

EATING THE OTHER IN 'MEI'S LAST BARBECUE': KYRIARCHAL SPECIESISM
AS SOCIAL PARADIGM

A THESIS

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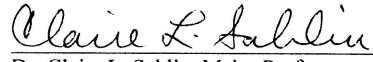
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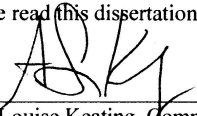
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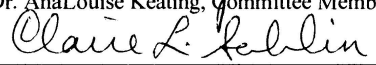
To the Dean of the Graduate School:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Kimberly Christine Merenda entitled "Eating the Other in 'Mei's Last Barbecue': Kyriarchical Speciesism as Social Paradigm." I have examined this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in Women's Studies.



Dr. Claire L. Sahlin, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:


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Dr. Claire L. Sahlin, Department Chair

Accepted:


Dean of the Graduate School

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ABSTRACT

KIMBERLY CHRISTINE MERENDA

EATING THE OTHER IN ‘MEI’S LAST BARBECUE’: KYRIARCHAL SPECIESISM AS SOCIAL PARADIGM

AUGUST 2012

In 1999 a compositionally challenged piece of cannibalistic snuff pornography entitled “Mei’s Last Barbecue” made the rounds of the burgeoning Internet. Loosely adhering to a genre of magical realism, the story horrifically details the slaughter, cooking, and consumption of Mei, a young Malaysian woman. My thesis considers the story as paradigmatically prototypical, positing that within the atrocity of this story lie archetypes both universally recognizable and experienced. My thesis identifies the social paradigm authorizing consumption of the degraded as one of “kyriarchy,” analyzing and expanding upon Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s construction of the neologism. Examining speciesism, sexism, racism, and classism as interdependent, reinforcing systems conveying stigmatization, animalization, and manifold consumption, my thesis develops the theory of kyriarchy through presenting “Mei’s Last Barbecue” as an amplified albeit accurate representation of the prevailing social paradigm. The conclusion of my thesis reflects upon the planetary impact of kyriarchy and the possibility of paradigmatic shift.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: THE ARCHETYPE WITHIN THE ATROCITY

We'll eat you up we love you so.
—Maurice Sendak.

In 1999, the Internet was different. Thirteen years ago, the Internet was a new world, a brave new virtual world, and many of its mainstream denizens were not yet fully inoculated against explicit extremes of content and imagery. Subject matter that Internet audiences are inured against today had the power back in 1999 to shock, horrify, and initiate agitated discussion within forums all across the digitized domain. As the world teetered on the cusp of a new millennium, into the electronic environment of ever lessening innocence dropped a short, sub-literary piece of fictional cannibalistic snuff pornography. Anonymously authored and entitled “Mei’s Last Barbecue,” the story gives a detailed account of the sexual assault, murder, and cannibalization of a young woman. While so-called niche pornography—pornography tailored to interests termed taboo and/or considered fetishistic—has arguably existed throughout all history and within all cultures, the Internet served in its inception as a conduit delivering these former fringe predilections to a new and often naïve audience. Response to “Mei’s Last Barbecue” spread in ripples across the Internet. Passed from virtual hand to virtual hand—what would today be described as “going viral”—the story traveled through the so-called tubes of the Internet, igniting in many of its readers an overlap of revulsion and fascination.

An ugly and compositionally challenged story, “Mei’s Last Barbecue” is a tale told in fourteen short paragraphs of graphic gore. Set in Malaysia, it is a fictional narrative depicting the sexualized exploitation, sexual abuse, butchery, and cannibalistic consumption of Mei, a Malaysian teenaged girl. The story’s narrative style is nonchalant—not so much callous as casual. The story takes the reader directly into a normalized reality in which Mei’s inferiorized social identity dispassionately authorizes a quite literal consumption by those empowered by social position and privilege. The juxtaposition of the story’s gruesome content and the insouciant way in which this content is presented contributes to a literary ambience that is as surreal as it is repellent.

In 1999 I was one of those horrified readers, and “Mei’s Last Barbecue” persisted in my memory, exerting a compelling force beyond its noxious content and clumsy composition. The story sickened me but I could not rid myself of the conviction that “Mei’s Last Barbecue” conveys more than obscenity, slaughter, and atrocity. I posit that there is more to the story than the simple albeit revolting pornographization of cannibalism. It is my belief that to dismiss “Mei’s Last Barbecue” solely as an aberrant and abominable fringe fetishization of sexualized cannibalism comfortably ignores the direct and undeniable connection between the story and a global social paradigm characterized by the multifarious consumption of the socially marginalized. Beneath the loathsome brutality of “Mei’s Last Barbecue” lurks the framework of a globally inclusive social narrative. It is the vague but nagging awareness of this underlying construction that makes “Mei’s Last Barbecue” more than a disgusting and petty piece of pornography. “Mei’s Last Barbecue” was difficult for me to forget not so much for its sordid and vile

storyline, but because reading the story left me with the disquieting suspicion that analyzing the premise beneath “Mei’s Last Barbecue’s” plotline would reveal the fundamental pieces of the prevalent social paradigm.

This thesis focuses upon a story that is graphically violent and relentlessly offensive; through citing “Mei’s Last Barbecue” and in elucidating the meaning, message, and social significance of the story, the content of this thesis too is necessarily graphic. In anatomizing and analyzing this gruesome and distasteful tale, my thesis will argue that “Mei’s Last Barbecue” is paradigmatically prototypical—that within the atrocity of this syntactically challenged story lie archetypes that are universally recognizable and universally experienced. This introductory chapter posits “Mei’s Last Barbecue” as both symptom and symbol of social paradigm. Chapter Two will give definition to a globally prevalent social paradigm that manifests itself in varying degrees of severity. Chapter Three will introduce speciesism as a concept and concordant mode of behavior intrinsic to the social paradigm, arguing that speciesism actively informs the modes through which the precepts of the social paradigm are enforced within “Mei’s Last Barbecue.” Chapter Four will connect speciesism to the paradigmatic components of patriarchy and misogyny and illustrate the ways through which these paradigmatic structures come into play in sustaining the sexualized violence of “Mei’s Last Barbecue.” Chapter Five will chart the intersections between speciesism and racism, noting the crucial interdependence between these aspects of social paradigm and the plotline of “Mei’s Last Barbecue.” Chapter Six addresses classism as a fundamental factor contributing to and augmenting Mei’s array of stigmatized identities. Chapter Seven will

conclude the thesis by both analyzing “Mei’s Last Barbecue” as a kyriarchal quantifier and postulating the possibility of paradigmatic shift. Through the sum of its parts, this thesis will take a paltry and unsavory Internet tale of pornographized cannibalization and dissect that tale to display the archetypes of the ubiquitous social paradigm buried within the story’s travesty of content and composition. Perhaps beneath or beyond the revulsion exhibited circa 1999 by readers of “Mei’s Last Barbecue” lies the uncomfortable recognition of the story as paradigmatic proxy; perhaps in examining “Mei’s Last Barbecue” as an amplified albeit accurate representation of the globally prevailing social paradigm, a shift away from that paradigm may be envisioned and enacted.

CHAPTER II

WE ARE THE STORIES THAT WE TELL

Cannibals? Who is not a cannibal?
—Herman Melville

Soylent Green is people!
—Stanley R. Greenberg

Cannibalism is never just about eating but is primarily a medium for nongustatory messages—messages having to do with the maintenance, regeneration, and, in some cases, the foundation of the cultural order.
—Peggy Reeves Sanday

I believe that as a society we are the stories that we tell, and whether these stories present as epics of classical literature or as inelegant examples of Internet pornography, they can be seen as ineluctably reflecting—even in refutation—the quintessence of social paradigm. A social paradigm is comprised of collectively held social conceptualizations and corresponding behaviors, and I contend that social paradigms are innately mutually exclusive—that but a single paradigm can manifest in a given and global social system and the conceptualizations of a departing paradigm can neither persist into an emerging paradigm nor can the methodologies of social interaction transition into and function from one paradigm to the next. The fundamental patterns of social paradigm imprint every aspect of social function and cultural rituals, and the stories that are told mirror social ethos and correlating doctrines. Literature is paradigmatically derivative and no story can exist within the proverbial vacuum; even literature working to repudiate and/or

replace the prevailing paradigm is necessarily an outgrowth of that paradigm. As a story structured upon the fetishized cannibalization of an underaged, raced, “third world,” impoverished, sexually exploited woman, “Mei’s Last Barbecue” functions as an emblem and indicator of our social framework. In its obscenity, “Mei’s Last Barbecue” can be seen as serving as the dirty lens cogently magnifying the social paradigm from which the story derives both method and meaning.

I posit that extending throughout history, stretching across geography and culture, there has thus far persisted a specific and singular social paradigm. I theorize that this social paradigm developed in tandem with biological evolution—that it is hardwired within the human species and only reluctantly mutable. Aspects of human mindset and behavior that developed initially as conducive from an evolutionary perspective to human individual and group survival—for example, a fear and distrust towards the new and different—have been paradigmatically translated into thought patterns and actions that, in contrast to their early inception as survival strategies, are socially and indeed planetarily destructive.

Throughout human history, while there have been watershed events and ideological transitions that have catalyzed significant changes in worldviews and correspondent social behaviors—for example, the development of a phonetic alphabet, the Peasants’ Revolt, the invention of moveable type printing, Copernican theory, the French Revolution, and the Civil Rights Movement—the predominant social paradigm incorporated into itself these transformations, stunting these revolutions through assimilation and in effect translating these transformations into the kyriarchal terms of the

prevalent paradigm. Through a malignant absorption, the dominant paradigm restructured the potential of these social breakthroughs to cause them to conform to the paradigm's kyriarchic foundation, and while these historical advances of philosophy can be argued as continuing to facilitate a future paradigm change, thus far the kyriarchic social paradigm has maintained its detrimental integrity. Although the presently prevailing social paradigm is obdurate in resisting replacement, it is vital to understand that despite the perceived longevity of the kyriarchal social paradigm, a comprehensive paradigm shift is conceivable, and humankind can be currently seen as precisely poised upon the very cusp of paradigmatic shift.

While through time and topography the deleteriously prevalent paradigm manifests itself in varying gradations, these variable nuances of social concept and conduct are rooted in a common paradigmatic denominator. In working towards an understanding of this dominant social paradigm, I believe that it is important to give name to this paradigm and through this naming come to better recognize the paradigm in all its guises and seemingly disparate expressions. A current and particularly apt appellation is "kyriarchy." As a conceptual clarifier, the concept of kyriarchy is a productive evolution from prior feminist characterizations of our social paradigm as patriarchal. Cindy M. Burns, in considering the feminist application of the term "patriarchy," asserts that patriarchy is "no longer an appropriate construct by which to define the power structure" (32). Burns explains that unlike "patriarchy," the term "kyriarchy" "takes into account the multiple and intersecting power and oppression structures that exist and combine to create any one's place in the power matrix" (32).

Many prominent feminist scholars, including Andrea Dworkin, Kathleen Barry, Catherine MacKinnon, and Mary Daly, characterize the social paradigm as patriarchal and codify all forms of dualized dominance and oppression into a gendered model, but this social theory is giving way to the conceptualization of the global social paradigm as not exclusively rooted in but instead encompassing the precept of patriarchy as but one of the intersecting systems of privilege and contrastive powerlessness.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza coined the term “kyriarchy” (derived from the Greek word “kyrios” meaning lord or master) in 1992 to advance feminist theory beyond a reliance upon the limiting concept of male over female dominance expressed through the term “patriarchy.” Schüssler Fiorenza defines “kyriarchy” as a “sociopolitical and cultural-religious system of domination that structures the identity slots open to members of society in terms of race, gender, nation, age, economy, and sexuality and configures them in terms of pyramidal relations of dominance and submission, profit and exploitation” (8). Schüssler Fiorenza’s concept of the kyriarchal pyramid encompasses a system of apexed privilege and progressively inferiorized positions of social identity, and where the nomenclatorial use of “patriarchy” confines the concept of dichotomized social privilege and oppression to a male/female binary, “kyriarchy” functions as an inclusive term giving full accounting of the myriad but fundamentally interrelated forms of social privilege and powerlessness.

Construed race, age, biological sex, class, degree of financial resources, sexuality, physical ability, physical appearance, nationality, and religion or lack of religion are some of the factors routinely applied in the allocation of social status or stigmatization.

The kyriarchal model significantly takes into account the multiple ways through which social identity and position result in concurrent conditions of privilege and oppression in that an individual can be socially privileged in one area of social measure while simultaneously oppressed in another. The premise of kyriarchy configures the interconnected, interdependent, and mutually reinforcing social systems conveying privileged status and contrastive degradation as these systems both inform and infuse all social perceptions and correlating interactions.

Schüssler Fiorenza's theory of kyriarchy removes the dynamics of dominance and oppression from the restraint of gendered interpretation and establishes the application of dominance and the subjection to oppression as not mutually exclusive but rather as social expressions and experiences possessing a contextual fluidity in that each social being exercises and is subject to simultaneous statuses of dominance and oppression. An individual can for example occupy a social space of privilege through possessing ample economic resources while synchronously be slotted into a position of social oppression through social identity as disabled. Furthermore, a kyriarchical global ethos is demonstrated along a continuum; while the modes through which the ethos are expressed differ in extremity, these presentations share a fundamental core and can be hypothesized as a single disease presenting through divergent but interconnected symptoms. To speak of the system of paradigmatic kyriarchy is to reference a pervasive social ideology and accompanying code of social conduct that is based upon the tenets of power and powerlessness. Manifesting upon a single scale upon which elements differ by degree but not by quintessence, within the borders of one nation kyriarchy may exhibit as gendered

wage disparity, while in other nations it may take the form of racialized apartheid, the state sanctioned imprisonment and murder of homosexuals, or deliberate ecological destruction. Underlying these superficially separate symptoms is the multifaceted but distinct and specific paradigmatic sickness of kyriarchy. While Schüssler Fiorenza's theory of kyriarchy has minor limitations in that the theory does not fully address paradigmatic—and by extension kyriarchic—reliance upon binary thinking and speciesism, as an explication of the prevailing social paradigm, the model of kyriarchy comprehensively succeeds where other paradigmatic characterizations have fallen conceptionally short.

Crucial to the kyriarchic paradigm is a binary mode of discernment through which concepts are defined by their constructed disparity and ranked polarity. Exemplifying the ways through which dualized thought patterns inform kyriarchy, ecofeminist scholar Val Plumwood effectively defines this dualism as “an alienated form of differentiation, in which power construes and constructs difference in terms of an inferior and alien realm” (42). The social paradigm's fundamental dependence upon binary thinking catalyzes the societal need to categorize as well as the inability to conceive of one category without divisively contrasting this category with another envisioned in diametric opposition. This opposition cannot be socially interpreted as neutral but must in effect be disparately valued in a way through which the superior value of one category is directly dependent upon the inferior value of the other. Through this dualistic dynamic, the category conceived of as superior is presented as the naturalized and indeed invisibilized norm, while the polarized category is conspicuous in its non-normative, un-naturalized

inferiority. Dualistic thinking divides the construed “us” from the constructed “other,” and in elucidating this propensity, Craig Owens notes in his essay “The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism” that the “positing of an Other is a necessary moment in the consolidation and incorporation of any cultural body” (58).

Paradigmatically, an “us” can only be understood in divergence from an “other,” and within this binary conceptualization, the us is both invisible and superiorized in contrast to the inferiorized and blatantly manifest other.

When the practice of “othering” is applied to human groups or individuals, an intrinsic part of this process is dehumanization. In considering historical patterns of social violence and brutality, Keith Thomas notes that “the dehumanization of . . . victims by reclassifying them as animals” is “a necessary mental preliminary” for those who engage in “acts of bloody atrocity” (48). To the humanized us, the contrastive other is dehumanized—animalized as nonhuman animals are conceptually inferiorized. Dehumanization reduces the other from identity as a being with intrinsic value, to the rank of a thing or an object that is available for use and abuse. Objectification, the process that Carol J. Adams defines in *The Sexual Politics of Meat* as permitting “an oppressor to view another being as an object” (58), warrants an object-like treatment of human and nonhuman animals that sanctions territorial, cultural, sexual, and—taken to its ultimate definition—corporeal consumption. It is this dualistic, dehumanizing othering—this turning subject into object, being into thing—that authorizes the doctrine of consumption.

I define consumption as using, utilizing, appropriating, absorbing, expending, depleting, destroying, and devouring. The diversely manifested consumption of the socially weak by the socially privileged is a marker of the global kyriarchical paradigm. The degraded, marginalized, dehumanized, and othered are metaphorically and frequently literally eaten—they are the emblematic meal served up at the kyriarchal banquet.

“Mei’s Last Barbecue” is shocking in part because it utilizes the cultural trope of cannibalism to present consumption as bluntly literal. In portraying the consumption of the marginalized, “Mei’s Last Barbecue” is not thematically unique; within a system of kyriarchy, figurative consumption is socially normalized to the point of invisibility. “Mei’s Last Barbecue” generates horror because the story does away with the culturally conventional cloaking of consumption; it dispenses with the social metaphoric niceties employed to disguise the blatant social consumption of the socially disenfranchised. “Mei’s Last Barbecue” produces horrified shock because it is the metaphor of social consumption turned to meat; it is the figurative given barbequed flesh.

I do not present “Mei’s Last Barbecue” as a subtle explication of the nuances of kyriarchy. “Mei’s Last Barbecue” bludgeons readers with kyriarchy as though kyriarchy were a blunt social instrument, and within this bruising blatancy many prime ingredients of the kyriarchal paradigm are condensed into rudimentary and very flagrant form. It is kyriarchally pertinent that the story’s setting is Malaysia. In 1999 as “Mei’s Last Barbecue” traversed the Internet, Malaysia was a country returned in effect by the Asian Financial Crisis to its previous state as a third world colony subject to the imperialistic tyranny of powerful first world nations. Within the marginalized nation of Malaysia, Mei

is an impoverished, Asian-identified, teenaged girl. Homeless and destitute, she sells herself as a prostitute (par. 2). Mei is attacked and beaten by a “trick” (par. 3). She stabs her attacker to death in self-defense, is arrested by police, and brought before a judge (par. 5). Mei is found guilty of murder and instead of sentencing her to prison, the judge orders her “sale to an exotic meat farm” (par. 5). The judge appraises the “tender body” (par. 5) of the assaulted girl; he feels paternally “sympathetic” towards her (par. 5) and views his decision to consign Mei to the exotic meat farm as an act of compassion as this punishment carries with it the chance that Mei could “become a milker and last a little longer” (par. 5). At the exotic meat farm, Mei, along with a group of young women similarly consigned, is inspected, graded, sorted, and processed for slaughter (par. 7). Disemboweled, impaled upon a pole, drizzled with butter, Mei is then roasted alive (par. 9-11). After her death, Mei is “[p]ierced with a meat fork to test the doneness of her meat, her juices and liquefied fat spurt[ing] from the wound” to indicate that she has “cooked up juicy and tender” (par. 12). The “host” of the barbeque—the man exemplified in the story as occupying the apex position of power—cuts into Mei, heaps his plate with “the meat cut from her vagina,” and then extracts her heart, “the organ still bubbling from the heat” (par. 13). The story ends with the men exclaiming, “UMMMMMMM! Absolutely delicious!” (par. 12) as they “gorg[e] themselves on the sweet, juicy, flesh of Mei, soon reducing her to just a few scraps of meat” (par. 13). As surfeit of gore as it is lacking in subtlety, “Mei’s Last Barbecue” serves up kyriarchy as a raw and unrefined recipe, providing in its plot the brutal and basic integrant parts of kyriarchal social paradigm.

From its grotesque plotline, “Mei’s Last Barbecue” unfolds as a grisly exemplification of kyriarchical consumption. While the story itself is sickening, what I see as more sickening by far is the kyriarchal paradigm represented grossly but accurately within “Mei’s Last Barbecue.” Kyriarchy—the rule of the lord and master—is a system authorizing social members empowered by privilege to consume the inferiorized—to reduce the inferiorized to “just a few scraps of meat” (par. 13). Although “Mei’s Last Barbecue’s” rendition of consumption is embellished within horrific content, beneath this gruesome surface layer it functions as a disturbingly precise guide to the kyriarchal social paradigm.

In the person of Mei, “Mei’s Last Barbecue” gives readers a character embodying the intersecting and reciprocally reinforcing identifiers of social degradation. Mei manifestly embodies oppression in all aspects of her characterization, and these identities of social marginalization work together to fortify and perpetuate her kyriarchal consumption. Within “Mei’s Last Barbecue,” the girl blatantly and unequivocally cannibalized is identifiable as the dehumanized, inferiorized, subordinated, constitutive other. Mei is from the “third world,” and her country is conquered and colonized as these conditions mirror consumption. She is the underaged, sexualized girl—she is portrayed as the dirty little whore who sells her sexuality in the streets. She is raced—she is embodied as the “uncivilized,” gibbering, slant-eyed Malay native. She is impoverished—she is depicted as homeless, starving, “destitute on the streets” (par. 2). Because of these socially constructed and inferiorized dynamics, she is othered, dehumanized, animalized, objectified, sexualized, and finally comestibly nullified by elite, “civilized,” wealthy,

white, English speaking men who are empowered by kyriarchical privilege to rape, roast, and consume her.

Throughout its brief paragraphs, “Mei’s Last Barbecue” synoptically manifests the social paradigm of kyriarchy in a way that while repugnant is patently precise. In “Mei’s Last Barbecue,” cannibalism takes the proverbial center stage as the story’s prevalent and deliberately deplorable theme, but in its overt, taboo-defying gruesomeness cannibalism also overshadows the non-gustatory ways through which Mei is consumed in the story. Despite the prevailing role that literal consumption takes within “Mei’s Last Barbecue,” it is important to recognize that the story in its entirety manifests as the thematic rendition of both the manifold and replicating modes through which the socially marginalized are consumed and the socially paradigmatic doctrines authorizing this consumption. From this conceptualization, “Mei’s Last Barbecue” functions as a primer in kyriarchal consumption, as the story simplifies to their most base and basic social components the manners and methodologies through which consumption is demonstrated. While the theory of kyriarchy takes into account the multiple, frequently complex, and contextual modes through which domination and oppression are societally expressed and experienced, in my perspective “Mei’s Last Barbecue” proverbially boils kyriarchy down to its basic essence, the basic distillate that simplistically but effectively provides instruction regarding who is meat and who is master. In a veritable caricature of kyriarchy, “Mei’s Last Barbecue” shows readers who eats and who are eaten.

CHAPTER III

KYRIARCHY AS SPECIESISM: MEAT IS MUTE

If it screams, it's not food . . . yet.

—Unknown

Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you.

—Genesis 9:3 King James Bible

Where's the beef?

—Wendy's advertising campaign, 1984

Categorized as the binary opposition between human and nonhuman animals, speciesism is an integral facet of kyriarchy. Peter Singer defines speciesism as “a prejudice or attitude of bias toward the interests of members of one’s own species and against those member of other species” (7). Like other expressions of dominance and oppression, speciesism manifests on a continuum, but regardless of degree, speciesism institutionalizes the degraded status of nonhuman animals, and it authorizes the contempt and disregard the human species commonly exhibits towards nonhuman species. The binary ethos of the kyriarchal social paradigm divides the human from the animal, and so effective is this social construct that human identity is seen as decisively distinct from animal identity. The mindset characterized by speciesism holds that all nonhuman species are solely valued for and thereby exist only in their use by humans as lesser, expendable, consumable objects. Kyriarchy’s binary process of differentiating the us from the other relies upon the premise of speciesism in that othering another human being involves

dehumanization. Speciesism supports the superiority of the human over the nonhuman animal, and animalizing the other dualistically works to humanize the us. The system of dehumanizing and animalizing the social other could not succeed as a mode of social division and degradation without the connective concept of speciesism.

Speciesism as an integral component of kyriarchy is bluntly demonstrated in “Mei’s Last Barbecue.” Mei is othered because of the inferiorized social constructs marking her social identity. This othering ousts her from the realm of human, from the us side of the binary, and through the paradigmatic process of dualistic thinking, her dehumanization conveys her animalization as animalization speciesistically confers inferiority. As I will elucidate further in subsequent chapters, speciesism intersects with the major interdependent facets of Mei’s social inferiorization: Mei is animalized and thereby inferiorized in conjunction with her biological sex, animalized and inferiorized in her construed “race,” and animalistically inferiorized in her condition of poverty. I postulate that consumability defines the function of the inferiorized within a system of kyriarchy, and that the social conceptualization of the point and purpose of the nonhuman animal corresponds directly to the notion that kyriarchically animalized and inferiorized humans exist to serve as consumable and disposable beings for those holding positions of privilege and power. Consumable in use and body, subordinated human and nonhuman animals are considered meat. Paradigmatically lesser beings are subjects turned to objects; they are the consumed while the elite and powerful are the consumers, and this theme is demonstrated consistently as well as grotesquely in “Mei’s Last Barbecue.”

Like nonhuman animals, socially othered and thereby inferiorized human beings are objectified by their usable parts, and as the sum of these parts they become things and not beings with value in and of themselves. A thing has no consent to give or withhold; a thing exists in its utility as consumable, and consumption, as Adams states, “is the fulfillment of oppression, the annihilation of will, of separate identity” (*Politics* 58). In “Mei’s Last Barbecue,” Mei is considered to be literally a thing—a thing bodily utilized for the pleasure of privileged human beings. Analogous to the kyriarchal perception of nonhuman animals, Mei’s pain, her abuse, and her ultimate annihilation are in essence utterly irrelevant to her consumers. In *The Pornography of Meat*, Adams asserts that “[p]leasurable consumption of consumable beings is the dominant perspective in our culture. It is what subjects do to objects, what *someone* does with *something*” (13 italics added). In “Mei’s Last Barbecue,” pain, abuse, and annihilation are trivialized through the fetishized focus giving the story its salacious, pornographized shock value; universally, the pain, abuse, and annihilation of nonhuman animals are ignored, discounted, or speciestically justified through the tenet that human need supersedes nonhuman animal suffering. The needs and desires of those occupying superiorized human subject status cause and trump the suffering inflicted upon nonhuman animals, and in “Mei’s Last Barbecue,” the various appetites of the socially dominant trump the brutality inflicted upon Mei. The kyriarchal system of elite consumption commends and rewards the appetites of those existing in positions of social power, while across the dualized divide lies the fodder, the beings turned to mere bodies and those bodies reduced to the raw denomination of meat.

It is important to note that what readers find shocking, horrific, and appalling in “Mei’s Last Barbecue” constitutes the conventionally obscured but normatively accepted and routine fate of nonhuman animals. The trigger for the revulsion generated by “Mei’s Last Barbecue”—for the protests against “Mei’s Last Barbecue” and the proclamations that the story is unbearably disgusting and despicable—is in the simple exchange of a human for a nonhuman animal. Speciesism informs this conceptual dissonance; speciesism informs the fact that while nonhuman animals are codified and utilized literally as “pieces of meat,” it is pornography, it is a fetish, and it is a universal cultural taboo to literally, openly, and without the camouflage of simile and metaphor equivalently use a human animal as a piece of meat.

Adams asserts in *Neither Man Nor Beast* that we are a “flesh-advocating culture” (26) and that in constructing the conceptualization of meat, “someone who has had a very particular, situated life, a unique being, is converted into something that has no distinctness, no uniqueness, no individuality” (27). Meat is the cultural terminology for both nonhuman animals and marginalized humans, and meat is the nomenclature designed to transform beings into a flesh that serves no other purpose than to be used and consumed. I believe that in giving readers the plot device of the “exotic meat farm” and in demonstrating with vividly horrific imagery the purpose and production of this exotic meat farm, “Mei’s Last Barbecue” graphically illustrates the cultural fixation upon flesh and explicitly depicts the mania for meat and the kyriarchal compulsion to define the dehumanized other by a multifarious consumability as meat. Within “Mei’s Last

Barbecue,” from brutal beginning to bloody end, there is no doubt that to those holding positions of social power, Mei is meat.

Because meat has no will, is passive, and is mute, it is pertinent throughout “Mei’s Last Barbecue” that Mei cannot communicate with those who butcher, cook and consume her. Within the narrative, a man inspects the body parts of the women herded together and awaiting slaughter at the exotic meat farm of “Mei’s Last Barbecue” (par. 6). The story tells us that when the man reaches Mei, “his strong but gentle hands caress her body, feeling her muscles and breasts, and inserting a finger into her vagina, he then said something to his assistant and moved on to the next girl” (par. 6). The juxtaposition of the phrase “strong but gentle hands caress her body”—hackneyed words more commonly found in the genre of romance novels—with the realization that Mei is not in fact being erotically “caressed” by the man but rather inspected as meat, as a potential meal, is as unsettling as it is repellent.

Not wasting words on meat, the man assessing the women does not address the objects of his inspection, and the story presents Mei as silent through the assessment, silent as she is strung naked, upside down on a crossbar in an assembly line of similarly trussed women. Of the men performing this action upon inert women, the story’s narrative states that “[n]o one said anything,” and they “just left them hanging there” (par. 6). The image presented in this scene of the story is gruesome. Women and girls are converted from beings to bodies as they are inspected as prospective cuisine—the inspection itself abhorrently sexualized as a “caress”—and then hung naked and upside down by men who know that there is no need or purpose in communicating with meat.

This image easily lends itself not only to comparison with the cultural conceptualization of the butcher shop, but also to the silencing of the socially dehumanized as that silencing is endemic to the kyriarchal paradigm. As the men begin to prepare Mei for the barbeque, she tries to communicate, attempts to appeal to the men, crying out, "Please kill me first. Don't make me suffer. Oh God! It hurts so much!! I don't want to die this way!" (par. 9). There is no response and no reaction to her pleas and words, and the story simply states that "the men [can]not understand her language and [are] not likely to change their minds anyway as they apparently ha[ve] done this many times before" (par. 9). To the men of the exotic meat farm, the sounds Mei makes are as disconnected from human communication as the vocalizations made by nonhuman animals within factory farms and feedlots. Giving credence to these noises makes no more sense to the men processing the women and girls than listening to the lowing of cattle entering the so-called kill floor of the slaughterhouse; heeding Mei's cries would for these men be as nonsensical as attaching import to the squawking of hens forced into battery cages.

The story relates that as Mei was "spitted by the pole," she "soon was silenced" (par. 9), and as the men cook Mei, as "flames lick at her body as she continue[s] to rotate on the spit" (par. 11), Mei is repeatedly described as "scream[ing] silently" (par. 10), and as "scream[ing] to herself" (par. 11). As meat Mei is made conclusively mute. Just as in the slaughterhouse the language of butchered animals cannot be heard and cannot be understood or perceived as intelligible, Mei's speech is meaningless, her pain is unacknowledged and considered unimportant, and her merit is held to be all in her meat. The socially degraded, like nonhuman animals, are conceptualized to be only flesh—

physical in their service to those occupying positions of social status—and their value is found solely in this flesh. Beyond flesh, all else is dismissed as unimportant as the socially marginalized and the nonhuman animal serve no other function than to mutely satisfy the hungers of the empowered and privileged.

As illustrated horrendously in its fourteen paragraphs, “Mei’s Last Barbecue” accurately and appallingly projects the ethos of speciesism typifying our kyriarchal social order, the ideologically inseparable link between the domination of nonhuman animals and the oppression of othered, dehumanized, animalized, and degraded humans. Speciesism divides the superiorized human from the inferiorized animal and into this degraded, animalized realm are relegated those humans who are othered in their deviation from the construed social norms. Like nonhuman animals, stigmatized, othered humans are categorized, objectified, and measured by the worth that the socially elite and powerful assign to their dismembered parts. All worth ascribed to the socially marginalized is dependent upon the potential consumption of their labor, sexuality, and reproduction, and through potential consumption via conquest, colonialism, national and cultural exploitation and appropriation. Within a kyriarchal social paradigm, the elite conquer, control, and consume the inferiorized, and the inferiorized are, as aptly asserted by Plumwood, “appropriated, incorporated, into the selfhood and culture of the master” (41). In “Mei’s Last Barbecue,” the metaphorically voracious consumption defining kyriarchy manifests ultimately in the motif of cannibalism as Mei is literally incorporated into—digested by—the master.

CHAPTER IV

KYRIARCHY AS SPECIESISM AND PATRIARCHY: HOW TO MEAT WOMEN

The sexualized female body is consumable when alive through sex acts and pornography, and consumable, if nonhuman, when dead as food or clothing or scientific material.

—Carol J. Adams, “Caring About Suffering”

It is widely thought and practiced and said that people are “above” animals, whereas it is commonly thought and practiced but denied that it is thought and practiced that men are “above” women.

—Catherine A. MacKinnon

The way to a man's heart is through his stomach.

—Fanny Fern

Mei’s consignment to the exotic meat farm as punishment for her attempt to defend herself against a sexual attack takes the reader into a normalized social sphere in which women and girls are routinely utilized and consumed not only sexually but also in ways analogous to human society’s use and consumption of domesticated nonhuman animals. Overlapping in ways that both promote and preserve kyriarchal structure, speciesism and patriarchy are pivotal features of the kyriarchal social paradigm, and like all components of kyriarchy, speciesism and patriarchy intersect with and mutually reinforce other kyriarchal institutions. “Mei’s Last Barbecue” presents the systems of speciesism and patriarchy in what I consider to be their purest and most consummate concentrations.

While focusing in her writing more upon the gendered social framework of patriarchy than upon the nuances of nongendered contextual social modes of dehumanization and oppression, Catherine A. MacKinnon effectually asserts that upon the general basis of biological sex “[w]omen are the animals of the human kingdom, the mice of men’s world” (318). MacKinnon explains that both

women and animals are identified with nature rather than culture by virtue of biology. Both are imagined in male ideology to be thereby fundamentally inferior to men and humans. Women in male dominant society are identified as nature, animalistic, and therefore denigrated, a maneuver that also defines animals’ relatively lower rank in human society. Both are seen to lack properties that elevate men, those qualities by which men value themselves and define their status as human by distinction. (318)

Within “Mei’s Last Barbecue,” this alignment of women and animals projects both a grotesque caricature and an exacting rendition of the ways through which speciesism reinforcingly fuses with patriarchal sexism, sexualization, and misogyny. Patriarchy as a component of kyriarchy effects a binary divide between women and men; it posits an essential and oppositional differentiation between women and men, institutionalizes male privilege and superiority, and authorizes the subjugation of inferiorized women by men. Within this conceptualization, women are marginalized as the other, dehumanized, and aligned with nonhuman animals. Patriarchal ideology aggressively promotes the submission of women and doctrinally holds that the function of women is in all ways to

submit to and serve men. Paralleling speciesism, within a system of patriarchy women exist in objectified service, as the sexuality, reproductive capacity, labor, care-taking, physical presence, and image of women are controlled and consumed by a male-dominated social order. The service and submission of women is taken in, used, and absorbed by men as an androcentric social norm of symbolic consumption.

Patriarchy as a featured part of kyriarchy sanctions the male appropriation of female sexuality, casting women as existing as essentialistically sexualized objects in the service of male sexual need. In describing the sexual essentialism of women, Kathleen Barry, a radical feminist scholar whose analysis is thoughtful and compelling even in its exclusively gendered focus, explains that “sex is equated with the female body—where it is gotten, had, taken. . . . As a sexed body, woman is made universal, and women, accessible for sex, are made to be indistinguishable from each other” (26). Patriarchy provides the common framework for socially constructed modes of sexuality, and sexuality manifested through the precepts of patriarchy is tailored to men and not women. Informed by an ethos of patriarchy, women are sexualized in ways that convey eroticized dehumanization, degradation, animalization, and subsequent objectification; paralleling the speciesistic perception of nonhuman animals, the meaning and merit of a woman is perceived to be based upon the use of her body parts by men. While the premise of kyriarchy provides for a greater and more nuanced interpretation of the social aspects that concurrently empower and oppress an individual woman, patriarchy as a feature of kyriarchy accounts for the ways through which women, like nonhuman animals, are objectified by their parts and the sum of these parts measured as meat. Correlating to the

speciesistic notion holding that the purpose of nonhuman species lies within human utility, patriarchy analogously conveys that it is only through multifarious use by men that women achieve worth, value, purpose and recognition.

The intersection of patriarchy and speciesism functions to mutually enforce, strengthen, and perpetuate these systems as individual parts while also functioning to reinforce kyriarchy as a whole. The speciesistic constituent of the predominant kyriarchal social paradigm polarizes the superiorized human against the inferiorized animal and authorizes the domination of animal by human; the patriarchal component of kyriarchy dualistically divides superiorized man from inferiorized woman and correspondingly justifies the domination of man over woman. In a manner that I see as concisely exemplifying the connection between speciesism and patriarchy, “Mei’s Last Barbecue” casually extends towards women the social acceptance and apathy generally and speciesistically exhibited towards the exploitation and butchering of nonhuman animals.

In “Sexist Words, Speciesist Roots,” Joan Dunayer addresses the connection between speciesism and sexism that is endemic to kyriarchy and reflected in the English language, stating, “When used to denote other species only, *animal* falsely removes humans from animalkind. In parallel, through their male imagery, the pseudogenerics *man* and *mankind* effectively exclude women from humankind” (19 italics in orig.). Speciesism connects to and supports the animalization of the demarcated social other, as women—disassociated from humanity as defined by mankind—are linked with

inferiorized animals, a process reinforcing the perceived low status of both women and animals and authorizing the abuse of both by socially elite man as human.

Dunayer further explains this process by stating that the

use of [the word] animal reflects the speciesist belief that humans fundamentally differ from all nonhuman animals and are inherently superior. More subtly, man and mankind too reflect speciesism. Their power to lower women's status rests on the premise that those outside our species do not merit equal consideration and respect. Linguistically outing women from humankind has force because lack of membership in the human species condemns an individual, however thinking and feeling, to inferior status. (19)

Through this kyriarchical mindset and use of language, humans are divided from animals and humans are held as superior to animals. Concurrently, humans are "mankind," and mankind is men. Women are not men. Women are aligned with animals and animals are considered inferior. Woman as animal is perceived proprietarily in a paradigmatically androcentric society as an asset, a commodity that men are entitled to own, exploit, abuse, control, and consume.

Speciesism and patriarchy as components of kyriarchy give men access to and control over animals and women, and the systems of speciesism and patriarchy position men as empowered consumers and women and animals as the powerlessly consumed. In *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, Adams examines the patriarchal tendency to align "meat eater" and "virile male" even as women are dichotomously paired with edible animals

(81). This dichotomy presents women as meat and men as eaters of meat. Cultural references to socially elite men as meat significantly differ from associations of women. A strong, sexually attractive man is termed a “hunk” or a “hunk of meat.” A man with well-developed muscles is referred to as “beefcake.” When a man becomes more physically powerful he is said to have “beefed up” or become “beefy.” Allusions to the elite man as meat do not involve images of powerlessness, passivity, ignorance, objectification, and consumption but rather present the elite man as meat-like in a way that confers power, virility, strength, and health. While elite men are *meat-like*, women are embodied as actual meat, and in further honing this social conceptualization, women are associated with and compared to animals domesticated for their flesh.

Domesticated animals symbolize captive, controlled bodies, flesh that serves no other purpose than to be exploited, used, and consumed. Dunayer explains that “[a]pplying images of denigrated nonhuman species to women labels women inferior and available for abuse” (11). Women are called “cow,” “sow,” “chick,” “biddy,” “lamb,” “duckie” “goose,” “filly,” “bunny,” “bitch,” “mutton,” “hen.” The resources of nonhuman female reproduction are exploited in the ingestion of milk and eggs, and infant, castrated, and female animals are consumed. Only very rarely are intact adult males consumed as food.

In “Mei’s Last Barbecue,” although Mei is ultimately selected for immediate slaughter, her “sale to an exotic meat farm” carried with it the chance that she could “become a milker and last a little longer” (par. 5). Dunayer explains that the animal metaphors used culturally to disparage women “refer to domesticated animals like the

chicken, cow, and dog—those bred for service to humans” (12). In service as a consumable, a cow is utilized for her milk, provides her milk until her body is no longer able, and she then serves with her meat. Dunayer describes the association of women and cows, stating that a cow is

[k]ept perpetually pregnant and/or lactating, with swollen belly or swollen udder. . . . Confined to a stall, denied the active role of nurturing and protecting a calf—so that milking becomes something done *to* her rather than *by* her—she is seen as passive and dull. The cow then becomes emblematic of these traits which metaphor can attach to women. Like the laying hen, the dairy cow is exploited as female body. Since the cow’s exploitation focuses on her uniquely female capacities to produce milk and “replacement” offspring, it readily evokes thoughts of femaleness more generally. Bearing with it the context of exploitation, the cow’s image easily transfers to women. (13 italics in orig.)

Modern culture makes no bones about its routine comparisons of women to meat and its associations of women with nonhuman animals used by human society for their meat. Internet searches turn up innumerable, international, consistently themed examples of the alignment of women and meat. In 1978, United States-based *Hustler Magazine* graphically featured upon its cover the image of a women’s naked body being fed into a meatgrinder, being graphically ground into meat. In 2006, Australia’s most senior Muslim cleric castigated women victims of rape, stating that women who leave their home are like “uncovered meat” attracting the attention and whetting the appetites of men

and as such to blame for their own sexual assaults (Kerbaj). In 2011, The Hundreds, a Los Angeles-based self-identified “social merchandizing company” marketed a teeshirt featuring the naked body of a woman, the woman’s body demarcated into sections identified as cuts of meat (Grossman-Heinze). The code term commonly used when seeking to buy or sell women prostituted through Asian sex tourism is “fresh meat” (Green, Fernando). In 2003, fierce debate erupted throughout the media regarding the veracity of the Web site *Hunting for Bambi*, an alleged Las Vegas-based business purporting to offer men the chance to “choose between a menu of thirty different naked women” (Oesterle) and then hunt the selected naked woman with a paintball gun. Missing what I posit as the entire social point, public outcry dissipated when it was ultimately revealed that men could not actually pay to hunt naked women but that the Web site existed in fact merely (!) to sell DVDs and videos of staged hunts featuring men stalking and shooting naked women.

As illustrated in these examples, comparing women to meat and labeling women as meat is socially normative. While I am relieved to note that the direct alignment of women and meat is subject to increasing cultural protest, this alignment is also a practice that is protected and perpetuated by the common social propensity to deny the social power of words and associations. Words and associations do not exist in a social vacuum, and in *The Pornography of Meat*, Adams explains that as a culture “[w]e don’t realize that the act of *viewing* another as an object and the act of *believing* that another is an object are actually different acts, because our culture has collapsed them into one” (14 italics in orig.). Social views are social realities, and I argue there is no cultural

delineation between the two. The social paradigm exists as social fact, and the current worldview does not simply conceptually align women with inferiorized nonhuman animals and theoretically refer to women as meat; rather, within the dynamic of kyriarchal paradigm women *are* dehumanized animals and meat. Adams extensively describes the prevalent tendency of advertisements to feminize and sexualize nonhuman animals and meat and to animalize women and present women as meat. Adams asserts that this is nothing less than “a window into the myths by which our world is structured” and that advertisements as raw reflections of the cultural norm clearly convey “who are the someones in our culture and who have become the somethings” (14).

Society is inundated with images and references both subtly and explicitly expressing the figurative alignment of women and meat, and while this is a social norm, the act—whether it be fictional or factual—of literally following through on the premise of women as meat is a fetish, a taboo, a sensationalized news story, or a protested piece of Internet pornography.

The exotic meat farm of “Mei’s Last Barbecue” strips away the social simile conveying contextual exploitation, and, sans simile, women are not *like* meat, women *are* meat. In “Mei’s Last Barbecue,” women are not *like* cows kept pregnant and lactating and ultimately butchered and eaten—women are literally bred and maintained as milkers and then slaughtered, cooked, and consumed. What can be viewed as most offensive in the lexicon of “Mei’s Last Barbecue”—in the application of the term “milker” to Mei—is the removal of the qualifying simile, the blatant exposure of the unmodified maxim behind the metaphor.

Society casually labels women as cows and society controls, exploits, and benefits from the reproduction of women. During social eras openly condoning slavery, enslaved women were explicitly utilized for their reproductive and lactatory capacities. Despite these factors, the social propensity to preserve the linguistic use of simile as it both disguises and sustains the social perception and use of women persists. While the omission of cultural camouflage in “Mei’s Last Barbecue” is presumably the authorial intent to appall readers and/or create the pornographic fetishization of Mei as meat and milker, “Mei’s Last Barbecue” very palpably omits this polite social pretense. Beyond any intentionally generated disgust and/or fetishization, what is accomplished through presenting Mei as meat and referring to her as a “milker” is the revelation of the truth behind the socially figurative—the exposure of common social similitudes as literal.

Although I believe that this aspect of the plotline is probably not a deliberate paradigmatic insight but rather the attempt to shock and perpetuate sexual fetish, the animalization of Mei and Mei’s consignment to the exotic meat farm to be utilized for her milk or her meat is a chillingly accurate reflection of the fusion of patriarchy and speciesism as kyriarchal components. In creating a setting in which women are normatively perceived and consumed in ways identical to the current perception and consumption of domesticated nonhuman animals, I see “Mei’s Last Barbecue” as conforming in effect to the literary genre of magical realism in that the story presents as ordinary a social world in which women are commodified and bodily consumed—utilized for their sexuality, for their service to men, for their meat and milk, and for their reproductive capacity. I contend that the literary gimmick is perfectly and presumably

inadvertently circumvented by the fact that there is essentially nothing magical at all about this reality. The surreal presented in “Mei’s Last Barbecue” is merely a lightly blurred—a barely blurred—rendering of the real.

While the consumption of women is usually metaphorically social and sexual, “Mei’s Last Barbecue” fictitiously shows this boundary to be contextually arbitrary. As “Mei’s Last Barbecue” crosses that border in fiction, in historical as well contemporary reality this boundary is also regularly breached by men viewing women as walking, talking meat. Globally, men make literal the figurative consumption of women, often amalgamating their sexual and ingestive consumption of women in a sort of multipurpose utilization that reveals the conceptualization of women as serving manifold functions of consumability. In 1921’s Germany, Carl Großmann was arrested for killing an unknown number of women, butchering and selling their bodies as meat (Balou). In 1928 in New York, Albert Fish killed and cannibalized ten-year-old Grace Budd (Taylor). In 1957 police discovered that Ed Gein had not only killed and cannibalized women but also made a belt out of nipples, fashioned bowls from the skulls of women, and kept a shoe box filled with the excised and dried genitalia of his female victims (Bell, Bardsley). In 1970, after killing a mother and her seven-year-old daughter in British Columbia, Dale Merle Nelson disemboweled the seven-year-old girl and consumed the contents of her abdomen (Mendoza). In the early 1980s in the former Soviet Union, Nikolai Dzhumagaliev killed and cannibalized between fifty and one hundred women, often cooking and serving their meat to unsuspecting friends (Strusiewicz). In 1981, Issei Sagawa murdered and consumed a female college student in Paris (Ramsland 1-2). In

Chicago between 1981 and 1982, Robin Gecht, Edward Spreitzer, Andrew Kokoraleis, and Thomas Kokoraleis—known as the Ripper Crew—cut off and later consumed the breasts of eight female victims (Mendoza). In 1986 through 1987, Philadelphia’s Gary Michael Heidnik kidnapped, raped and tortured six women, dismembering, cooking and consuming parts of two of the women who died as the result of torture and starvation, and forcing his remaining captives to also eat the bodies of the dead women (Morris). Texan Christopher Lee McCuin killed and cooked his twenty-one year-old girlfriend in 2008 (Jite). In Great Britain, David Harker in 1998 murdered, cut up and consumed his girlfriend, serving her body with pasta and cheese (Wetsch). In Beijing, January 2009, Russians Maxim Golovatskikh and Yury Mozhnov drowned Karina Barduchian in a bath, dismembered her body and stewed and consumed her flesh with potatoes (Shasha). Eating women garners guilty attention in fiction and on film. Readers and audiences are fixated upon stories and films featuring women fictitiously consumed in a sexualized cannibalism. When it happens in “real life,” when the socialized accessibility and consumability of women is taken literally, the cannibalization of women grabs and holds the headlines as too many social members find titillation in knowing that some men see the essential blur in the contextual boundary of social/comestible consumption and act accordingly.

Animalizing women, feminizing meat, and infusing animalized women and feminized meat with the sexualization ineluctably accompanying these alignments creates a dichotomy humanizing men and positioning humanized man as empowered consumer. Within this kyriarchal context, the deliberate, relentless, and explicit animalization of Mei

in “Mei’s Last Barbecue” works to confer what I posit as a corresponding human identity upon the story’s male characters. Epitomizing the paradigmatic reliance upon binary thinking, the humanized identity of the men operating and benefitting from the exotic meat farm of “Mei’s Last Barbecue” is reinforced through animalizing those corporeally supplying the farm with its “exotic meat.” In “Mei’s Last Barbecue,” Mei is described as something that is sold, caged in a “holding area,” “inspected,” “sorted” (par. 6), and “spitted” upon a pole to cook (par. 9). The systematic ways through which Mei and the other women farmed as exotic meat are prepared and processed for butchering gruesomely mimics the handling of nonhuman animals in Westernized slaughterhouses. Within the architecture of the kyriarchal paradigm, Mei’s patent presentation as a consumable animal functions concurrently to present the men as nonanimalized consumers. As the status of human authorizes animal consumption, it is not necessary for “Mei’s Last Barbecue” to explicitly describe or demonstrate the men as overtly human in counterpart to the ways through which Mei is repetitively animalistically portrayed; to superiorize the men as separate from animals and therefore human, it is only necessary to inferiorize and animalize Mei.

In what I perceive as analogous to the ways through which “Mei’s Last Barbecue’s” lucid animalization of Mei makes the humanization of the men implicitly apparent and therefore not subject to elucidation, “Mei’s Last Barbecue’s” unremittingly depiction of Mei as female binarily bolsters the normative male social identity of her consumers. Readers of “Mei’s Last Barbecue” are bludgeoned with socially paradigmatic indicators of Mei’s femalized and therefore sexualized identity. While Barry does not in

this specific discourse consider the mitigating nuances lent to the subject by intersecting social factors, through the generalized context of patriarchy she aptly asserts that, unlike women, “men are not the objects of sexualization; neither as a collectivity nor in their individuality are they sex, sexed body. In fact, *men are not reduced to their bodies* or their biology or their drives. While male sexuality has been treated as driven by an imperative, however imperative their sexual drives are cultivated to be, men’s identities are formed by what they do in the world, not by functions attributed to their bodies” (27 italics in orig.). “Mei’s Last Barbecue” describes Mei’s body in dismembered, pornographized pieces. The story sexualizes these female parts, as “female” is patriarchally conflated with “sexual,” and this portrayal sustains the socially conceptualized purpose of the sexualized female as existing only to passively serve the action of male need.

The story’s first paragraph is devoted to depicting Mei’s body, to describing her “exquisite figure” (par. 1). Mei is not so much a character in “Mei’s Last Barbecue” as what I conceptualize as a setting within the story upon which actions and events take place. In embodying this setting, the narration continues in stating that Mei’s “breasts were firm, nicely rounded and stood out from her well developed chest tipped with two tiny dark protruding nipples. Her public [*sic*] mound was very prominent but she had kept her pussy clean of hair, the multiple folds of her vagina lips centered with a barely visible clit” (par. 1). Mei’s body is a passive and sexualized setting upon which actions are imposed by subjects socially privileged to exercise this action and power. The actions taking place upon the site of Mei’s body are abominable; they are a sickening

amalgamation of sexual assault and the commonplace torture that is the social utilization of nonhuman animals. Mei's body is prostituted, sexually assaulted, beaten, whipped, held, inspected, sorted, tied, strung up, hung up, shaved, bowels and bladder flushed with hoses, injected, slit open, disemboweled, sewn up, impaled, slathered with butter, and eaten (par. 1-14). Mei's vagina, breasts, and buttocks as the construed sexualized seats of her female identity are described in obsessive detail as seemingly disembodied and passive body parts within which things are actively "inserted" (par. 6), "pushed" (par. 7), "guided" (par. 9), "injected" (par. 9), "forced" (par. 10), and "impaled" (par. 10). As Mei is roasted over flames, it is her female and therefore sexualized "breasts and buttocks" that she can feel "begin to heat up" (par. 11). It is no coincidence but instead what I construe as patriarchally pertinent, that in order to assess her barbecued progress, the cook "slice[s] a small piece of meat from the underside of one of her breasts, and another tiny morsel from her pretty butt" and "pops" these "small, hot, pieces of girl meat into his mouth" (par. 11). As "Mei's Last Barbecue" concludes, the consumption of Mei as an othered, animalized, sexualized, passive, and bodily fragmented female segues seamlessly from the sexual to the gustatory as the host of the exotic meat farm exercises his pyramidal position of kyriarchal privilege by filling his own plate with "the meat cut from her vagina" (par. 13) before beginning to "carve thin slices of Mei's breasts, buttocks and thighs" into "serving cuts of beautiful, juicy and slightly rare cuts of prime girl meat" (par. 13).

Ousted from mankind, dehumanized as an inferior animal, persistently demarcated as female as female identity is through the kyriarchal component of

patriarchally defined by passivity and sexually construed pieces and purposes, Mei's constructed identity serves in its assigned inferiority to uphold the non-fractionalized, nonsexualized, active, autonomous, human, superior normativity of men. Animalized, feminized, and therefore consumable, Mei is reduced to her parts, while through the process of dualization essential to kyriarchy, the social identities of the men are contrastively undisclosed and as such normalized as corresponding to the sum of human and male. In "Mei's Last Barbecue," the ubiquitous social dynamic that sexualizes objectified female parts in the service of men while aligning men with humanity and women with animals, is inflated into caricature not at its foundation but only in outward depiction. "Mei's Last Barbecue" takes an essential premise permeating the kyriarchical paradigm—the principle that inferiorizes nonhuman species, associates sexualized women with inferiorized nonhuman animals, and authorizes the multifaceted consumption of both by superiorized human as male—and tightens the focus to present the premise in its most straightforward, blunt, blatant, and kyriarchic form. While the story's overt demonstration of women as animalized consumables is repugnant, it is essential to note that the infrastructure of this plotline is nothing but common paradigmatic doctrine.

CHAPTER V

KYRIARCHY AS SPECIESISM AND RACISM: THE COLOR OF MEAT

Black, uncouth, uncomely, disagreeable and low in their habits, wild and seemingly deprived of nearly all the blessings of the intelligence that is generally bestowed upon mankind.

—Brigham Young

For to describe a man as a beast was to imply that he should be treated as such.

—Keith Thomas

Kill the beast! Cut his throat! Spill his blood!

—William Golding

While speciesism as it connects to patriarchy is a major kyriarchical factor present in “Mei’s Last Barbecue,” it is by no means the short story’s only manifestation of speciesism’s intersection with other kyriarchical systems. Irrespective of biological sex, humans consigned to statuses of social degradation are also animalized as the process of animalization links with speciesism to concurrently dehumanize, malign, other, and effect a social separation from the elite kyriarchical standard. The oppression of nonhuman animals can be seen as the prototype for the oppression of humans (Spiegel 25), and in addressing this dynamic, Keith Bradley in his essay “Animalizing the Slave: The Truth of Fiction” references Aristotle’s influential first book the *Politics*. In this treatise, Aristotle separates from the social elite the men and women subsumed into slavery, defining these women and men as differentiated in the “way that an animal differs from a human being” (110). Bradley cites Aristotle in asserting that into this animalized, nonhuman category

“fall all whose function is bodily service, and who produce their best when they supply this service” and that in considering animals and humans degraded to the construed inferior level of animals, “there is little difference in the way they are used; both . . . provide bodily assistance in satisfying essential needs” (110).

Richard Twine, in considering the “discursive animalization of various social groups,” asserts that the technique of animalization “has worked along lines of gender, class, religion, and race most obviously” (57). The construction of “race” in the process of degrading, dehumanizing, and animalizing the socially construed other is a paradigmatic constant. While “race” as it is used to differentiate humankind exists neither as a biologic reality nor a historical constant, within the system of kyriarchy it is a crucial construct used in the polarization of the superior from the inferior—in dividing the humanized us from the animalized other. It is vitally relevant in “Mei’s Last Barbecue” that Mei is raced—that as a character she is immediately identified as a woman of color. The direct, first-sentence racialization of Mei crucially fortifies the collective factors of her paradigmatically authorized, rationalized, comprehensible consumption. Without the assignment of a racialized identity, I posit that Mei would be perceived as not quite so consumable and the story would be less effective in fully conveying the principles of the kyriarchal paradigm. I acknowledge that the other markers of Mei’s social identity would persist in proclaiming her consumability, but her racialization functions instantaneously and unequivocally to authorize Mei’s use and abuse as an animal and cast her as a consumable.

Maythee Rojas in her study of feminism and construed race, pertinently asks, “What moves us to identify one group as being ‘of color’ and another not?” (4). Racism—as tenaciously real as “race” is not—is endemic to the persistent social paradigm. Originating in the fear and distrust of the unfamiliar, the dissimilar, the constitutive other, racism is, I suggest, an early evolutionary factor of the human survival strategy gone horribly awry. Racism is frameworked inflexibly within the system of dualistic thinking as that system compels the division of the socially standardized nonracialized norm from “raced.” Through this dichotomous formula, normative “nonrace”—the perceived nonracialized identity of those holding dominant social status—exists in its superiorized relationship to raced. The nonracialized side of the binary is the default reference through which “race” is socially seen and conceptualized, but unlike the social conspicuity assigned to a racialized identity, a nonracialized social identity exists as the invisible constant; a nonracialized identity is the fixed point both so omnipresent and omnipotent that it is imperceptible even as it prevails as the standard preceding the binary divide that through that division inferiorizes.

“Mei’s Last Barbecue” provides in Mei an immediately racialized character—a character that can therefore be perceived as and used as an animal. Mei’s characterization as overtly raced is covertly juxtaposed with the expressly nonracialized characterization of the men who ultimately cannibalize her. While the story launches directly into what seems the paradigmatically *de rigueur* racialization of characters not matching the nonracialized standard of the dominant norm, the men portrayed as commanding and as being served sexually and comestibly by the story’s exotic meat farm present as the

unspoken, racially mute binary backdrop—the tacit nonrace—against which the racialization of Mei takes place.

Racialization is one of the kyriarchal processes of othering, and like all forms of dualized social division, othering based upon “race” cannot occur as a neutral variable but must in fact confer inferiority in its constructed difference. This inferiority is conferred through an assigned animality, as racialization ousts the racialized other from human status and that ejection effects a resultant alignment with nonhuman animals. Speciesism is grafted to racism, as through the precept of speciesism the projection of an animalized identity is the synchronic consignment of inferiority. Carrie Rohman, in examining the overlap of racism and speciesism, explains that a “given individual or race is valued according to its perceived distance from the irrational, instinctual animal, according to its ‘progress’ upwards from animality” (30). Racializing a human individual or group is to diminish or eradicate that conceptualized distance from inferiorized nonhuman animals. Mark S. Roberts, in his discourse on animality and human oppression, explains that “to systematically attribute demeaning, animalistic tendencies to types or groups leads inevitably to maltreatment of these groups, ranging from exclusion to outright slaughter. The reason for this is simple: animals, generally speaking, do not have to be treated in the same way as humans. Their entire natural history demonstrates their inferiority, and this inferiority, via theoretical tinkering, popular prejudices, and just plain bad science, can be transferred effortlessly from one species to another” (40). I contend that this context gives “Mei’s Last Barbecue” its own form of logic, as Mei’s consumability as established already by her degraded social status is enhanced by her

racialization as that racialization others her, dehumanizes her, and permits her to be proverbially “treated like animal.”

The abuse and exploitation of racially oppressed humans and nonhuman animals are paradigmatically analogous. Julie Andrzejewski, Helena Petersen, and Freeman Wicklund examine this parallel, stating, “Diverse areas such as animal agriculture, the slave trade, hunting, zoos, and scientific experiments show how people of color and animals have historically been subject to similar strategies of control and violence. Racist propaganda has compared people of color with negative stereotypes of animals, and people of color have been considered belonging to a subhuman species, lacking both reason and rights” (143). The abuses inflicted upon nonhuman animals and the modes through which nonhuman animals are variously exploited have essential points of correspondence with the abuse and exploitation of humans, as within the system of kyriarchy the ethos justifying consumption and the methodologies through which consumption is expressed extend seamlessly from the nonhuman to the human animal with no point of conceptual divergence. While this parallel has been consistently demonstrated, comparing the oppressions to which nonhuman animals are routinely subject and the oppressions historically and contemporaneously perpetrated against social groups and individuals animalized through racialization has frequently been construed as offensive. Although there are clear similarities between the degradations and cruelties inflicted upon nonhuman animals and upon humans othered through racism, charting this intersection has generated controversy. Drawing connections between the violence done to nonhuman animals and the violence done to human beings has been experienced as an

insult to the referenced humans, in that the comparison itself is perceived as debasing. The controversy can be inferred as a nuance of speciesism—as an indicator of the profound degree to which speciesism infuses kyriarchal paradigm. Marjorie Spiegel, in her elucidation of the parallels between nonhuman animal and human slavery, asserts that comparing the suffering inflicted upon nonhuman animals to the suffering of oppressed humans “is offensive only to the speciesist,” to “one who has embraced the false notion of what animals are like” (25).

A testimony to the paradigmatic effectiveness of speciesism, it is frequently considered to be an offense to note the correlations between the abuse of nonhuman animals and the abuse of animalistically degraded humans, and “Mei’s Last Barbecue” has taken this construed offense, this taboo of comparison, and turned it to a sexualized fetish. In “Mei’s Last Barbecue” an explicitly racialized character is explicitly used as an animal. “Mei’s Last Barbecue” takes a short-cut in relying not so much upon the social process of conceptually converting a human being into an animal through the tactic of animalistic comparison and through the use of simile and metaphor, but rather skips this step and strategy entirely and presents Mei simply, consistently, and casually as a consumable animal. Animalizing the social other—particularly when “race” catalyzes this animalization—is a social norm so routine as to have become almost invisible. Much like the examples of the animalization of women, instances of the alignment of animalization and racism fill the Internet. In 2010, a United States-based “right to life” group used in its billboard campaign the picture of an African-American child with the caption, “Black children are an endangered species” (Samhita). As a strategy designed to

dehumanize and through dehumanization authorize violence, Nazi propaganda repetitively animalized Jews as rats and vermin. This tactic continues into the present era; in 2010, as reported by the Jabotinsky International Center, Saudi Arabia's *Arab News* published a cartoon depicting Jews as an infestation of rats. Within the United States, the sum of cartoons depicting President Obama as a monkey or ape defies enumeration. Within the kyriarchal social paradigm, the division of the racialized other from the nonracialized dominant culture invariably involves the assignment of animalized traits and characteristics. There is a means towards the achievement of racialized dehumanization, in that with each attached animalized quality, the racialized other is further divided from subject status as human. The titillation of "Mei's Last Barbecue" is that the story takes a girl of construed color and does not bother to delineate the ways through which her racialization animalizes her identity. The horrific magical realism of the story presumes the paradigmatically palpable, demonstrates the kyriarchally obvious, and makes clear that to confer Mei's animality—to make Mei an animal as that identity permits abuse and multifarious consumption—all that really need be noted is Mei's racialized identity. This racialization is accomplished in "Mei's Last Barbecue's" very first sentence, setting the proverbial table for the multivalency of Mei's consumption.

CHAPTER VI

KYRIARCHY AS SPECIESISM AND CLASSISM: EATING THE POOR

Social class functions similarly in interaction with other social categories and as a distinct construct.

—Bernice Lott, “Cognitive and Behavioral Distancing From the Poor.”

There is no scandal like rags, nor any crime so shameful as poverty.

—George Farquhar

And it is exactly at one year old that I propose to provide for [these impoverished children] in such a manner as instead of being a charge upon their parents or the parish, or wanting food and raiment for the rest of their lives, they shall on the contrary contribute to the feeding, and partly to the clothing, of many thousands.

—Jonathan Swift

In the space of a single opening paragraph, Mei is defined by the conditions that rank her, the conditions that determine and frame her fate within the story, and the factors that lead, in fact, straight to the barbecue. Mei is first raced and sexed as these conditions other her, animalize her, and enable her kyriarchical marginalization and subsequent consumption. Having bluntly made the plot points of Mei’s biological sex and “race,” the narrative next notes that Mei can gain no employment, has no home, no money, no economic or social resources and is “destitute on the streets” (par. 2). Through these declarations, Mei is classed—identified by the poverty that frequently accompanies a status of construed low class. Scholar of social psychology Heather E. Bullock defines classism as “the oppression of the poor through a network of everyday practices,

attitudes, assumptions, behaviors, and institutional rules” (*Class Acts* 119). In “Who Are the Poor?,” Bernice Lott and Bullock address the classist societal propensity of the non-impooverished to distance themselves “from the poor, from those ‘others’ who are viewed as deserving their fate” (201). In later work, Lott expands upon this to state that “[t]reating poor people as other and lesser than oneself is central to the concept and practice of classism. Through cognitive distancing and institutional and interpersonal discrimination, the nonpoor succeed in separating from the poor and in excluding, discounting, discrediting, and disabling them” (Lott, “Cognitive and Behavioral Distancing” 102).

The poor are stigmatized. Like racism and sexism, classism constructs difference and division as these social factors degrade and inferiorize. Like racism and sexism, classism turns a social member from us to other and depends upon speciesism to attach an inferiorized animalistic stigma to that othering. Mei’s poverty as conveyed through her homelessness and her lack of all resources others her, permits her exclusion from the binary social us, authorizes this exclusion’s concomitant dehumanization, and sanctions her consumption. While I understand that there is no “universally agreed vocabulary for the analysis of poverty” (Øyen 3), universal stigmatization accompanies the condition of living in poverty (Spicker, Alvarez-Leguizamón, Gordon 191). Throughout history and culture the poor are divested of their personhood, animalistically characterized as vermin and parasites, “constructed as a ‘species’ or ‘race’ apart,” and seen as “[d]irty, diseased and depraved . . . a source of both physical and moral filth and contamination” (Lister 105-6). The poor are animalized to “create a subhuman quality,” and sexism and

speciesism align with classism to portray and label poor women as “brood mares,” “breeding mules,” “monkeys,” and “animals in the Government barn” (Lister 112).

An identity as a lesser being ejects those living in poverty from the subjective systems of social protection. The term “moral exclusion”—coined in 1987 by Ervin Staub in his study regarding the social conceptualizations endemic to violent social acts such as torture, mass murder, and genocide—is used by Lott in “Cognitive and Behavioral Distancing From the Poor” in a way that I view as synonymous to “othering,” as like othering, the act of moral exclusion separates the us from the other as that separation authorizes dehumanization. Lott asserts that the “related theoretical constructs of moral exclusion and delegitimization have been introduced in the effort to explain the atrocious and inhumane treatment of stigmatized people by those in power” (102). Othered and excluded, existing within a condition of social exile, the poor—lacking humanized identity, with neither position nor power—are, I assert, anyone’s meat.

Within the kyriarchal context of classism, the forms of Mei’s consumption are systematically justified. In conjunction with her additional stigmatized identities, Mei’s poverty reduces her to not a being but rather a thing and as she no longer holds full status as a social member and subject, the acts carried out upon Mei are paradigmatically justified. In “Moral Exclusion and Injustice: An Introduction,” Susan Opatow explains that “those who are morally excluded are perceived as nonentities, expendable, or undeserving; consequently harming them appears acceptable, appropriate, or just” (1). On the fundamental and collective level upon which social paradigm is recognized and understood, I hypothesize that readers of “Mei’s Last Barbecue” may discern, despite

their repugnance, the kyriarchic classist rationale providing the framework for Mei's consumption.

I believe that in a kyriarchal ethos, while classism, sexism, and racism regularly overlap, classism can be seen as taking up where racism and sexism leave off. Classism further hones the us from the other; it cuts yet deeper in dividing from the empowered and privileged socially elite the construed vermin, filth, and refuse. Those who are rejected from status as social subjects and conceptually reduced to nonhuman animals are conceived of as an object, as a body, as meat finding worth only in utility to kyriarchic superiors. For Mei, her kyriarchal utility is that her dismembered parts "turn a delicious dark golden brown" (par.11) as they are "cooked up juicy and tender" (par. 12). In "Mei's Last Barbecue," Mei's value as an impoverished woman lies in the fact that her barbequed meat is pleasing to her consumers; affirming Mei's social worth at the conclusion of "Mei's Last Barbecue," the cook cries out, "Absolutely delicious! This one is perfectly done. Let's get her onto a serving platter" (par. 12).

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION: RESISTING THE PLANETARY COOKOUT

Let the Stoics say what they please, we do not eat for the good of living, but because the meat is savory and the appetite is keen.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

*“You must sit down,” says Love, “and taste my meat.”
So I did sit and eat.*

—George Herbert

Research under a paradigm must be a particularly effective way of inducing paradigm change.

—Thomas S. Kuhn

There can be nothing doctrinally new under the sun of a persisting paradigm, and while the online emergence of an unsavorily premised and syntactically challenged tale of rape, murder, and cannibalism may have evoked avid protestation and proclaimed shock from its general readership, “Mei’s Last Barbecue” functions in fact as both a part of and a perhaps unintended commentary upon a kyriarchal societal paradigm in which the powerful are privileged in multifariously consuming the othered, the marginalized, the inferiorized. As social members, readers of “Mei’s Last Barbecue” are acculturated to the institutionalized doctrine and structure of kyriarchy as it is reproduced within all aspects of social functioning. Rape, murder, and cannibalism are only and simply the overt, undisguised and unadorned manifestations of the paradigmatic creed of consumption; they are merely very blatant expressions of the inclusive and absolute disease and dysfunction of the present kyriarchal system as that system endemically

others, stigmatizes, degrades, and ultimately and omnifariously consumes that which it deems unworthy of privilege, position, power, and even existence.

In its fourteen short paragraphs of brutality and butchery, “Mei’s Last Barbecue” is crowded with the readily recognizable mainstays of kyriarchy. The story launches by rapidly defining Mei’s social identities and statuses as these defining elements multiply with a paradigmatic exponentiality to diminish her societal rank. Between the commencement of “Mei’s Last Barbecue” within which Mei—as raced, enfemale, and classed—is driven by homelessness and starvation to sell her body for sexual consumption, and the close of the short story wherein Mei is cooked alive and consumed as meat, the story is layered in a replicating array of kyriarchy. Severed from a paradigmatic context of kyriarchical consumption, I contend that the social, sexual, and cannibalistic consumption comprising the plot of “Mei’s Last Barbecue” would not work; it could not exist. “Mei’s Last Barbecue” only achieves logic through a kyriarchical frame of reference. I theorize that readers intrinsically and intuitively recognize the story’s structure—that readers unthinkingly apprehend the ways through which the story relies upon the binaries of wealth/poverty, power/powerlessness, white/of color, first world/third world, man/woman, and civilized/native. It is through this kyriarchal configuration that, despite the grotesque plotline, the sordid fetishization of sexualized violence, the pornographized carnage, and the gruesome carnality infused cannibalism, “Mei’s Last Barbecue” stands as solidly, cogently, and paradigmatically coherent.

“Mei’s Last Barbecue” is not an isolated, disconnected piece of Internet filth; “Mei’s Last Barbecue” is in fact the flotsam of the kyriarchal social paradigm. In reading

“Mei’s Last Barbecue,” the familiar is found obdurately lodged within the heinous; in coming upon cultural confirmation in violence and carnage, it is I believe impossible to not recognize the archetype in the atrocity. The hyperbolic horror of “Mei’s Last Barbecue” does not occur in a vacuum but rather distills kyriarchal social ethos, serves up social doctrine raw and bleeding, and in gore inexorably gives up the paradigmatic truth. While the kyriarchically inferiorized are not commonly barbequed and consumed with the casual normativity featured in “Mei’s Last Barbecue,” there is a line so negligible as to be nonexistent between the plot of “Mei’s Last Barbecue” and the events both major and routine marking human history and persisting normatively into the present day.

Although the body parts of girls and women are not generally featured upon bills of fare, throughout the world the body parts of girls and women are routinely excised through female genital mutilation, distorted and crippled through body modifications devised to bring these female body parts in line with patriarchal standards of sexualized beauty, coercively displayed or contrastively veiled to please an androcentric social gaze, and beaten, violated, and murdered as the physical and sexual assault of women is culturally commonplace and indeed accepted to the point of expectation.

The historical and contemporary instances within which individuals and groups othered through racialization are turned into meat echo as an enduring social trend. South African Saartjie Baartman, the so-called Hottentot Venus, was exhibited caged and semi-naked throughout Great Britain and France in the Nineteenth century for the salaciously construed novelty of her flesh; upon her death she was dissected, dismembered, and her excised genitalia exhibited in a French museum until the mid-1970s. During the

Holocaust of Nazi Germany, racialized others were confined to death camps, tortured in medical experimentation, murdered en masse in numbers nearly defying comprehension, and the body parts of the dead reportedly turned into soap, pseudo-scientific curios, and decorative items (McCarthy).

While the poor are not literally herded into feedlots, their meat ground up to feed their social superiors, the vilification and exploitation of the poor is a global standard. In a kyriarchal social paradigm, poverty is powerlessness and this condition of powerlessness turns those living in poverty into readily consumable populations, into individuals with no choice but to risk their bodies in occupations and endeavors too dangerous and degraded for the socially superiorized. Although the poor are not generally eaten as food, poverty creates the conditions within which people in order to survive must literally sell the organs of their own bodies to the kyriarchically superiorized. The poor are blamed for their own poverty, depicted as parasites and as a societal scourge, and this social mindset justifies turning the communities of the impoverished—as well as entire nations characterized as third-world—into dumping grounds for the toxic waste of the kyriarchically elite. In a kyriarchal paradigm, the poor as mere meat are ground out as consumable commodities as they are ground down further and finally into death.

The practices and policies of social consumption—of a consumption resulting in individual and group exploitation and extermination—are only barely covert; these practices and policies are, I contend, no different from the exotic meat farm of “Mei’s Last Barbecue.” “Mei’s Last Barbecue” gives readers a girl, a racialized girl, a racialized poor girl, and portrays how through the process of kyriarchal logic these overlapping

statuses of social degradation lead ultimately to the barbeque, to a climax in which this girl is “arranged on her elbows and knees with the traditional apple in her mouth” (par. 13). This is disgusting; reading this in 1999 I was disgusted. “Mei’s Last Barbecue” is proverbially over-the-top in its garish and grotesque rendition of consumption, but the grisly concentration of social paradigm into an Internet tale of carnalized cannibalism must not conceal, lessen, or exculpate the often less graphically extreme but myriad ways that the consumption of kyriarchy is socially manifested on a globalized level.

“Mei’s Last Barbecue” is a repellent story, but to dismiss it as ludicrous is to ignore the ways through which the story accurately manifests the global paradigm. Spurning the story as too painful and repulsive to read must be accompanied by the recognition that the social paradigm giving the story fuel and framework is equally repugnant. Shunning “Mei’s Last Barbecue” as hideous and shocking must be followed by the understanding that while society does not universally and openly condone literally cooking and consuming socially degraded human beings in ways directly paralleling the ways through which the cooking and consumption of nonhuman animals is condoned and indeed culturally celebrated, this fact is only conditional and always a matter of simple context.

“Mei’s Last Barbecue” presents as nothing more than the paradigmatically commonplace taken to a paradigmatically logical extreme, and this awareness can function as a facilitator of change. Revolution begins with realization, and it is through recognizing the vicious paradigmatic veracity of the story that readers may ultimately come to resist kyriarchy and work towards a paradigmatic transformation. Social

paradigms are stubbornly persistent; I posit that paradigmatic shift is rigorously resisted by a majority of individuals and social institutions entrenched within the paradigm, and that this resistance is often justified through theistic dogma and an adherence to the prior socially construed facts and assumptions comprising “tradition.” In “Mei’s Last Barbecue,” Mei’s attempt to subvert kyriarchy through taking action to defend her own life against sexualized attack is Mei’s only subject-like, self-empowered act of resistance. This is a gesture of autonomy forbidden to the inferiorized and oppressed, and “Mei’s Last Barbecue” with its horrific dénouement can be read as an object lesson in the perils and punishment implicit in challenging the status quo of tradition, in attempting to thwart the system of kyriarchy.

Following her one act of rebellion, Mei obediently and compliantly accepts without question her kyriarchal position and function. The terrible surrealism of the tale presents not only the proceedings of “Mei’s Last Barbecue” as normative, natural, and evidently logical, but also presents Mei’s acceptance as both reasonable and rational. Mei’s submission merges into what can be deduced as even an endorsement of her own fate, in that the story relates that Mei “could feel her skin begin to tighten as she began to cook, and she could even smell herself roasting. It smelled so delicious, she almost wished she could taste her own meat” (par. 11).

Within “Mei’s Last Barbecue,” Mei is ultimately portrayed as knowing that both sexually and basted in butter she is meat. She is rendered as knowing that her place and purpose as the kyriarchally inferiorized is to serve the manifold appetites of the kyriarchically privileged. As Mei has internalized her kyriarchal position and the

chargrilled fate that this position authorizes, the tone of “Mei’s Last Barbecue” indicates to me that readers too are expected to sanction this arguably exaggerated but thematically concise presentation of kyriarchal social doctrine. Paradigmatic precepts are perpetuated and protected under the guise of normativity; they are presumed to be fixed, innate, and self-evidently natural. I perceive “Mei’s Last Barbecue” as in effect conveying to its readers that while “Mei’s Last Barbecue” is indeed a deliberately flagrant pornographized parody of social paradigm, the principles giving the story its rules and reasoning should be upheld as simply and patently normal, natural, and therefore proper. This message is conceptionally valid, in that within the context of kyriarchy the plotline and ideology of “Mei’s Last Barbecue” are in fact paradigmatically naturalized norms. I assert that what is normative and natural in “Mei’s Last Barbecue” can be rejected as sickening and intolerably offensive, and in this rejection the paradigm fueling this standard and structure of normal and natural can too be rejected. I believe that it is vitally important to understand that “natural” cannot be conflated with “immutable,” and a paradigm’s long-term prevalence does not guarantee its perpetuity.

Although the present social paradigm arguably evolved in tandem with biology, as humanity has evolved beyond the utility of the vermiform appendix, the coccyx or tailbone, the vomeronasal organ of the nose, the human eye’s nictitating membrane, and the human ear’s facility for independent mobility, so too can humanity shift beyond a paradigm that has become as vestigial and indeed actively deleterious as wisdom teeth. Where it behooved humanity once as a strategy of survival to polarize and separate the us from the other—to experience kinship and safety through effecting a divide and attaching

a degraded, dehumanized status to the perceived other—this philosophy and practice has grown exponentially and resulted in worldwide, wholesale environmental and social violence and destruction. If unchecked through paradigmatic shift, what was once humanity’s strategy of success will be humanity’s downfall, and this downfall will likely encompass and doom the entire planet.

In 1999 I read “Mei’s Last Barbecue” because the story was forwarded to me by agitated online acquaintances eager to spread the much-discussed gruesomeness and construed depravity of the story. I read it and expressed myself to be “grossed out.” But although the Internet rapidly flooded with imagery and content so debauched and horrific as to proverbially leave “Mei’s Last Barbecue” in the dust, I never forgot the story. I became increasingly convinced that a tale such as “Mei’s Last Barbecue” cannot logically spring up full-blown out of nowhere—there must first exist a structure and a context giving shape to the negligible albeit nauseating plotline of “Mei’s Last Barbecue.” Something must cause the story to quicken—to take on a life and meaning—and over the years I came to believe that what gives flesh and blood to “Mei’s Last Barbecue” is the prevailing social paradigm, that “Mei’s Last Barbecue” stands as the bare and bleeding emblem of this social paradigm, and that to despise and disparage “Mei’s Last Barbecue” must be to despise, disparage, and ultimately work to revolutionize the dominant social paradigm.

“Mei’s Last Barbecue” is a parable of the kyriarchal ethos of consumption, an allegory channeled through abomination. “Mei’s Last Barbecue” happily concludes its lesson in eating/being eaten by stating that “Mei was an excellent meal and very little was

left of her at the end of the dinner” (par. 14). A paradigm based upon consuming the inferiorized other—whether that “other” is a human, a nonhuman animal, a group, a nation, or an ecological system—will swell into a barbecue of epic, planetary proportions. The global cookout that is the logical consequence of the existing paradigm will leave the earth, all the earth’s inhabitants, and all the physical, chemical, and biological systems of the earth much like Mei in the story’s conclusion: just a “few scraps of meat” and “well picked bones” (par. 13). “Mei’s Last Barbecue” is a small, poorly rendered and mostly forgotten piece of pre-Millennial cannibalistic pornography, but it is also the encapsulation of kyriarchy.

Our current paradigm is one of rampant and viciously voracious consumption, and diagnosing “Mei’s Last Barbecue” as a symptom of this paradigm—as a grisly and grotesque presentation of the paradigmatic disease of kyriarchy—is, I contend, an act of emergent revolution. Kyriarchy creates the insatiable appetite, provides the bill of fare clearly demarcating the systems and beings available for consumption, and “Mei’s Last Barbecue” cooks up the ethos of kyriarchy in barbecued form, presenting what can be projected as the last barbecue of our planet itself in the kyriarchal image of “[e]veryone . . . slicing more of [the] meat off, gorging themselves on the sweet, juicy, flesh” until almost nothing was left (par. 13). Joan Ferrante asserts that a shift into a new paradigm will cause “converts to see the world in an entirely new light and to wonder how they could possibly have taken the old paradigm seriously” (470). The promise of a new social paradigm is that it will provide neither place for “Mei’s Last Barbecue,” nor even the context in which to comprehend the cannibalistic snuff pornography that is “Mei’s Last

Barbecue.” A shift into a new social paradigm means the conclusive end of “Mei’s Last
Barbecue.”

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