

# Gender and independence in my year of meats



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

In Ruth Ozeki's *My Year of Meats* (1998), the main character Jane is an up-and-coming documentarian. She is offered a job on the set of a new television show called *My American Wife!* and happily takes it. The show is sponsored by a special interest group called BEEF-EX, and they are trying to open up Japan to the meat market. They are doing so by showing Japanese families what traditional American families are cooking at home through the new television show. Jane is a very strong leader and independent thinker, and eventually she starts to manipulate the show into what goes on in America instead of the white picket fence American dream stereotype that the interest group wants to be shown. This causes her many problems although she makes it out alright and the show has a lot of successes. Jane breaks through the typical gender roles of this time by putting her career first and having good leadership qualities, although these same attributes cause her to have other problems in life.

Jane has never fully loved someone because she is too independent and she is too scared to let someone accept her for who she is. She seems not to have normal relationships, and this stems from the fact that she never fully lets love in. In her relationship with Sloan, they start by having phone sex. When they first meet Jane says "Sloan was unapologetic as he pushed me down onto the flimsy bed and lowered himself on top" (53) and they continue to get steamy until morning. It just seems strange to be having such intense bedroom activities upon meeting someone for the first time whom it seems Jane is trying to talk to and not just sleep with. Deep down it seems Jane wants to be with Sloan in more than just a casual sex kind of way, but she also does not want the relationship to get in the way of her

career. She is torn between trying to have a successful television show or have a real meaningful relationship with Sloan. She tries to have both while still not stating she and Sloan are dating. When she loses the baby, Sloan gives up on her and does not answer any of her calls for a few months. Eventually, Jane goes to a bar where Sloan is playing, and they both cry together and mourn what they could have had. They get back together, and Sloan says, " Takagi, we'll get married", (351) and she replies with " Just sit back and enjoy the music" which makes it seem like she is still unready to commit. Either way she gets what she wants, and although many problems have been created by her personality type, maybe she is the one who has life figured out.

Jane feels the need to do whatever she ultimately thinks is right, and this causes many problems in her work because she cannot work with a boss very well. There are countless times where Joichi is very upset with Jane because she takes it about herself to go against the household parameters for the television show. She tricks the higher ups of the company into having to air certain episodes because she turns in the material late and they are unable to check it first. These kinds of things are what eventually lead to her getting fired. The final stunt she pulls is when the crew is at the slaughterhouse. Jane is trying to get video of all of the negative things going on inside current slaughterhouses and the prevalence of DES and the effects it has on humans. She takes the crew inside the kill floor to film, and even the meat workers are confused as to why the film crew is going in. One of the bosses, Wilson, says, " Kill floor's no place for sightseein" which comes to

be the truth because this is when a meat slab hits Jane and she gets knocked out.

As the novel moves along, Jane loses many things, including her job, because of her curiosity and need to go against her boss when she thinks her stance is correct. Eventually, Jane gets to edit the tapes from the shooting at the slaughterhouse and turn it into a hit that a lot of major media companies want to use. She also could have had a much safer venture if she would have just worked well with Joichi from the start and could have made a lot of money doing that also. Even if she does get to sell the slaughterhouse video, she will still have to learn to work better with others in the future, or it will be her demise. There is no one who is going to have a perfect life and personality, and this novel shows that everyone has to go through struggle to be happy in life.

Jane is happy with how everything has worked out for her at the end of the novel, but she has also caused a lot of problems for herself leading up to this point when she is happy. She still seems like she is unready to commit fully to Sloan and it seems like their relationships may have more problems down the road. Jane also seems like she will never really have a long career with any one company because of her unwillingness to listen to authority. In the short term, everything does seem to work out, but there is always life beyond the pages that the reader does not get to follow up on. Maybe part of the problems the world experiences today are because everyone is becoming too individualistic and fewer people just want to try and live the simple "American Dream". Either way Jane is always going to do what she

wants and live how she sees best for her. Her personality may cause problems in certain aspects, but it also sets her free.