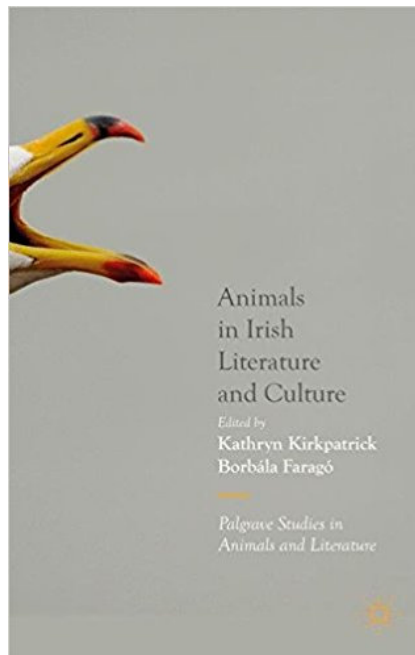


Reviews

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**Beyond Ireland's Myth, its Folklore, and its Two-Dozen Indigenous Animals**

Kathryn Kirkpatrick and Borbála Faragó, eds. *Animals in Irish Literature and Culture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. xviii + 270 pp. \$90.00 hc, \$69.99 e-book.



Of the many prominent animals to feature in Ireland's long cultural history — from the mythic Salmon of Knowledge to the folkloric selkie, from the indigenous red fox to the “Celtic Tiger,” that much-disputed label given to the country's turn-of-the-twentieth-century economic boom — perhaps the most notorious is the simian. An unlikely figure for Ireland and its people, the simian became a “model” of sorts for depictions of the Irish in the late nineteenth century, specifically by English political cartoonists who, within the framework of colonial discourse, wished to draw out what they saw as the primitive natures of the Irish. These depictions gained renewed interest as objects of study during the height of postcolonial theory in Irish Studies in the 1980s and '90s, most notably by way of Lewis Perry Curtis's *Angels and Apes: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature* (1997). It is hard, now, to imagine an Intro to Irish Studies course that doesn't

feature these images; certainly, at my home institution of the University of Notre Dame, these images provide a quick means to facilitate discussion around the colonial dynamics of Ireland and Great Britain — and to reveal the troubling historical precedents for the university's own iconic Fighting Irish, humanoid leprechaun figure.

That these images of the simian Irish helped expose, for postcolonial theory twenty years ago, the unfortunate colonial lens of nineteenth-century English cartoonists, they now help expose, for animal studies in the current moment, the unfortunate anthropocentric lens of not only those cartoonists but also the postcolonial theorists. After all, as animal studies points out, the problem doesn't simply lie with the fact that the Irish in these depictions are troublingly primitivized (and troublingly racialized) figures, but that such primitivizing depends on perceiving the simian itself as part of a degraded, nonhuman category. The images, in this way, reinforce, even as they blur, a hierarchical binary that privileges the human over the nonhuman animal. To attune scholars of Irish Studies, among others, to such anthropocentrism is one of the primary goals of *Animals in Irish Literature and Culture*; and, in fact, Kathryn Kirkpatrick, in her introduction to the collection, gives substantial attention to our infamous simian Irish. The various ways the volume branches out from and develops the insights culled from those notorious nineteenth-century Irish apes — encompassing a broad range of literary forms, historical time periods, cultural politics, animals and, especially, theoretical approaches to those animals — makes for its most generative and formidable scholarly impact.

The mission statement of the collection is two-fold: first, to motivate a broader scholarly interrogation of the cultural uses of the animal in Irish culture as it bears on, among other things, gender, class, race, the environment, and national and transnational identity; and two, to pivot away from human conceptualizations and uses of the animal in an attempt to consider the animal on its own terms, and in so doing to unseat anthropocentric views (2-3). To that end, the collection is broken into four sections that themselves ostensibly reflect the turn in focus from human to animal, from a series of essays on the abuse and consumption of animals in Part I and those focused on the use of the animal in conceptualizations of gender and sexuality in Part II, to the more posthumanist approaches of Part III and IV, which feature a selection of essays first on literary writing that decenters the human in favor of the animal, and second on artworks that blur the very categories of human and nonhuman animal. And even as some of the book's organization is a bit arbitrary, with some essays more thematically at home in different sections, and others having potential homes in several sections, there is nevertheless a thrilling ethical momentum to the collection, such that, should the

reader dare to read it from cover to cover, he or she might discover not only the hermeneutic possibilities made available by animal studies but also the cultural and ecological benefits of such an approach.

Such ethical drive is in keeping with the primary theoretical underpinnings of the collection, defined primarily by the work of Carol J. Adams. Nearly every article in the book directly cites Adams, sometimes referencing *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (2000) but more often pulling from her edited collection *The Feminist Care Tradition in Animal Ethics* (2007). To be sure, what informs so many of these essays is the way the care (or lack thereof) of animal Others translates into and informs the treatment of human Others. More often than not, those Others are women, as seen in Kirkpatrick's own article on the depiction of fox-hunting in eighteenth-century literature, as well as in Katarzyna Poloczek's insightful examination of marine life in the work of several contemporary Irish women poets, and in Sarah O'Connor's article on the creative energies unleashed by the female-becoming-hare of Éilís Ní Dhuibhne's Irish-language writing. But so, too, does the collection attend to a range of diverse human Others, such as the exploited workers that Amanda Perry sees mirrored in the bovine imagery of poet Dennis O'Driscoll, as well as the transnational Other of Eva Bourke's migrant Irish poetry, configured as insects, in co-editor Borbála Faragó's own piece; or the diseased and dying Others in Luz Mar González-Arias's essay on the work of Dorothy Malloy (a poet who is rightly, and posthumously, garnering increased scholarly attention); and the queer Others of Ed Madden's excellent essay on the conjunction of sexuality and the animal in late twentieth- and early twenty-first century gay writing, in which he ultimately calls for a "queer animal or eco-criticism" that, by incorporating queer theory's wide-ranging suspicion of any discourse of "the natural," would "interrogate the presumed naturalness of categories of gender and sexuality, and by extension the structures and categories of what counts as human" (115). Carol Adam's "War on Compassion" and the feminist care tradition thus provides a theoretical cornerstone for the collection, followed distantly by the significant contributions to animal studies of Cary Wolfe, Donna Haraway, and Derrida's "The Animal that Therefore I Am (More to Follow)."

As with Madden's essay, *Animals in Irish Literature and Culture* is at its strongest when it draws from animal studies to investigate various cultural issues in Ireland. Alongside the aforementioned concerns around gender, sexuality, and the migrant is the engagement with issues specific to (but relevant beyond) Ireland — issues such as those brought out by Sarah Townsend and Maria Pramaggiore surrounding the (depreciated) state of Ireland after the 2008 economic collapse that "killed" the Celtic Tiger. Townsend looks back at the pig's cultural place in Irish culture, focusing primarily on

Patrick McCabe's novel *The Butcher Boy* (1992) and Enda Walsh's play *Disco Pigs* (1996), but tracing the history of porcine signification in Ireland (with some roots in countercultural America) in order to frame its contemporary status as a "PIIGS" country, the label given to those countries — Portugal, Ireland and/or Italy, Greece, and Spain — that particularly necessitated economic bailout, and thus were "deserving" of a tarnishing moniker that suggests greedy consumption, and the need for "handling." And Pramaggiore explores the harrowing fate of the horse in Ireland in the years following 2008, examining their representation in film but also detailing the very real-world abandoning — and, in some cases, quite literal consumption — of "surplus" horses bred during the economic boom.

Among the more valuable scholarly moves these articles make is to pull from Irish Studies scholarship in order to consider the insights of animal studies. For example, Pramaggiore draws from the vast work around Ireland's unique "double-edged temporality" — such as, among others, Declan Kiberd's significant work in *Inventing Ireland* (1996), in which he suggests that the country's brand of cultural modernity uniquely looks to tradition rather than seeking to break from it — in order to consider the horse's own double-edged modernity, one in which its very commodification relies on the cultural perception of it as a traditional, rural animal (217, 227). In fact, one wishes there might have been a bit more interrogation into what Irish Studies might bring to animal studies throughout *Animals in Irish Literature and Culture*, rather than vice versa. One of the more fascinating revelations, for example, is made by Donna Potts, who discusses the work of one of animal rights' earliest proponents, the Irishman Richard Martin — a.k.a. "Humanity Dick" — who, in 1822, put forth an act that "was the first parliamentary law in the world to proscribe cruelty to animals" (167). Potts's work in this moment excitingly positions Ireland in the field of animal studies, even at its forefront; but for the collection as a whole, there remains considerable room to further imagine the ways Irish Studies might impact animal studies.

That's not to say, either, that those essays in the collection that do not explicitly engage Ireland's cultural landscape are without merit—far from it. Liam Young's essay on Yeats, while not focused on broader questions of Ireland per se, nevertheless attends to a much-needed field of inquiry on the poet's vast poetic bestiary. His attention to the nonhuman and posthuman characters of Yeats's poetry gives a fresh dimension to the questions of authority and linguistic indeterminacy that have long been at the center of Yeats scholarship. Much the same might be said of Tom Herron's insightful, if at times baroque, reading of Paul Muldoon's *Maggot*, Muldoon being a poet whose literary bestiary may outnumber even that of Yeats. Jeanne Dubino brilliantly draws out the

affective anxieties of the bi- and interspecies-ism found in the dogs of “Irishman” Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*. And, as with the aforementioned Dorothy Malloy, I’m grateful for the attention given to the much-deserving Donegal poet Francis Harvey across two of the book’s strong essays, including the one by Potts, as well as that of Christine Cusick’s eco-critical chapter on bird poetry.

I don’t wish to give much space to the collection’s weaknesses, though there are a few of note. Aside from the previously mentioned desire for more essays that might suggest the relevance of Irish Studies to animal studies, I find that, in several instances, a few essays offer theoretical foundations that are valuable on their own but which are ultimately underdeveloped, or simply irrelevant, to the hermeneutic work that follows. It’s difficult not to observe, too, that Maureen O’Connor’s *The Female and the Species: The Animal in Irish Women’s Writing* (2010)—arguably the first substantial engagement with the intersection of Irish Studies and animal studies—is infrequently addressed in these essays, suggesting a not necessarily egregious but still occasionally surprising failure on the part of Irish-Animal Studies to attend to its own foundations.

But to critique the book on such terms is to miss its more important significance, not least the very way in which it *builds* on O’Connor’s work: it begins to fill in the gaps, through a plethora of diverse voices on diverse topics, that would be found in any burgeoning field of study. It paves the way for new and further considerations of the intersection between Irish Studies and animal studies; it creates a space for the nonhuman animal to be confronted by a field of scholarship that has been focused almost entirely on the human, recognizing the ways humans have been dehumanized but with little attention to the nonhuman animals that are used in service of that dehumanization. Ultimately, *Animals in Irish Literature and Culture* conveys the urgency with which we might adopt an animal studies perspective in Irish Studies, so that we may, as Christine Cusick argues, “step outside of [our] limited epistemologies,” (194) and march on with a more inclusive and ethical scholarly lens.