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THE ANIMAL CAPITAL OF RECESSION IN DANIELLE MCLAUGHLIN'S *DINOSAURS ON OTHER PLANETS*

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ABSTRACT. ***The Animal Capital of Recession in Danielle McLaughlin's* Dinosaurs on Other Planets.** Following Nicole Shukin's notion of "animal capital" (2009, 3), which "simultaneously notates the semiotic currency of animal signs and the carnal traffic in animal substances" (7), this article investigates the capitalist interdependence between the cultural and material dimensions of animal life as represented across Danielle McLaughlin's short story collection *Dinosaurs on Other Planets*. The first section highlights potential theoretical connections between Shukin's notions of "rendering" as well as "animal's saving grace" (2018, 95) and Maurizio Lazzarato's conception of futurity under the "logic of debt" (2012, 25). The second section analyses the texts' depiction of the "contingency" that market life has upon animal life, such that the system of debt exacerbates cruelty toward humans and nonhumans alike, with animal bodies being "rendered" as food or artefacts (Shukin 2009, 20). The third section reveals how the "ambivalence of animal signs," meaning the "capacity of animal life to be taken both literally and figuratively" (Shukin 2009, 6), interacts with the characters' anxieties regarding the recession and economic migration.

***Keywords*:** *animal capital, rendering, animal's saving grace, debt, economic migration, post-Celtic Tiger Ireland, recession*

REZUMAT. ***Capitalul Animal al Recesiunii în* Dinosaurs on Other Planets *de Danielle McLaughlin.*** Plecând de la noțiunea formulată de Nicole Shukin drept "capital uman" (3), care "notează în mod simultan valuta semiotică a semnelor

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animale, cât şi traficul carnal de substanţe animale" (Shukin 2009, 7), acest articol investighează interdependenţa capitalistă dintre dimensiunile culturale şi materiale specifice vieţii animalelor în reprezentarea acestora pe parcursul volumului de povestiri *Dinosaurs on Other Planets* de Danielle McLaughlin. Prima secţiune evidenţiază potenţialele conexiuni teoretice dintre, pe de o parte, noţiunea de "rendering," un joc de cuvinte care denotă atât "randarea", cât şi "ecarisajul" (Shukin 2009, 7) şi "harul salvator al animalelor" (2018, 95) formulate de Shukin şi, pe de altă parte, concepţia lui Maurizio Lazzarato asupra temporalităţii viitorului sub "logica datoriei" (2012, 25). A doua secţiune analizează felul în care volumul reprezintă "contingenţa" prin care viaţa pieţei este legată de cea a animalelor, astfel încât sistemul de datorii exacerbează atât violenţa împotriva animalelor, cât şi cea împotriva oamenilor, corpurile animalelor fiind "rendered" în artefacte sau produse alimentare (Shukin 2009, 20). A treia secţiune evidenţiază modul în care "ambivalenţa semnelor animale," mai precis, "capacitatea vieţii animale de a fi interpretată atât literal, cât şi figurativ" (Shukin 2009, 6), interacţionează cu anxietăţile resimţite de către personaje în legătură cu recesiunea şi migraţia economică.

Cuvinte-cheie**:** *capital animal, rendering, harul salvator al animalelor, datorie, migrare economică, Irlanda Post-Tigrul Celtic, recesiune*

I. Introduction

Danielle McLaughlin's 2016 short story collection *Dinosaurs on Other Planets* is strikingly haunted by the impact of the 2008 global financial crisis, culminating in the metaphor of economic collapse as an asteroid hitting planet Earth in the story of the same title. In the wide array of Irish fiction dealing with the trauma of the country's Post-Celtic Tiger era, the volume stands out in its attention to the changing status of animals in the cultural imaginary as well as the material reality of the country's economy. This binary relation interferes with the characters' economic anxieties regarding a capitalistic system that shackles their future to debt, an affect which has been signalled by Eoin Flannery as being recurrent in Post-Celtic Tiger literature (829-830). If characters often seek emotional solace or meaning in the company of animals, these impulses are kneecapped by the violence in which the market logic exploits humans as well as nonhumans. Distorted perceptions and representations of animals even seep into the characters' view of impending emotional catastrophe, either due to the consequences of the recession or due to them being forgotten by a posterity destined for economic migration. In this sense, the volume also offers a subtle critique of mimetic representation itself.

To explore and reveal the intricate ways in which *Dinosaurs on Other Planets* develops these subversive narratives of recession, the article takes a cue from Nicole Shukin's concept of "animal capital," which aims to critique the West's "tangle of biopolitical relations within which the economic and symbolic capital of animal life can no longer be sorted into binary distinction" (Shukin 2009, 7). In her conception, "animal capital" is the product of "rendering," which denominates "both the mimetic act of making a copy, ... and the industrial boiling down and recycling of animal remains" (20). Shukin's theory also draws attention to the phenomenon whereby neoliberalism has invested symbolic currency in "animals' soulful powers of bonding or companionship, their immaterial or affective labour, and their optimistic ability to live 'despite' the ruins" (2018, 97). She labels this ideological development "the saving grace of animals," which is another concept that helps shed light on how the novel challenges the operations of mimesis. The article also relates these concepts to Maurizio Lazzarato's writing on the "logic of debt" (2012, 25), thus investigating how animal and human life, both being implicated in the processes of rendering, interact within the temporality of indebtedness.

II. Rendering's Future Logic

In venturing to develop a defence of animal liberation in contrast to Marxism's more anthropocentric tendencies, sociologist Ted Benton comes to valorise the acknowledgement of the "aesthetic, cognitive, normative, spiritual—in other words cultural—dimension to the way in which humans meet their physical needs" (1988, 17). In turn, by truly pondering the idiosyncrasies which come with human consumption, society can hope to "[avoid] the effacement of the manifold differences among nonhuman animals in their ways of satisfying their physical needs" (18). This is one of the main arguments which lead to Benton's conclusion that, even from an economic perspective, it is unethical for humans to view animals as being solely instrumental to anthropocentric ends (18). Since Benton's article, various authors have widened the scope of the critical consensus regarding the human consumption of animals.

One particularly insightful treatment of the subject can be found throughout the theoretical output of Nicole Shukin. Setting the preliminary remarks of her 2008 text *Animal Capital*, Shukin explains that "biopower" (in its Foucauldian conception) functions as per its ability to "hegemonize both the meaning and matter of life" (Shukin 2009, 20). It is this binary that sets the precedents for Shukin's notion of "animal capital," understood as "simultaneously sign and substance of market life" (12), as well as the concept of "rendering," which "indexes both economies of representation ... and resource economies trafficking in

animal remains" (21). In turn, Shukin finds it politically expedient for "the critic of animal capital" to unearth the interferences between "animal life" and "capital" (24). This is why she purposefully seeks to avoid romanticizing the otherness represented by animal affect (an error that Shukin claims Derrida and others have been guilty of) and she instead raises the question of the function that animal affect plays within capitalism (42). The present article contends that, in addition to the affective import extracted from animal life for semiotic, branding purposes, neoliberalism also has a way of instrumentalizing animal affect to suit the upholding of the debt system.

The theorist further contextualizes "rendering's modern logics" within Antonio Negri's notion of "tautological time": "What appears in the tautological time of real subsumption ... is a profound indifference between the time of capital's production and the surplus time of social life itself, or that life time left over after the so-called working day" (Shukin 2009, 17). From this point of view, Shukin goes on to argue that it is imperative to not give in to "the appeal of mimesis as alterity," and, via this opposition, "to reckon with the material history of mimesis as rendering" (59). Although Shukin asserts that rendering, in both its industrial and representational meanings, is but one example of "nature's subsumption," "an immanent function of capital," she also stresses the possibility of resistance, though with crucial attention to the inescapability of tautological time (83). Indeed, the machinations of rendering are liable to intensify further under the temporality of globalization, which, especially in the human-nonhuman dynamics of pandemics, leads to a particular porosity in the division of species that generates many types of animal capital (47). Relating Shukin's insight to Matthew Calarco's critique of the inherently performative attempts at carving out a space for animal liberation within liberal democracies, Cary Wolfe identifies the source underlying these phenomena to be "a matrix that, under conditions of globalization, increasingly takes as its political object planetary life itself," or "what we are now forced to call a newly expanded community of the living" (2012, 52). As it becomes clearer throughout this article, such a "matrix" (52) can be associated, via an acknowledgement of the workings upholding animal capital, with the economic migration of humans as well.

Shukin takes a more future-oriented view of animal capital with her notion of "animal's saving grace" in her chapter, "Capitalism," of *The Edinburgh Companion to Animal Studies*. Her cautious development of this notion springs from the observation that human agents of a capitalistic, extractivist, and environmentally damaging global capitalism are seeking to find a spiritual redemption and material repossession following the ecological disaster of neoliberalism precisely among the nonhuman animals they have exploited for so long (Shukin 2018, 95). What emerges in this context is the specific

transactionality of human-nonhuman affective relations in the context of neoliberalism, essentially becoming tasked with compensating, through their affective and mental prowess, for the results brought on by the planet-wide, all-subsuming logic of the free market (96). In contrast to the logic or rendering, animals' saving grace is contingent upon the "vitality of other species," which, unlike corporal matter, resists forceful capture (102). Here, "the agency of animals is in principle encouraged, cultivated, economised" and thus becomes fundamental to emerging forms of animal capital (110). Shukin acknowledges the potential pitfalls which come with theorizing "non-human involvement in and consent to neoliberal capitalism," but defends this framework by arguing that it can bring new light onto neoliberalism's ideology of rationalism, wherein the nonhuman is perceived as being organically intertwined with the human, and thus takes on a tacitly (and paradoxically) social dimension (101).

One economic concept that Shukin omits from her development of "animal capital" and "animal's saving grace" is that of debt. This paper investigates the potential theoretical avenues that may be opened via the hidden relations between the logic of debt, the logic of rendering, and the saving grace of animals. Seen through the lens of Maurizio Lazzarato's theory of the "indebted man," it may seem that the "closed loops of tautological time" (Shukin 2009, 83) also harbour a specific temporality of debt, while the grace through which nonhuman agents are supposed to save humanity might also bear the markings of a life outside the debtor-creditor relation and the illusory "consenting subjectivity" (2018, 101) of animals.

In Lazzarato's conception, "debt produces a specific 'morality'" whereby "the couple 'effort-reward' of the ideology of work is doubled by the morality of the promise (to honour one's debt) and the fault (of having entered into it)" (Lazzarato 2012, 33). Moreover, the notion of debt structures an apparatus through which "collective and individual subjectivities" (29) can be regulated. The meaning of "subjectivity" is, for Lazzarato, imbricated in the dynamics of economic relations (49). Accordingly, subjectivation also "allow[s] capitalism to bridge the gap between present and future" (46). The risk, the fundamental unexpectedness of futurity, must be neutralized, while the "system of debt" takes on the function of "anticipat[ing] and ward[ing] of every potential 'deviation' in the behaviour the debtor the future might hold" (45). Lazzarato paints a suffocating, but convincing image of what this temporality infers: "objectivizing time, possessing it in advance, means subordinating all possibility of choice and decision which the future holds to the reproduction of capitalist power relations" (46).

The relation between debt and futurity has not gone uncovered in literary theory, especially in the case of Irish studies. Eoin Flannery has already

written about the notion of "debt, guilt and form" in the context of "(Post-)Celtic Tiger Ireland," deeming them to be "germane to the recent economic, social and literary histories of the country" (829-830). In his theoretical backdrop to the analysis of Claire Kilroy's *The Devil I Know* and Dennis O'Driscoll's poem "The Celtic Tiger," he comments upon Nietzsche's work on the idea of debt, as he draws attention to how the philosopher identified a "key feature of the morality of indebtedness: the production of the memory of that debt," which is also a "future-memory" (Flannery 2020, 831). As he investigates how this view of futurity and debt might help illuminate "recent discourse on indebtedness and responsibility following the global economic crash" (831), Flannery makes an illustrative observation regarding Lazzarato's perspective on the individual temporality of indebtedness: the specific, private "temporal plane" of the indebted man is relegated to the "limits of the human life-span," which ends up being "burdened by the power relations extant in the world" (831).

How would animal life fit into this view? Certainly, animals' saving grace might also be a product of the tacit human longing for life outside debt, the possibility of hope despite an already predetermined future, as animals cannot take on debt. There might also be interferences between the guilt of the debtor and the guilt springing from the awareness of one's complicity in a system whose logic is genocidally contingent on the depletion of animal life. By focusing on the common need shared by humans and nonhumans alike in "satisfying their physical needs" (Benton 1988, 18), one could ask if the internalized "logic of debt" (Lazzarato 2012, 25) can be unlearned, or, in contrast, if the "consenting subjectivity" (Shukin 2018, 101) projected by neoliberal discourses upon animals could find its Achilles' heel precisely in the incomprehensibility that debt presents to nonhuman beings. Finally, in relating animal capital to indebtedness, the common source of rendering might be revealed to dwell within the indebted subjects themselves. The subject would have to face the possibility that their guilt, faults, and promises have been contingent upon the stuff of animal signs and animal matter.

If Flannery applied Lazzarato's work on the logic of debt to analyse narratives concerning the Ireland of the 1990s through the 2000s, the same theoretical framework can be revisited through the lens of the animal capital represented in Danielle McLaughlin's *Dinosaurs on Other Planets*. As Tom Tracey points out in his review of the volume, McLaughlin spikes her stories with "the material signs of recent recession and the last vestiges of the wealthy fallen from grace" (2016). He also notes the prevalence of animals throughout the collection, "as though their species were fugitives from another realm," and makes a comment that seems to resemble Shukin's understanding of the interdependence between the animal as sign and the animal as matter (Tracey

2016). This "linkage" between the human and nonhuman is further evidenced by the ambiguous referentiality behind McLaughlin's description of the natural world, with "things that might have been alive or might have been dead" (2015, 67) and "small dark shapes cut the air above the water: birds, perhaps, or bats" (95). The stories thus seem to purposely undercut the apparently metaphoric dimension of the animal deaths it depicts, as well as mimetic renderings of nature in general. Such a narrative treatment of the natural world does seem to offer a twist on what Flannery observes in Kilroy's *The Devil I Know* as a thematization of the "means through which we abstract and objectify the physical externalities of the non-human" (2020, 843). Therefore, if the symbolic functionality of animal representations is undermined by the material reality that links animal life to market life, these depictions might also convey a message regarding the interdependence between animal capital and the recession.

III. The Animal Capital of Debt

In *Dinosaurs on Other Planets*, McLaughlin depicts the economic, material realities which upend her characters' desire for some sort of meaningful shared affect on the part of animals. Nonetheless, if Shukin draws attention to neoliberalism's hope in the potential of animals to save civilization from global warming, the short story volume goes a step further in showing how the spatiality of wilderness often interacts with and subverts the temporality of debt. As Rob Kitchin, Rory Hearne, and Cian O'Callaghan explain in their study of Irish housing between 1993 and 2006, the effects of the "increased demand in housing" lead to:

> a construction boom, surge in house prices, a large increase in household and mortgage debt, bank indebtedness, over-zoning, urban sprawl, and long-distance commuting—each of which could be considered a crisis in its own right given its dramatic transformative effect and demands. (Kitchin, Hearne & O'Callaghan 2017, 273)

As such, the temporality of the commute, recession and debt all spill over into the natural spaces that the characters inhabit. In contrast, a decentring of tautological time begins with the skewering of any clear referentiality or mimesis supporting the literary descriptions of nonhuman creatures.

Among the stories flaunting animal imagery, "The Night of the Silver Fox" is most directly concerned with the issue of debt. In the wake of his mother's death, Gerard works at his older cousin Kavanagh's fish factory, despite having been "bright at school" at the time of the hire (McLaughlin 2015, 57). The

businessman's decision is not only of a protective nature, but also relates to debt, as Kavanagh is financially indebted to Gerard's father after the latter had given him money to repair the roof of the factory that had been damaged by heavy rains the previous year (61). At present, the fish manufacturer owes money to Gerard as well, since many of his clients have not been able to pay due to the recession, thus leaving him unable to ensure his workers their wages. Liddy, a mink farmer whom the two characters visit in order to get back Kavanagh's interest, is one of these clients, and the businessman is not open to any further negotiation.

Though foregrounding a surprising financial reality of mink-farming in the contemporary age, the text is also sure to imbue a prey-like vulnerability into Liddy's plea for understanding and further postponement of payment: "'We had the activists a while back,' he said. 'Ten minutes with a wire cutter and I'm down a thousand mink. ... Liddy shook his head and brought a hand to his own thin throat" (61). The nauseating metaphoric interplay between debt and animal cruelty seems to emphasize the very complicity that links the two phenomena. Such linkage is brought further into focus as Liddy's daughter, Rosie, saves the mink farm from trouble by offering a hereto unrelenting Kavanagh the possibility of sexual favours. The first echoes of sexual coercion at the hands of Kavanagh surface in the undertones of infancy colouring the girl's invitation for him to see the farm's most prized animals: "'You can't go yet. You haven't seen the silver foxes.' She was leaning out of the forklift, her shadow stretching across the yard. 'We brought them over from England last month. They're still only cubs'" (63). The fact that the animals are an imported product also relates to the volume's overarching theme of economic migration. In this case, Liddy has bought the farm in a desolate rural area, causing his wife to leave him and their daughter for the city. Throughout the story, the insidiously violent creditor-debtor dynamic is sedimented upon a referentially uncertain animal imagery, thus troubling the notion of mimetic representation itself. When Gerard notices "a faint odor of dead fish as he places his jacket upon the sofa" (60), it can be simultaneously evidence that Kavanagh's sexual coercion (with its transactional pretext) has been ongoing, as well as proof of the young man's unconscious identification with the animals of prey in whose rendering he is complicit.

As such, this olfactory image is tied to the economic migration and dislocation in which humans and nonhumans alike are involved. However, if the position of the creditor is associated with the fishery, the animal symbolism shrouding the creditors hints at a form of agency that nonetheless maintains a subversive agency – as he waits with Liddy for Rosie and Kavanagh to return, Gerard becomes increasingly aware all the while of the dreary transaction taking place, and turns his gaze to: "a stuffed brown mink. It was mounted on a

marble base on which was inscribed something Gerard could not read. The mink stood on its hind legs, teeth bared in a rigid grin, front legs clawing the air" (McLaughlin 2015, 64). The mocking, imperfect appearance of this artifact may be likened to what Shukin, referring to Mark Simpson's study on taxidermy, observes as "animal signs capable of protesting and competing with those metaphorically and materially rendered in service to cultures of capital" (Shukin 2009, 130). Animals may not escape the machinations of rendering, but they may escape their end-goals, just like debtors may, despite the tangible harm they suffer, escape the end-goals of the creditors.

When its allegiance to the logic of debt emerges, rendering also creates distrust both towards its agents and the animal symbols and/or animal products they sell. Despite being a creditor of Kavanagh's, Gerard has little power in relation to his employer, an agent in the rendering of nonhuman remains. In turn, the young worker supplants the subterfuge behind the meeting of the silver foxes with a consciously escapist vision of innocence: "He wondered if there were any silver foxes at all. He imagined the cubs in Kavanagh's rough hands and Kavanagh, awed and silent, turning them this way and that" (McLaughlin 2015, 65). Of course, not only does Kavanagh's act show how the logic of debt can open the creditor toward sexual predation, but it also illustrates how factors such as the age gap within the debtor-creditor dynamic – Gerard being fourteen and his employer being middle-aged – can make it so the debtor's simultaneous status as a creditor frees him from any real accountability towards to whom he owes money. If, as Shukin argues, neoliberalism tacitly presupposes a certain "consenting subjectivity" in the animals' interactions with capitalism, and coaxes them into a supposedly willing "agency" (2018, 101), it could be argued that such a "saving grace" is also required of Liddy from Rosie, as he willingly turns a blind eye to the sexual coercion in exchange of debt forgiveness, and of Kavanagh from Gerard, as he gambles on the boy's innocence to give him an avenue toward unpaid labour, debt, and sexual exploitation or downright abuse.

In "Along the Heron-Studded River," a bipolar, unemployed Cathy tries to find solace in avoiding taking her daughter Gracie to school, but also through a peculiar act of rewilding, which is narrated from her husband's perspective: "... Cathy had driven to the city and had returned with half a dozen koi, some of them bronze and tea coloured, others grey. He had watched her release them, dazed and startled, into the pond" (McLaughlin 2015, 42). The husband commutes to his workplace, as was the case with many Irish workers in the wake of the recession.

The text's spatial representation of wilderness thus encumbers upon a space that has been claimed by always already indebted humans. The married couple had bought the home while Cathy was still pregnant, and the enchantment

she experiences at her first sight of the natural landscape is punctured with an unsettling display of animal agency: "…white hills like a bridal gown, jewelled with frost. Small dark birds, feathers puffed against the cold, darted in and out of hedgerows" (44). This nonhuman mobility stands as an omen for the events to come, as what seemed to be a healthy reconnection with nature quickly offsets complete dysfunction and familial alienation, starting with the road between the house and husband's workplace, a piece of rural infrastructure that the city hall repairs at the start of each year, only for it devolve into a "dirt track" during wintertime (45). If tautological time subsumes any duration one might devote to family life, "Along the Heron-Studded River" suggests that the nonhuman world might not be an all too viable exit from unbridled capitalism, since "the river road was a portal between worlds: his home on one side, the city on the other, and in the middle a no-man's-land of space and time when his wife and daughter were beyond his grasp, unreachable" (45). This passage from urbanity into a domestic space under the threat of wilderness goes on to intensify the husband's protective gaze over his family. In this sense, he partakes in a subtle, psychological competition with his sister-in-law Martha and her possessive surveillance over Cathy and Gracie. Both of these gazes aim to protect the mother and daughter, and the husband's perspective leaves out certain details which might hint at the fact that he is not any less possessive than his sister-in-law.

Nonetheless, the husband does seem to face two added psychological challenges more deeply than Martha: firstly, the rural environment threatens his gaze in its visual (or rather, ocular) unpredictability; secondly, Cathy's obsessive attempts at protecting and purportedly liberating animals threaten her and their daughter's safety. At one point, the husband finds Cathy, her ankle bleeding from a cut, feeding a flock of sheep, with Gracie nearby. The scene is preceded by an eerie description of a natural landscape which initially seems to disturb mimetic depiction:

> The countryside at night was a different creature, the soft ground sucking at their shoes, the air thick with midges. As they got closer to the river, he noticed movement ahead, black, lumbering shapes at the edge of the trees. It was a herd of cattle, the white patches of their hides emerging like apparitions from the darkness." (McLaughlin 2015, 45)

The narrative choice to muddle the visibility of animals does not function merely as an attempt to imbue the story with an eco-Gothic atmosphere. This disturbance is rather a way of emphasizing the phenomenological gap between the self and the nonhuman, with effects in the physical as well as semiotic reality. This reading is only reinforced later on, as the father finds Cathy shooing away the

herons from the supposedly liberated koi, with Gracie holding a "dead, grey fish" (McLaughlin 2015, 51). The subsequent scene further illustrates how McLaughlin's treatment of material reality subverts the animals' potential metaphorical quality as signs:

> He wanted to say that it was winter, that the bird was only doing what it always did, what it had to do. That there had never been any hope for those unwitting koi, here in this desolate place where even the river fish struggled to survive. Cathy picked up the ax. "What are you doing?" he said. "We're going to keep the fish safe. We're going to build them a cage, like in the zoo. Right, Gracie?" (McLaughlin 2015, 52)

Cathy's fascination with koi fish as signs of innocence and herons as signs of watchful predators (a foil to her husband's and sister-in-law's gazes) is precisely what motivates her exercise in the protection and liberation of animals, misguided as it is. What she ends up doing is recreating the physical conditions of the pet shop, with the added danger of predatory herons. It is also a peculiar instance of temporal objectivization. In building the cage, Cathy would reduce the risk inherent in futurity, showing how the logic of debt is embedded in subjectivity and internalized by debtors and creditors alike. The moral indebtedness that Martha and the husband feel towards the wife and daughter is not very different from the moral indebtedness Cathy seems to feel towards animals. All three instances break down under the unreadability of alterity – whether it be human or nonhuman. Nonetheless, the domestic realm does seem to open the husband to the chance to protect. At the end of the story, as Gracie is pulling a table cloth with a crystal decanter about to fall and hit her, he intervenes: "But he was watching, as he was always watching, and he was there, just in time to catch it before it fell" (McLaughlin 2015, 97). In the instance of protection, the father is seemingly able to escape tautological time, even if for a few seconds.

"A Different Country" stages a similar struggle. The story opens with a tense relationship dynamic between two Dubliners, Sarah and Jonathan, whilst on a visit to his brother Aidan's house in a small town by the sea. While the former two had met at university while studying architecture, Aidan is a fisherman, and, along with his pregnant wife and chain-smoker Pauline, contribute to Sarah's feeling of unease regarding Jonathan's past and their hope for a long-term relationship. At one point, while the city-dwelling academic is charmed at the sight of a dog on the beach coming up to her with something in its mouth, she employs a language which subtly follows the discursive traits of debt: "'What's that you've got for me?" (McLaughlin 2015, 97). Quickly enough, she realises that the dog is carrying a crab he has nearly killed. Horrified at this

display of joyful violence, she tries to throw it to safety, but the dog simply returns with the prey. It is almost as if the dog owes Sarah a display of benevolent behaviour as saving grace. When she asks her boyfriend to throw it instead, her reasoning echoes the imagery of economic migration: "'It needs to go farther out'" (97). Although this event goes towards intensifying the disillusionment she already feels at the prospect of their relationship, the dreary material reality of the rural environment also comes to function a microcosm of the wider Ireland in the class struggles intensified by the recession.

The sense of a disastrous futurity seems to guide the story. Sarah's vision of Pauline as "a sea creature lured to dry land" (McLaughlin 2015, 103) is followed by the woman's confession that, since both her and Aidan's fathers and grandfathers were fishermen, she feels as if her baby (whom she is in the process of harming through her smoking), is almost genetically driven towards the same vocation: "I can feel him straining for the sea, the same as if he could see it or smell it. ... But it's a dirty business, fishing. Dirty and hard" (104). This correlation between vocation and ancestry makes sense within tautological time, as capitalism conquers every possible human temporality, mythologizing and naturalizing itself. Coupled with the recession, the linkage also opens the characters towards a fatalistic, and thus defensive posture towards nonhuman life. This dreary reality is made terrifyingly clear to Sarah later on when she goes to alert Johnny and Aidan that Pauline's waters have broken, only to discover that the men are in the process of culling seals, a controversial practice that has caused great debate in Ireland throughout the last decade, and was even considered for legalisation in 2020 by the Irish Government, before the proposal was rejected (Foxe 2020). In the story's symbolically charged climax, human and nonhuman posterity share the same sacrificial fate, and the totalizing workings of debt seem to inform the cullers' decisions (to kill the animals) as well as speech:

> "They've got brazen," he said, walking toward her across the sand. "They've been eating through the nets, destroying the catch." He held out a hand to help her up, but she didn't take it. (McLaughlin 2015, 106)

With the Irish Wildlife Trust arguing that overfishing is the real cause of a decrease in fish stock (*RTÉ* 2020), this ethical rationalization of the culling ironically reflects capitalism's own overextraction of resources – in the interspecies struggle over resources, fishermen can project unto animals their own feelings of guilt at the prospect of debt. However, Sarah also tried to stop the dog from eating a crab earlier on in the story. The contrast between the two situations illustrates the paradoxically symbiotic relationship between animal capital and

animals' saving grace: while subjectivity rationalizes human violence towards animals by stripping them of identity, it also tacitly projects morality upon animals, in such a way that they can be seen as individuals liable for punishment.

In the final scene, Sarah follows her drive to fulfil a certain moral indebtedness and raises a timber with the intention of putting one of the seals out of its misery. Once again, a disturbed referentiality distorts her gaze before the text leaves the reader guessing as to whether or not she kills the wounded animal. However, this time the skewered image is that of the complicit Jonathan, who "did not speak or call and ... appeared only in silhouette, his face featureless under the dark oilskin," while the previously invisible face of the seal is seen in all its suffering, with a "half-closed eyelid flicker[ing]" (McLaughlin 2015, 107). The horrific revelation of the common violence subsuming human life might motivate Sarah to curb the seal's suffering, and thus become both its saving grace and, essentially, another agent in the culling. The text suggests that the limits of human imagination still harbour a way of uncovering the interferences between the rendering of animals and a doomed futurity shared among humans and nonhumans.

What surfaces in this failure of animals' saving grace is the suggestion that noncompliance to the demands of the "the logic of debt" (Lazzarato 2012, 25) might be a more ethical alternative to the projection of one's own morality onto animals. Instead of projecting, one can instead acknowledge that animal affect and the intergenerational workings of debt do share at least one emotion, that is, fear. Therefore, even though its characters do not escape the claustrophobic conditions of animal capital and their detrimental impact upon posterity (as suggested by the imagery surrounding Pauline's pregnancy), the text does hint at a possible strategy in "the fight against the debt economy and above all against its 'morality' of guilt, which, in the end, is a morality of fear" (Lazzarato 2012, 164), imagining an ethics of responsibility that is not primarily driven by the threat of punishment, nor conditioned by the extraction of animal resources.

IV. Animal's Eschatological Grace and the 'Cavernous' Eyes of Mimesis'

The last two stories in the collection, "In The Act of Falling" and the eponymous "Dinosaurs on Other Planets," present a contrast between the adult characters' anxieties regarding recession as well as economic migration, and their children's fascination with dead animals and stories of apocalypse or extinction. While adults try to control the narrative, the younger characters are more apt in dealing with animals-as-signs, animals-as-physical-beings, and the interferences between the two. These stories convey the psychologically damning consequences that the recession had on the Irish population, a leading SilverCloud study showing that "57 per cent of people surveyed also said the

financial crisis has made their generation more pessimistic" (Gallagher 2018). In addition, the stories also speak to more ecological concerns. The latter aspect was not lost on the volume's reviewers. For instance, Tracey observes that "the quantity of dead or traumatised creatures signals a general environmental unease that speaks as much to the mood of anomie of Recession Ireland as it does to our growing concern with global climate change" (Tracey 2016). It might therefore be useful to investigate how the two stories filter their characters' views of financial or environmental catastrophes through the affective expectations they have of animals proper and animal signs alike.

"In the Act of Falling" depicts traces of past families whom the affective vitality of animals did not rescue from economic migration or precarity. This, at least, is what the protagonist gathers from the animal equipment left behind by past owners of her home. At first, she envisions their lives starting from the "skeleton of a pony trap, its metal spine rusting at the back of the shed, the stone hot-water jars" (McLaughlin 2015, 131). However, she soon comes to realize that "perhaps they were not to be known by what they left but by what they took, in which case she would never know them" (131). She reaches the same conclusion as she ponders the "beekeeping equipment" abandoned by what she assumes to be separate owners from the ones mentioned previously: "she'd taken this as evidence that the people who had lived here before were beekeepers, but perhaps it was better evidence that they were not; that they were, at best, failed beekeepers" (137). These spectral signs of animal life and its unsuccessful saving grace upon human life call to mind the shared vulnerability of humans and nonhumans under the effects of late Capitalism.

The protagonist's disillusionment with animals' capacity for affective restoration reverberates throughout her personal life. The story essentially revolves around her autistic son Finn's obsession with animal signs of the Christian Apocalypse, an interest he has picked up at school from a nun whose eyes are like "Angelina Jolie"'s (McLaughlin 2015, 133). Once again, the text alerts us to the cultural semiologic capital which interferes with both human and animal life. Finn is essentially drawn to the binary logic of saving grace with which religious discourse and imagery imbue animal signs: some will die when the heralds begin to emerge, but others will be saved. As such, the animal signs employed by the Church directly inform Finn's relation to the animals around him:

> Birds, it seemed, were the next great heralds of the apocalypse, and Finn had decided it was important to catch them in the act of falling. Before the birds, there had been two long weeks of insects: a meticulous recording of spiders, flies, and beetles, tallies of the dead entered each night in a blue-lined copybook. (McLaughlin 2015, 129)

In the context of the Great Recession, the symbolic weight behind the image of the "falling" birds' downward trajectory sets them apart from the other animals Finn had been obsessed with. This aspect is not lost on his mother, whose husband Bill, a recently unemployed stay-at-home dad, blames her for Finn's new obsession. She had told him that "in Stephen's Green, the ducks on one of the ponds had died" (McLaughlin 2015, 131). She herself was a witness at the site of the death scene, and decided to use it as an anecdote in order to alleviate a moment of deep alienation from her family and also try and enter the close interpersonal dynamic that her husband and son seem to harbour (131). In this instance, the dreary financial reality underscoring the protagonist's family life leads her to engage in the fascination with animal signs that the Church had set ablaze in her son's imagination.

Products of animal rendering surface throughout the protagonist's home life in ways that further alienate her from both her family and the nonhuman world. Inspecting Finn's eschatological drawings, she finds "complex, intricate diagrams, the margins scribbled with words like 'plague' and 'apocalypse' and little hand-drawn pictures of birds, small, fat-bellied things with disproportionately long legs and large feet" (McLaughlin 2015, 132). Her son, now a renderer of biblical apocalyptic animal signs, has internalized the emotions springing from her financial anxieties. This eschatological view of market life does seem to fall in line with Flannery's reading of Nietzsche and Lazzarato: "… the guilt of indebtedness precedes our births and outlives us after our deaths, and ... is structural to the formation of the modern subject" (2020, 831). The story presents us, in a sense, with a secularization of the Apocalypse that underscores the absurdity of the punishment suffered by indebted humans and their cohabiting animals.

Moreover, the overworked protagonist realises that her job simply won't allow her the time to give Finn the proper attention he deserves, and, weighed down by the vacated homes of her neighbourhood, a product of economic migration due to the recession, she dreams of flying to Dubai on vacation in a break from her directionless husband and the art books he voraciously reads. A certain dissonance also emerges between the protagonist and art itself, once again due to financial anxiety: when she hears Bill utter the words "the deep recession into space," she momentarily does not realize that he is speaking about paintings. These anxieties reach an intense sequence of "rendered" animals during a dinner scene:

> She saw then that Finn was sitting at the kitchen table, and that the thing he had on a plate in front of him, which at first glance she'd taken for a soft toy, was in fact a dead bird. .... "It might be diseased." "It is diseased," he said. "It's got plague."... Behind her, Bill was taking something from the oven. ... She watched as he peeled the foil cover from a roasting tin, and when the rush of steam dispersed, she saw that it was a chicken. (McLaughlin 2015, 135)

The unnervingly ambiguous referentiality underpinning the scene's animal capital unearths a contrast between the different fates of the chicken: for Finn, the valueless carcass gains priority over the commercially motivated semiotic rendering of chicken-as-toy and the culinary rendering of chicken-as-food. The affective resolution in this sequence of impressions, moving between illusion and epiphany, seems to resemble Shukin's concerns regarding mimesis, which, she claims, is "wholly immanent to [capitalism's] biopolitical workings" (2009, 58-9). This breakdown in the neoliberal logic of rendering directly nullifies the protagonist's faith in the saving grace of animals, as her vulnerability to be fired in a downsize or simply fired and replaced, is mirrored in the park's replacement of the dead ducks with new ones:

> They should have made her happy, but they didn't. ... There was trickery of a sort at work, a sleight of hand that suggested that the first ducks had never existed, and only she alone, in silent witness, knew better. (McLaughlin 2015, 137)

A certain affective connection between her and the dead animals further develops as she realises that the replacement, much like many instances of employee downsizing, goes unrecorded in the public consciousness: "Later, at her computer, she typed 'Stephen's Green ducks dead' into a search engine, but her inquiry yielded nothing of relevance" (McLaughlin 2015, 137). Though the ducks harbour value as an aesthetic and affective enhancement of the lake, the institutional negligence which lead to their death is either purposely hidden or does not promise to be of much interest among the reading public. The scene is an illustration of the murderous consequences springing from the extraction of animals' vitality for affective purposes. The nun's words to the protagonist in the final scene of the story become all the more resonant: "Consider the lilies of the field," she said, "how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these" (144). The epiphany that the protagonist is given way to, ironically, by the same nun who was a factor in Finn's obsession, does corroborate Flannery's assertion that "the past, in the form of the period of the Celtic Tiger itself, and the future, in terms of political and economic fall-out, as well as continued individual, personal indebtedness, cannot be disaggregated, either in practical or moral terms" (2020, 837). As such, for an escape from the logic of debt to be attainable, the protagonist must face both the memory of past recession as well as the cold work ethic of the past economic Boom. Nonetheless, a saving grace is unlikely to come from any ducks or biblical renderings of flowers, but rather from an inner confrontation with the capitalist ideology of labour and the tautological time subsuming the temporality of affect.

In "Dinosaurs on Other Planets," the final story of the novel, a similar juxtaposition between the two types of rendering is further complicated as their relation to the act of gazing itself emerges in the story's climactic moments. Here, too, dysfunctional family dynamics interfere with representations of rendering. Kate and Colman live in a rural area and are visited by their daughter Emer, her very young son Oisin, and her new boyfriend Pavel, a Polish immigrant. Tensions are high, not only due to the physical intimacy that Colman is unable to offer Kate, nor the fact that their daughter rarely visits, but also because of the worsening relationship issues between Emer and Pavel, who is the same age as her parents. When Colman takes Oisin hunting, they find an animal skull which the grandfather identifies as once belonging to a cow. Having reached home, Colman starts initiating Finn into the art of rendering by macerating the skull, and the boy is determined to see it as a "dinosaur skull" (McLaughlin 2015, 153). While the grandfather is disappointed, whispering to Kate that "the child doesn't know what meteorite is," Emer's boyfriend plays along: "'So it is,' Pavel said" (153). Colman brings Oisin a poster of the Milky Way with the dinosaur-killing Asteroid included, and the boy asks a question whose innocent poeticism sparks a brief, but metaphorically charged conversation on life beyond Earth:

> "So there could still be dinosaurs on other planets?"
> "No," Colman said, at exactly the same time Pavel said, "Very likely."
> The boy turned to Pavel. "Really?"
> "I don't see why not," Pavel said. "There are millions of other galaxies and billions of other planets. I bet there are lots of other dinosaurs. Maybe lots of other people, too."
> "Like aliens?" the boy said. "Yes, aliens, if you want to call them that," Pavel said, "although they might be very like us." (McLaughlin 2015, 155)

For Finn, the animal sign of the dinosaur skeleton has been superimposed onto the image of the cow skull being physically rendered from its flesh by Colman. For Pavel, the cultural sign of aliens reflects his own experience as an economic immigrant. Alien life, the dinosaurs, and the memories of ancestors, all seem to be impossible to represent mimetically in faraway places, and this resistance to anthropogenic rendering is what drives the affective impetus of the story. Kate herself is deeply troubled by the fact that Emer will leave with Finn to Australia, and the boy might end up forgetting her (McLaughlin 2015, 161). If the recession was associated with the Apocalypse in the previous story, here, the forgetting of older generations due to economic migration seems to be related to dinosaur extinction.

With Kate, the text explores a longing for ways of "seeing" beyond that of the gaze and the violent or semiologic forms of rendering it can engender.

Her contempt for Colman's act of maceration is evident: "She looked down at the skull, and at the debris that had floated free of it, and something about it, the emptiness, the lifelessness, appalled her, and suddenly she couldn't bear the idea of the boy's small hands touching it" (McLaughlin 2015, 157). It is the same "emptiness" and "lifelessness" (157) that mimetic artistic renderings of animal signs assume. In contrast to Colman's maceration of the skull, Kate's relationship with her cat is likely the only healthy human-animal relationship in the whole collection. Interestingly enough, this dynamic also surfaces in the moments of sexual tension between Emer and Pavel. At the very end of the novel, the cat's affective self-expression is strikingly vital, especially after the string of carcasses to which the volume has treated its readers: "The cat had been winding itself in and out around her legs, and now it made a quick foray into the room, came running out again, voicing small noises of complaint" (163). Responding to the cat's "complaint," Kate follows her to the kitchen. On the way there, she meets Pavel in a moment that dramatizes the very complications created by the gaze that mimetics try to whitewash, as Emer "was conscious, even in the semidarkness, of his eyes moving over the thin cotton of her nightdress" (163). The cat maintains its companionship in the ensuing scene of ethical rejection (163), then Emer leaves for the kitchen and finishes the maceration process, "wiping the rims of its eye sockets, the crevices of the jaws" once belonging to the cow, now rendered off. Staring at the skull, she finds that it "returned her gaze with empty, cavernous eyes" (163). Although one could read this image as symbolic of Kate's own mortality, or her affectionless marriage, the text draws attention to the process of rendering as well: "She tipped the bucket over, spilling the bleach onto the ground. For a second it lay upon the surface, before gradually seeping away until only a flotsam of dead insects speckled the stones" (164). Indeed, the scene captures the toxicity brought on by both the rendering of animal flesh and the rendering of the animal as image. The final image of the story echoes Colman's rational response to Finn's "dinosaur" inquiries. Instead of the poster, or the obscurity to which characters have to adjust their vision, the text turns to a naked-eyed vision of the constellations in their resistance to thorough rendering:

> Putting down the bucket, she gazed up at the night sky. There were stars, millions of them, the familiar constellations she had known since childhood. From this distance, they appeared cold and still and beautiful, but she had read somewhere that they were always moving, held together only by their own gravity. They were white-hot clouds of dust and gas, and the light, if you got close, would blind you. (McLaughlin 2015, 164)

From this perspective, the financial anxieties, economic migration, or reductive logic of rendering that have been plaguing the stories' characters seem to be the

products of something not much more natural than a bucket of bleach. "The outward-looking gaze of capital" (Shukin 2009, 69) may be resisted by looking beyond the rendered version of the exploited being and acknowledging its unrepresentable singularity.

V. Conclusion

The article has demonstrated that Danielle McLaughlin's *Dinosaurs on Other Planets* problematizes the practice of mimetic representation in relation to animal life within Ireland's rural society in the wake of the Great Recession. It has shown how debt interacts with animal signs both through the language employed by the characters as well as through their interactions with nonhuman animals and systems of rendering in both its meanings (semiotic and physical). Instances of failure in the "saving grace of animals" (Shukin 2018, 97) reveal the common fate of humans and nonhumans within neoliberalism and open the characters to a deeper understanding of the material macrostructures which influence their lives. Betraying the contingency that threatens their hopes during the aftermath of a recession, the intensified logic of rendering also informs the characters' views of futurity, either leading to eschatologically pessimistic financial anxieties, or frustrations over the effects that economic migration has upon their family lives. *Dinosaurs on Other Planets* suggests that a complicity between mimesis and exploitation hides behind these harsh realities, but that hope of resistance might lie in gazing beyond the product of rendering, and toward that which cannot be rendered.

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