

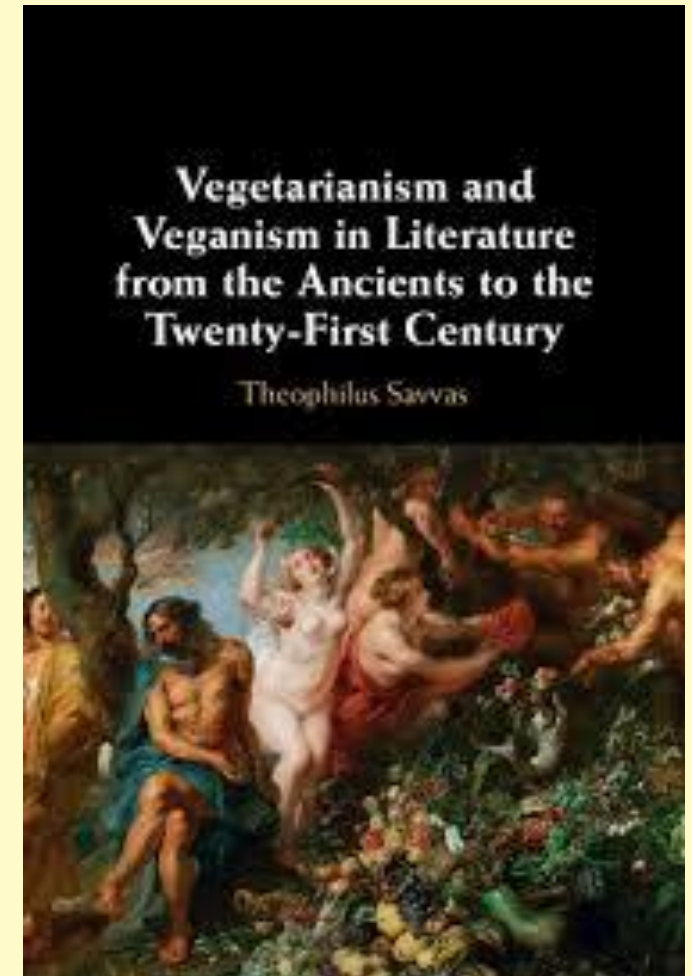


VEGETARIANISM IN THE FICTION OF WOMEN'S LIBERATION (SAVVAS CHAPTER 5)

VLS Working Group
5 September 2025

Chapter Overview

1. Introduction (pp. 137-138)
 - Brief discussion of Adams & *The Sexual Politics of Meat*
2. Class and Vegetarianism in the British Novel: Brigid Brophy and Isabel Colgate (pp. 138-154)
 - Texts: Brophy's *Hackenfeller's Ape* (1953) and *Flesh* (1962) & Colgate's *The Shooting Party* (1980)
3. North American Fiction: Eating Animals and Eating Women (pp. 154-161)
 - Texts: Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman* (1969) and Marge Piercy's *Small Changes* (1972)
4. Conclusion (pp. 161-165)
 - Not indicated as its own section by Savvas, but I think it merits individual discussion
 - Text: Octavia Butler's *Dawn* (1987)



Although not directly alluded to, this chapter is in conversation with—and can be seen as more or less a response to—Chapter 7 (“Feminism, The Great War, and Modern Vegetarianism”) of *The Sexual Politics of Meat*

Main Questions

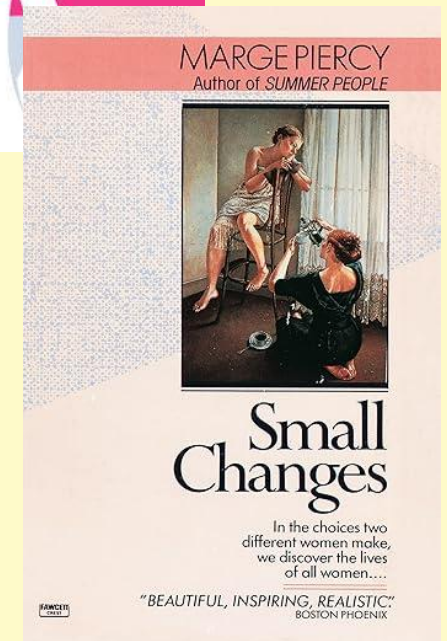
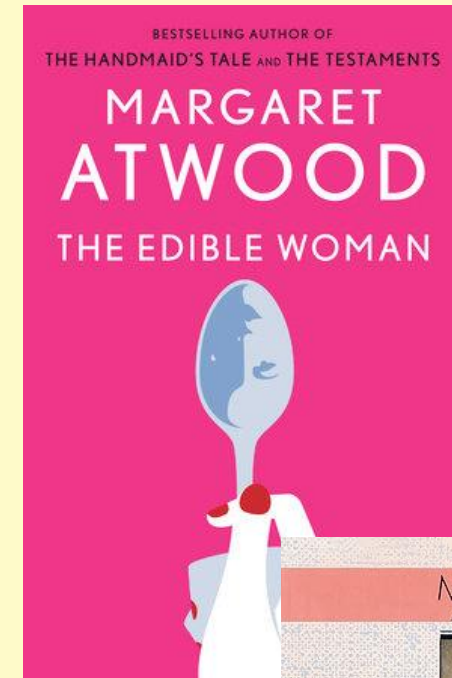


[The Vegan Review](#)

1. How is vegetarianism/veganism actually represented in feminist fiction?
 - “There are ways in which the very problem —that of eliding or ‘absenting’ the non-human animal via metaphorization—that Adams highlights as a patriarchal tool are reproduced in the feminist works upon which her theory is constructed...the pattern of gendered vegetarianism and veganism in the literature is more nuanced than Adams sometimes allows for.” (138)
2. What is the relationship between (vegan) theory and (feminist) fiction? Can they be reconciled?
 - “The necessary link between vegetarianism and feminism [can] not be assumed... These are challenges, then, from within feminism— but few criticisms have worked in the other direction and asked: What does Adams’s theory (as a theory) do for (or to) the non-human animal?” (138)
 - “Where criticism must attend to the specifics of each and every text, theorizing must work to smooth out those differences” (138)

Key Arguments: Fiction vs Theory

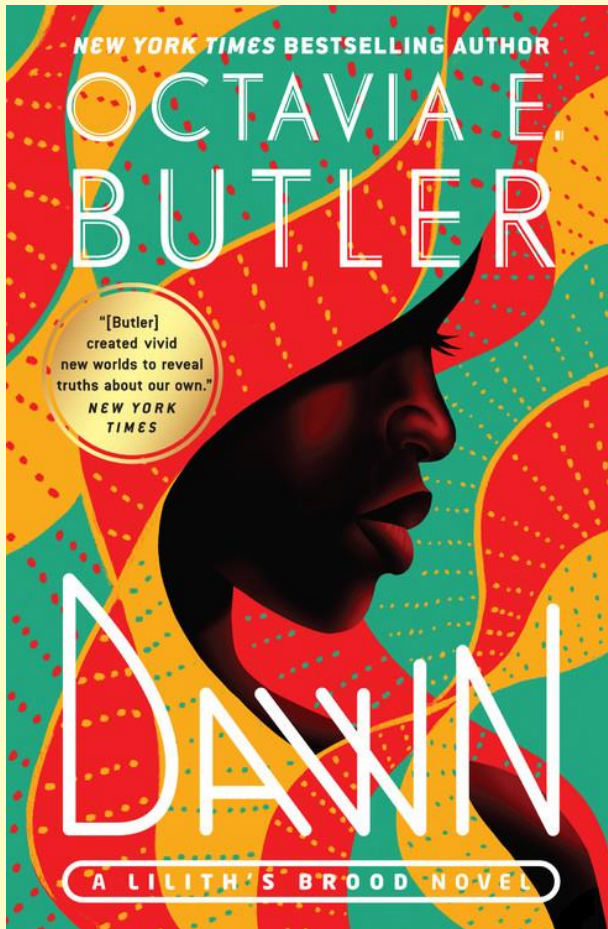
- Adams overlooks some of the nuance in the novels she discusses; e.g., that the main character in Piercy's *Small Changes* text resumes eating meat late in the novel
- “Neither *The Edible Woman* (Atwood) nor *Small Changes* (Piercy) demonstrate the necessary connection between vegetarianism and feminism. The connection established between metaphor is lost, as **both novels suggest that the rejection of meat had only been symbolic**; once the literal confines of patriarchal control have been refused, there is no need for such symbolic rejection. **The effect of this is, in fact, to re-instantiate hierarchy by figuring the liberation of the human as more pressing exigency than that of the non-human**” (159)
- “At the same time that the woman removes herself from the symbolic order of ‘trapped animal,’ the literal animal, that is Adams’s ‘referent,’ is once again absented. Contrary to what Adams’s theory would suggest, **these books ultimately sever the connection and imply that as a free agent the woman has no connection with—and no ethical obligation toward—the on-human animal.**” (159-160)



Key Arguments: Intersectionality

- “The logic of Adams’s argument has to be that since meat-eating is both a product of and a bolster to patriarchy, those women who eat meat are willingly contributing to their own objectification and oppression—and upholding the very system which they ought to be fighting against; this helps explain some of the resistance from within feminism to the theory” (161)
 - Argues that Adams’s theory can easily accommodate intersectional thinking and reverses the argument
- “However, there is also need to for some wider acknowledgement of the potential limitations *in practice* of intersectionalism itself... the non-human animal may be the limit test of such [utopian] thinking” (161-162)
 - Cf. Julia Feliz’s framework of “consistent anti-oppression”

Key Arguments: Decolonizing Vegan-Feminism



- Draws on Afropessimism & Afrofuturism without naming it as such
 - Odd that thinkers like Sylvia Wynter aren't cited
- “What the coming together of black studies, feminist thought, and critical animal studies has done recently is to offer **a way to conceive of vegetarianism and veganism outside of the domain of the colonially produced ‘human,’** and thus, I would suggest, as a rhetorical trope of ‘decolonization’ itself” (162-163)
- Reads Octavia Butler’s *Dawn* as theorizing this intersection, as developing a kind of subjecthood that doesn’t abject the animal as other
- Ends by arguing for the power of ‘unrealism’ in the utopic imagination (165), but doesn’t elaborate

SOME CONCLUDING THOUGHTS



Some Thoughts/Criticisms

- There's a lack of historicization of, and attention to, “Women’s Liberation”
 - *Why does Savvas focus solely on novels that Adams references?*
 - *Is this simply a problem with the title of this chapter, or is it indicative of something more substantive about Savvas’s method?*
- There isn’t sufficient space to do justice to the broad interests of this chapter that lie beyond the central theoretical argument
 - *E.g., class politics*
- Does this suggest something about the problem of limiting a vegan analysis to overt representations of vegetarianism/veganism?
- Missed opportunity for a more substantive engagement with how decolonial theory intersects with and might inform vegan-feminism