phallic brutality connected with the ubiquitous motif of taxidermy – another motif that will be reframed in Yamanaka's tale (see below).

Though humans assert their machismo through brutality against animals, this behavior is always haunted by unease. Thus when the Father, defending his property, kills a white dog stealing chickens, Lovey reports: "The pitchfork breaks flesh. And a human voice of something screaming. . . . The big white dog, brown shepherd eyes, and the concrete of the chicken yard covered with thick, purple blood. I swear, I see tears falling. I swear it" (70). The very description humanizes this ghostly Other by emphasizing the suffering of the dog's "flesh," its "human voice," its "screaming," and the "shepherd eyes" of a domesticated animal that can actively look back and even cry. The blood and all the references of expression (voice, look, tears) create interiority in this white dog, onto which empathy can be hitched.

The same applies to the story of Mr. Moritz, who tells how he

> shot a doe and when he got there, "she was crying, Hubert, I no joke you, brah, crying like a goddamn baby. Nah, like one goddamn wahine, so I had to put her outta her misery. Me, I no can stand for see things suffa, know what I mean, eh? So I told my bradda Stanley, 'Eh, brah, I gotta put her outta her misery.' So I went up to her head right between the eyes, brah, and wen' shoot um and you know what, Hubert, all the fuckin' brains wen' shoot out, and stuck on my glasses, and all blood and brains all over my face except where my glasses, brah." (79)

A very interesting close reading of this incident is possible if we take into consideration the parenting empathy with the female ("baby," "wahine"), the humanized crying (again), and especially the destruction of the brains, the center of cognition in the Other, which bespatters the hunter's face and dirties him in turn.[14] This is crucial imagery that changes our understanding of the subject-object relationship. Not only is the hunter's gaze defamiliarized by the glasses but it is also blocked by the object's brains. This element of touch counteracts the distancing visual paradigm, but beyond that, the blown-up "brains" even signal an element of intentionality in the victim, a potential for cognitive agency that works against the illusion of a seemingly passive and merely specular definition of the Other as mere object, as game that can be seen at a

[14] On the motif of dirt in connection with animals, see Monica Chiu's chapter on "Animals and Systems of Dirt in the Novels of Lois-Ann Yamanaka" (85-131).

distance and easily killed.[15] The paradigmatic change announced in this scene is one that moves the encounter with the Other from a visual mode (distance, object, game) to a cognitive one (touch, intelligence, empathy).

Hence the later chapter title "Dead Animals Spoil the Scenery" is programmatic in this book. It moves the concern with the Human/Animal binary beyond the visually perceptible. We face a gruesome listing of animal killings: spearing geckos with knitting needles (149), slugs writhing in the bleach (150), mice smashed (150), hitting cats by swerving the car. Says the father: "Humans more important than animals. So don't cry now" (151). But Lovey observes that "[*d*]*ead animals are full of liquid*" (151, original italics). They have an inside too. After the big rainfall, for instance, the neighbors find a bloated goat full of maggots (153), an apocalyptic image that associates the dying of animals with literal "corruption." The picturesque angle ("scenery") is here destroyed by the smell and the animals turn into unnatural objects: they used to be alive and be subjects themselves. These encounters are part of a synaesthetic strategy of experientially reaching beyond specular distancing.[16]

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[15] Another good example of this tension where such an "object" also signals its true nature as a living subject is the mongoose whom they drown in order to avoid damaging the fur that they want to use for taxidermy. Lovey observes this very closely:

> Swims, like dog paddle.
> Drowning and writhing and twisting. Brown body turning. Eyes taking one last look at us. Mouth gasping, open, close.
> Then a bubbling, gurgling sound.
> The smell of stagnant, greenish-brown swamp water.
> Father pokes at it with a chopstick.
> Dead and float to the top of the cage.
> *Shit bricks.* (155, original italics)

Note how the mongoose paddles like a domestic animal ("dog"). Moreover, its "look" points to intentionality and its mouth makes an effort at production. These are willed gestures that indicate communication and ultimately interiority. The visual surface of this encounter is further corrupted by the "smell" of the dead animal, which overcomes any effort at distancing. On failures of distancing, also see below, footnote 16.

[16] This is actually an old strategy of American literary realism, as we know it, for example, from Howells's descriptions of New York's poor in *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890), see Emily Fourmy Cutrer's analysis of what she calls Howells's "pragmatic mode of seeing." One of her examples is the encounter of Howells's hero Basil March with a "decently dressed person" who turns out to be a beggar looking for food in the gutter. When Basil gives him a coin, this man grabs his hand, thus "shattering the spectacle, collapsing the difference between spectator and sight" (269). Both smell and touch are modes of encounter that obstruct visual distancing.

In all cases presented by Yamanaka, the subversive solvent of the phallic binary is some kind of empathy that coincides with an attribution of interiority. This equalizing element of sameness clearly points to another mode of understanding relationships, one that is dialogic, voice-oriented and cognitive (the brain imagery suggesting intentionality, agency in the Other) rather than physically objective and spatial or visual. Beyond finding binaries and deconstructing them in different ways, the point is then to understand the imagery in terms of which these encounters are expressed. As we have seen, many examples in Yamanaka's text suggest that the Other is neither a phenomenological abstraction nor just a thing, but a living being. Though perception merely encounters outside objects, in certain cases a living inside is attributed to them in a *cognitive wager* that projects subjective agency and makes empathy possible.[17]

The mere binary inversion of roles must be seen as a preceding stage, as a preparatory measure for this kind of identification. Thus, if Yamanaka presents many cases of empathy in which animals are humanized, there is also the opposite, when humans behave like animals. In such reversals the gender binary comes in as a parallel, insofar as such bestiality often has to do with male aggression – it is violence associated with a symbolism of masculine assertiveness. The character who best personifies this is Larry, the older brother of Lovey's friend Jerry, who brutalizes the younger siblings, all kinds of animals, and brings ruin upon his girlfriend, the angelic Crystal Kawasaki.[18] Larry disfigures Lovey and Jerry's Ken and Barbie by drawing "nipples on Barbie and a chingching with fuzz, bushy underarm hair, and a goatee." Ken gets "real-looking balls and a dingding with the black marsh pen" (100). It is clear that Larry is inscribing himself on other bodies. The little ones can only take revenge by stealing Larry's marijuana and selling it in order to buy themselves new Barbie stuff on sale (note how satisfaction is only possible within a framework of illegality and consumer currency). But Larry's

[17] Research in psychology has long been concerned with this issue; the classical study on "attribution theory," i.e., on the attribution of motivation, is Heider. The term "cognitive wager" appears in Gibbs, who locates himself more narrowly within cognitive linguistics. My own use is more general and has to do with a projection of life into matter (biology over physics), which allows for intentionality in the Other (an aspect we can already find in Hörmann's notion of "Sinnkonstanz" (179-212).

[18] There is a similar male perpetrator in *Blu's Hanging*, the Portuguese Uncle Paulo, who has sex with his nieces instead of assuming his responsibilities as a guardian (174). He is an extreme case of irresponsible parenting – which indicates that the third binary (Parent/Child), though also characterized by a power differential, need not/should not be phallic. Because of her negative descriptions of other ethnicities, Yamanaka has even been accused of racism, see Mark Chang's discussion of the "Cultural Politics in the Controversy over *Blu's Hanging*."

most characterizing moment comes when he and Crystal, who are supposed to babysit, retire to her room. Standing on Jerry's shoulders and looking through the bedroom window, Lovey reports: "I see Crystal's stuffed animals all over the pink carpet and Crystal, her beautiful long black hair strewn over the pillows. Crystal naked and kneeling on her bed, and Larry straddling her, pushing and pushing on her, his ass squeezed tight together. Like two dogs" (207). Thus not only are animals personified and humanized in this book, the analogy also goes the other way round and the humans can become bestial, like "two dogs." The binary distinction dissolves. Soon after this episode, her mother takes Crystal on a trip to Japan – for an abortion, as we eventually find out.

Though Larry is possibly the most phallic character associated with sex and violence in *Wild Meat*, the aftermath of this episode shows that he is not an autonomous agent either. Thus after losing Crystal, he becomes even more aggressive towards Jerry and Lovey and kills their little fantail guppies.[19] Note how aggression is violently handed down the line from the big ones to the little ones. Hence Chiu associates Larry's "misdirected anger" with his "intense feelings of disempowerment" (100). Himself subjected to rules beyond his control, Larry takes revenge on a weaker substitute, i.e., he can only act out his own phallic violence within narrow delimitations.[20] The course of Yamanaka's tale suggests that this systemic contextualization applies to most uneven binaries that her protagonists experience. Role reversals and empathy are symptoms of both "upward" *and* "downward" orientation and ultimately lead to a reconceptualization of the most symbolic figure of power, the father, and the narrator's subaltern relationship with him. Hence the nature of the daughter-father relationship significantly changes at the end of the book.

The father certainly starts out as a typically phallic character: he hunts and he exposes his children to brutality in order to teach them lessons of survival (remember what happened to the little ram Billy). "Play the game" is his advice (148), which indicates his submission to

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[19] Larry makes accusations: "'Cause of you, you asshole, that Crystal called it with me. You cunt" (212). He scoops the fish out: "One by one he grabs them and squeezes them by the head till black slime comes out of their mouths and their eyeballs pop out all shiny" (212). Again Lovey observes that the victims' sensory organs (mouth and eyes) are destroyed. And again this results in a world of decomposition: "Already the flies humming around us" (213).

[20] Larry's weakness is well illustrated when later on, at a local YMCA social club pool party, in a scene of symbolic self-castration, stone-drunk he puts his fingers into a fan: "All blood on the walls and Crystal coughing and gagging by the side of the pool" (246). This is a writing on the wall (Daniel 5.1-31) that spells apocalyptic disaster.

the rules of power. Though as head of the family, he is mainly experienced as an outside force, at the end of the book, we get to know Lovey's father Hubert from the inside and learn that (like Larry) he is far from an all-powerful God the Father.[21] Not only is he poor, he is also the youngest of three brothers. For Tora and Uri, he is but their little brother Inky (167). The significant memory of his youth is that, when he wanted to join his older brothers in their adolescent adventures, they drew a line for him in the dirt road: "You see um, Hubert? You try to cross um. I going lick you with this bamboo pole. You cannot come with us. You too slow" (168). And when Inky erases that line they simply draw a new one. It marks a binary that moves with him and that he will therefore always be subjected to. Hubert remembers his feelings of "missing out on heaven, the way Tora and Uri make um, the places they see while I was behind that goddamn line he drawn in the dirt. And I so damn sad I cannot see heaven with *my own eyes*" (169, original italics). Thus the father has himself been subjected to an experience of being fenced in by a hegemonic environment. He is not only force but also forced upon, i.e., part of a system beyond himself that is not necessarily working to his advantage.

It is significant that at the end of the book Yamanaka has the father blinded in a hunting accident, which forces the symbolic figure of authority to "see" reality differently and to reconceptualize the many binary relationships that have been presented above. The last chapter of the book, called "The Burning," literally ends in a volcanic eruption, where the earth itself rejects all of this human abuse – possibly in homage to Mark Twain's final pages in *Roughing It* (1891), where Twain gives us a survey of American frontier culture and its "westward" course all the way to the hellish volcanoes of Hawaii.[22] There is even a direct reference to Twain in the book when Yamanaka mentions the "Mark Twain monkeypod tree by the Nishimoto Motel in Waiohinu" (169).

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[21] This weakness of the father figure is even more strongly emphasized in *Blu's Hanging*, where the father is depressed about his beloved wife's death and taking drugs. He leaves the household chores to his adolescent daughter. Though also a source of violence, he is mainly a person to be saved, to be taken care of, himself in need of parenting. The same applies to his son Blu. Both depend on the daughter and sister Ivah in order to learn to attach themselves to the real world – which is what the "hanging" of the book's title means. Generally, violence is less gendered in *Blu's Hanging*, where sexual aggression also comes from the Reyes girls or cousin Lila Beth and violence against animals is also committed by Mrs. Ikeda, whose breeding dogs are "crying" (113). Many qualities of the queer relationship between Lovey and Jerry appear in the relationship of the siblings Ivah and Blu.

[22] See chapters XXII to XXXVI – the important last third and conclusion of the book. Twain writes: "The place below looked like the infernal regions and these men like half-cooled devils just come up on a furlough" (556).

The first destructive fire in the chapter, however, still victimizes the children. It is an accident caused by Lovey with the copper wire incinerator.[23] When the little sister Calhoon's hair catches fire, this results in a patriarchal curse: "You fucking rotten kid. You rotten to the core." Lovey is shocked by his reaction: "My father never hit me, not once in my life. He never swore at me but this one time." She is especially shocked when he blames her for being a female: "Thass why I wanted boys. Look what I get. You weak inside like every other wahine I ever met" (260). The preoccupation with the hunting binary and the gender binary is now extended to the *parenting binary* – this is a different kind of relationship that allows for new kinds of transformation. Hubert lives in a world of harsh phallic realities and he wants to protect his children, who must submit to his authority, to be sure, but not as mere objects. As a father, he is also a caretaker. Thus on the next day, when she wakes up in the backseat of the Land Rover, Lovey finds her "body covered with the old goat blanket" (261).

The father's hunting accident clearly is the summarizing climax of the book: "Daddy got his eyes blown out hunting for goats down at the Kalapana side of the Chain of Craters Road" (261). The scene is particularly powerful because now the focalizer is "Daddy," which allows for upward empathy.[24] Hubert reports how they trapped some goats "between us and the hot lava flow. I signal Gabriel because we get one easy catch, eh?" (262). But there is a strange and unexpected turn. We read that

> those stupid goats was running over the hot lava.
> The flow was so wide, was at least one mile, they got hundred yards, I swear I never seen anything like this and I never going, I swear to God, they all got stuck in the lava, billies and nannies and kids, all of um. (262)

Hubert is overwhelmed then he retells the scene, moved by compassion:

> Then I thought about you, Lovey, and how you wouldn't like see one kid or nanny die this way, all that goat hair burning and the smell, but what I neva going forget is how they was crying.

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[23] Yamanaka is again making the point that the economic survival of her poor Japanese protagonists is only possible by illegal means that pollute the environment: ". . . the cops catch you burning big time like this and you cabbage" (250).

[24] My point here is that the text does not operate in terms of some kind of poetic justice or symbolic revenge. It will be shown that Lovey's empathy goes beyond the hostage syndrome and thus collapses the hegemonic context. This echoes James Baldwin's approach to the racial binary in *The Fire Next Time* – which preaches upward empathy in the particular sense of Christian compassion and forgiveness.

> Was so loud and pitiful, the way they all was crying till their last breath, and their faces sink in the lava and they still bleating, I tell you. So I took my gun, aimed um, and shot at the kid close by me. I was going shoot them all to put um out of their misery. (262)

But when Gabriel tries to pull him away from the lava, Hubert falls and his gun backfires. Because of this phallic reversal, he is now blind and in the hospital. Note that there is a metonymic connection between his apocalyptic experience and the blinding. The last things he sees are "[a]ll the babies burning and melting away" (263).[25] Showing empathy for the animals (who are, moreover, "kids" in the literal sense) has made the patriarch lose his vision and turned him into an invalid.

The accident forces the blind father to see differently and turn to a vision beyond direct perception in a process initialized by the arrival of Tora, who apologizes for his former behavior and reactivates his younger brother's inner vision: "Can you see Haupu Mountain, Hubert?" (268). He takes him back to dreams of the past: "I said you can see, Hubert. Lay back now and relax. . . . The mountain, Hubert. It's there, right in front of us. . . . I know, Inky, you can do it . . . let me hold your hand. . . . There, pick that Mountain apple. No, not that one, the one right above it, the biggest, most reddest one" (268). Tora makes Inky see Paradise and grab the fruit of knowledge: "Daddy nods yes, slowly" (268). Rather than a vision of presence, this is a vision of absence, one that can overcome the physical phenomena and instead originates in the memory of the past. It is constructed out of what has been experienced, out of subjective knowledge – cognitive rather than perceptual, a *made* interiority rather than a mimetic presence of outside imposition.[26] It is crucial that this fundamental shift be pointed out because it involves a very different, non-perceptualist approach to reality.

Lovey adds to this effort at cognitive construction an element of smell and touch. Still worried about her father's curse as a terrible legacy that crucially threatens that Paradise apple ("rotten to the core"), she wants to make up and be her father's "secondhand eyes" to see Haupu Mountain: "Homemade sight. He can't build it" (269). Note that this new lineage of vision is not phallic, top-down, but carried bottom-up, daughter to father, in a dialogic cooperation.[27] In order to provide an

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[25] This is a truly sentimental moment reminiscent of Twain's approach to destruction in *Connecticut Yankee*. On Twain's sentimentalism, see Camfield.

[26] For a thorough presentation of this issue, see William James's very detailed essay on the differentiation between "percept" and "concept," which is at the foundation of his pragmatist philosophy (*Some Problems* 47-112).

[27] This is different from a simple rejection of the dysfunctional patriarch as we find in much of classical modernist American literature preoccupied with the Parent/Child

experiential grounding of her father's new inner vision, Lovey decides to fly to Kaua'i and bring back some local dirt in a Ziploc bag (274). To the father, this gift represents heaven on earth: "My father opens the bag and takes a deep breath. Puts his hands inside and runs the dirt and stones through his fingers. 'Then this gotta be dirt from Kipu if I gonna be in heaven.' He runs his fingers through the dirt, 'Yep, this feels like Kipu,' he says" (275-76). Smell and touch transgress specular limitations and suggest a synaesthetic, postperceptualist experience in which subjects negotiate their interactions with an environment. If such an approach be ecocritical, it can definitely be well described with the vocabulary of pragmatics and cognitive psychology.[28]

Let me conclude this reading of *Wild Meat* with the example of Lovey's "poultry shears" to illustrate this new and different kind of subjective agency at the origin of identity. Signing up for a Singer sewing class at first turns out to be a major humiliation for Lovey. Everybody can see that her new clothes are homemade rather than store-bought (200). The classmates taunt her: "Rip-off patchwork denim. Phony-ass, fake stuff. Looks Wigwam or worse yet. Homemade" (201). Echoing its hegemonic discourse, they remind Lovey that capitalism wants people to buy things and participate in a store-bought economy. But Yamanaka's introduction of animal skins[29] goes beyond a merely anti-industrial argument for creativity.[30] There is a significant symbolism in the fact that for this course her mother has equipped Lovey with another "great shame, poultry shears for sewing scissors" (198). Through this detail, linking textiles to animals, the story of the sewing class reactivates the Human/Animal binary and leads to the father's making of leather vests: "Only the top game hunters wear the kind vest we going make" (201). He teaches Lovey about tanning, cutting, puncturing – this is a kind of taxidermy as second skin: "Daddy wears his vest to sleep" (202). Lovey then chooses her own vest to be made from Bully hide, goat hide, ewe hide, rabbit hides, all connected to the animals she knows: "No one can name them but me" (203). The symbolism of the leather vest indicates that you are not simply destroying the animal, but you go into its skin. In an almost totemic sense, you identify with it and at the same time

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binary in terms of Father/Son relationships, see, e.g., Irwin's important discussion of patriarchy in William Faulkner.

[28] Think, for example, of Jean Piaget's "operational" approach to representation in a context of adaptive behavior and his notion of "object construction."

[29] As the daughter of a taxidermist, she "grew up in a house filled with the joys of animals both dead and alive – where she slept in a storeroom/bedroom with such bedfellows as native and mouflon sheep, wild pigs, sharks, and an ornery bantam named Prince PoPo, which were mounted and stuffed but unclaimed by debtors" (*Blu's* iii).

[30] This argument goes back to William Morris's Arts and Crafts movement.

create a very personal *bricolage* of existential self-fashioning. This is an interesting step away from the commercial pressure to identify with store-bought vestments and it is later transferred back to textiles again: "Grandma, Mother, Calhoon, Father and me at that moment in the patchwork denim bell-bottom hiphuggers whose scraps nobody in the room could name but me" (204).

As we have seen, Yamanaka's efforts to overcome the phallic binary in her texts entail not only a sophisticated deconstruction and inversion of several binaries, but in the form of her preoccupation with animals (downward) and the father (upward) in terms of empathy, they also involve an attribution of inside to the Other that moves beyond the plane of semiotics into a realm of behavior and cognitive agency. The main difference involved in this paradigmatic change is the refusal to collapse the physical (behavior) and the mental (cognition) into a single symbolic plane of theorizing. Problem-solving (or even some kind of healing) can ultimately only come from an origin beyond formal inversions and more conceptualist reconfigurations, i.e., it must come from some kind of interiority and subjective constructive agency at the origin of representation – what I have elsewhere called the "cognitive paradigm." As the many cases of empathy show, the very projection of such a quality onto the Other, the *cognitive wager* of attributing cognition to a phenomenal thing (in our case, the binary Other: the female, the animal – epitomized in the term "wahine") is Yamanaka's strategy of choice to avoid the violence of phallic patterns.

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