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Corporations, affecting more than your bottom line

One of the most influential entities in Ruth Ozeki's book *My year of meats* is the Beef Export and Trade Syndicate (or BEEF-EX), a large lobby group representing the interests of "beef, pork, lamb, goat, horseas well as livestock producers, packers, purveyors, exporters, grain promoters, pharmaceutical companies, and agribusiness groups" (Ozeki). As we are given insight into the operations of these industries through characters at different levels of involvement with the industry, there are instances of corporate greed that can be identified. It can be seen that the industry is willing to sacrifice the well being of their customers during the production of the BEEF-EX sponsored show, "My American Wife". It should be seen as equally as influencing is the effort put forth to impose unattainable standards just to make a profit. In order for the lobby group to convince the wives of Japan to consume more meat, they choose to portray an ideal American family. This of course implying that there is such a thing as a perfect family. We also learn about the major role that pharmaceutical companies play in the production of meat, primarily in the use of Diethylstilbestrol (or DES). We learn that these drastic drugs were used to simply fatten up the cattle faster. This unfortunately had the side effect of causing massive damage to a females reproductive system.

As a reader, I felt very moved by the revelations in this book relating to the food industry. The importance of the changes highlight the struggle that takes place in-between what we think is safe or not safe to eat. It was interesting to discover how Jane developed and learned so much about the beef industry, specifically relating to her own personal health "it didn't take me long to stumble across DES. It was a discovery that ultimately changed my relationship with meats and television. It also changed the course of my life" (Ozeki). When describing the resulting damage of the DES to her uterus, she referred to the ideal one looking like "head of a bull, with the fallopian tubes spreading and curling like noble horns", while as a result of the hormones before birth "[t]he left side of the bulls broad forehead was caved in, less triangular, as though my uterus had been coldcocked" (Ozeki). These changes then described to her mother will highlight

the difference over generations, that her mother was not even aware of these issues back then. In fact, her mother didn't even know the drugs that she was given, showing her blind faith that the doctor would give her something safe. This contrasts the attitude that Jane did when she was prescribed something for her pains after the miscarriage, where she questioned it, looked it up, just to find that it could actually be quite harmful to her! This will relate quite nicely to the idea of the trust that the meat industry has or had relating to the safety of their products.

Jane's relationships really develop out the other viewpoints and the facts relating to the industry. Even her relationship with Sloan develops quite interestingly. The wording that is used in their communication near the end and at the beginning, especially after the miscarriage which gets Sloan obviously quite upset that she had been in the feeding lot. These events of course triggered by the incorrect development of Jane's reproductive organs due to the drugs as designed by BEEF-EX. The relationships with some of the characters in her shows, such as Lara and Dyann, are used as methods to describe factual and historical evidence of the food and drug industry and the lengths that some people go to avoid the issues that are caused by them. The role that Bunny and Rosie played in providing direct evidence of the effects of the drugs used in feed lots, which was later used to great effect in the documentary developed by Jane.

I found it quite entertaining the attitude that Jane took starting near the middle of the book of essentially ignoring the requests of John and BEEF-EX regarding the "Pork is Possible, but Beef is Best!" (Ozeki) motto. While this doesn't specifically highlight the hormones and antibiotics used, these actions are almost taken in direct response to her finding out more about the industry and wanting to reveal more of the "real" world of beef. This will then be supported by the descriptions of her actions taken in the feed lots and the killing/packing plant.

The concept of the ideal American family is reinforced at multiple occasions by BEEF-EX can be seen as quite unrealistic. They reinforce their decision solely on the market research, eliminating characteristics such as "1. Physical imperfections 2. Obesity 3. Squalor 4. Second class peoples" (Ozeki).

The mood of the novel also changes from the start from a lighter seeming novel to being quite dark. In the beginning, Jane seems to be looking forward to the employment, which would keep her fed and employed for over a year. When we learn more about the use of hormones in the book, we become much

darker, with Jane's miscarriage, and Akiko's husband beating her. This sets us up for the big reveal of Jane's documentary focusing on the meat industries practices at the end of the novel.

Pulling everything together, the characters, their relationships, and the tone really set the stage for arguing the negative affects and resulting changes on the characters as a result of the drugs and practices used by BEEF-EX.

Works Cited

Ozeki, Ruth. *My year of meats*. New York: Viking, 1998. Print.