



CALL FOR PAPERS

Domesticating Irish nature : past and contemporary approaches and practices

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Université Grenoble Alpes

Keynote speaker : Finola O’Kane (UCD)

The idea of domestication suggests a vision of humanity that is shaped by its dualistic opposition with a wild nature, and sustains an anthropocentric narrative where the centrifugal forces of civilization, control and exploitation are allowed to penetrate the passive other that nature represents.

In recent years, the term ecocide—the extensive destruction of ecosystems—has gained legal and philosophical traction as a way of naming and challenging large-scale environmental harm. While global and ubiquitous in scope, ecocide also has deeply local and singular resonances. Within the Irish context, the relationship between land, nature, and extractive practices is marked by a long, complex history of colonial appropriation, economic transformation, and cultural negotiation within a territory which, far from the touristy clichés about a serene picturesque so-called *Emerald Isle*, has been scarred by war, sectarianism, famine, epidemics, industrial extraction, wild capitalism, to name but a few ills and plagues. Extractive, exploitative and ecocidal practices can easily be incorporated within a metanarrative of domestication, which this conference will seek to interrogate.

Discursive practices fuelling anthropocentric understanding of the non-human include agronomy and botany. As 19th century botany developed, it embraced forms of classification or taxonomy of the natural world, ordering, organizing and naming species at home and in the British Empire. Botanists travelled the world over and brought home specimens which they hybridized, naturalized or transplanted abroad once the land had been cleared. The entangled

stories of botany and Empire have been told (Browne 1992 ; O’Kane 2008 ; Baber 2016 ; Agal 2022 ; O’Morchoe 2024). But the development of botany took place as part of a general process of domesticating nature at home and abroad which requires our attention in the present era of climate change. Between 1801 and 1922, Ireland was entirely part of the Union of Britain and Ireland, and botanic gardens were created (Dublin 1790, Belfast 1828, Kilmacurragh 1850s). This domesticating trend at the scale of the world and nations was also true closer to home, as botany was encouraged as a past-time for women and children, albeit with gender-related variations over time (Skene 1997 ; Forrest and Ingram 1999 ; Martin 2011 ; George 2017 ; Pardoe and Lazarus 2018). Today, how is the idea of domesticating nature being reassessed in Ireland in an era of climate change? This question is relevant in terms of botanical, gardening, horticultural and agricultural practices across Irish society as a whole, as well as in literature and the arts, whether fiction or non fiction. How is the cultivation of public parks and gardens impacted by climate change? How are endemic or imported species regarded and dealt with today? How do botanists and, more widely, naturalists in Ireland today, navigate the heritage of imperial classifications and taming of nature, with the need for regeneration as a proactive mode of adaptation ?

Recent studies of early agriculture have shown that this vision of the domestication process can be deconstructed to envision humans as domesticated by their interaction with non-human species (Scott). The history of domestication can thus be perceived within a posthuman framework as a network of dynamic encounters and hybridizations beyond the human, where non-humans are acknowledged as active participants (Stépanoff). In Ireland, do rewilding initiatives such as the rewetting of bogs or the maintenance of patches of temperate rainforest (Daltun) present themselves as a reversal of the domesticating narrative? Or could tensions between conservationists and farmers on the subject of the reintroduction of iconic wild species such as the hen harrier reveal conflicting understandings of domestication as a process of making the land fit for human habitation?

In literature, the reciprocal relationship of domestication between man and dog was movingly – and brilliantly – illustrated by Sara Baume in *Spill, Simmer, Falter, Wither*. While the misappropriation of land (be it for mere extraction, infrastructure or real estate development) may play an important dynamic part in the plot of many works of Irish contemporary fiction, in which the traumatic legacy left by the Celtic Tiger (¢ 2009) still looms large (think of Tana French’s debut novel *In The Woods* (2007), Brian McGilloway’s *Borderlands* (2007) or *The Nameless Dead* (2012), or even Conor O’Callaghan’s postmodernist neogothic masterpiece *Nothing on Earth* (2016), other writers seek and find some problematic sense of refuge in nature, like Sara Baume, in her 2017 novel *A Line Made By Walking*, or *Seven Steeples* (2022). In that case, nature is not just a Walden-like “Thoreauesque” place of escape. It constitutes a vantage point (both frail and resilient) from which to deconstruct the excesses of deregulated consumer society, where historically Man has long been trying, in an illusory way, to “make himself master and possessor of nature”, to quote the famous words from Descartes’s *Discourse on Method* (1637).

The concept of domestication is also at the core of ecofeminist movements which, ever since Françoise d’Eaubonne’s 1974 *Le Féminisme ou la mort*, have sought to upset the traditional ascription of inferior values (primitiveness, unruliness) to the feminine and Nature, and the alleged superiority of the masculine and the civilised (Birkeland, 1993; Haraway, 2007). More recently, the emphasis has been laid on the need to “reclaim” – restore and recreate – the pairing of women with Nature outside of capitalist, patriarchal and essentialist frameworks (Thompson, 2006) and through libidinal connections with the natural world (Hache, 2016). From

nineteenth-century ecogothic tales of avenging boglands (Le Fanu, Stoker) to more recent feminist fiction of empowerment (Murdoch, Rainsford), the literary tradition of writing the Irish landscape remains deeply entrenched in a narrative of subversion and hybridity. By means of ontological but also linguistic defamiliarization (through asyntactical or ungrammatical structuring), ecofeminist tales strive to “dislocate[e] the centrality of humans” and, simultaneously, “re-naturaliz[e] the human” and “the feminist project” (Braidotti, 2022). The dissolution of boundaries between the human and nonhuman, as argued by dark ecology advocates such as Timothy Morton, exposes the frailty of both, and encourages us to replace any form of centrism with rhizomatic thinking. As Sueellen Campbell writes, “we belong not only to networks of language and culture but also to the networks of the land.” (Campbell 136).

In contemporary Irish poetry as well, the domestication of nature is a paradigm that has often been explored by Irish poets –women in particular, though not exclusively– who have perceived a parallel between the domestication of Irish nature and the domestication of women by Irish society. In the 1980s, for instance, in her collection *Reading the Sky* (1985), Paula Meehan sought to escape from the garden “into the pleasures of the wild and undomesticated”, as Kathryn Kirkpatrick puts it (“Paula Meehan’s Gardens”, 52). Nature, uncultivated and therefore undomesticated in Meehan’s eyes, is also a place where individual epiphany becomes possible—as in her poem “When My Father Was A Young Man”, in which the lyrical “I” is drawn to the *uncultivated* aspect of her grandmother’s garden because it enables her transformation. Likewise, in “Postcard from Ithaca”, knowledge of the land-scape is to be found through the uncultivated and undomesticated: “the kitchen garden’s full with ripening fruit/But the speedwell in the fallow field/Has kept the blue in your eyes” (RS 43). Similarly, in recent ecopoetry collections such as Grace Wells’ *Fur* (2015) and *The Church of the Love of the World* (2022), the female Irish poet also seeks “*the landscape’s older, original information*”, “where the uncultivated and undomesticated ‘has kept’ what has been lost through cultivation” (Kirkpatrick 52). In Wells’ poems, animals too are regarded as bearers of this ‘older, original information’, even of a form of *medicine* essential to the balance and coexistence between land and humankind—as in her poem inspired by a line from John Moriarty, “When the Animals Leave They Take Their Medicine With Them” (*Fur* 83), where “Flocks of field-birds refused to rise as one./Stag ceased to guard the herd”. In an unpublished poem, “Wolf Medicine”, Wells even suggests the possibility for both poet and reader to regain that animal knowledge by becoming animals ourselves: “might we not dream ourselves as wolves?”. At a time where several Irish political leaders and scientists are calling for the reintroduction of wolves—or even lynx—into Ireland to “meet environmental targets” (Pádraic Fogarty), Irish ecopoets echo the same concern, shared by Manchán Magan in his works: how can Irish society *un-domesticate* itself, and reconnect with the land, its language and culture, and therefore with its own identity?

The recent development of the blue humanities has entailed a paradigm shift from stability and groundedness to the ever-mutating element of water. The field of critical ocean studies « has shifted from a long-term concern with mobility and fluidity across transoceanic surfaces to theorizing ways of embedding, animating, and submerging, rendering vast oceanic space into place » (De Loughrey). Steinberg has invited us to think with and from the ocean. The tidalectic approach (Kamau Braithwait, Stephanie Tessler) promotes oceanic as well as archipelagic thinking in the wake of postcolonialism. The development of elemental approaches (Steinberg, Alaimo, Neimanis) spurs us to consider the entanglement of water, human and non-human life while taking into account the agency and ontological difference of the liquid element. In the field of environmental science one may equally observe a surge in publications about water pollution, oceanic disruptions and turbulences. Though the sea, the rivers, the coast and shores, as well as the wet lands have always been central in Irish history, economy, and imaginary, the

blue humanities invite us to reconsider their place, to weave new connections and unearth transnational flows and currents.

This international colloquium held in Grenoble, combining workshops, roundtables in addition to thematic panels, therefore also invites contributions that explore the representations at stake when the environmental history and prospective future of Ireland are involved. This exploration may be achieved through the intersecting lenses of ecocide, resource exploitation, and ecological resistance or use of nature as a place allowing for an escape from the usual modern globalized ultraliberal capitalistic *rat race*. We seek interdisciplinary interventions—historical, literary, legal, political, ecological, artistic—that investigate how nature in Ireland has been used, abused, and reclaimed in the face of economic pressures and environmental degradation. Organizers encourage submissions from scholars, artists, activists, and practitioners engaged in environmental thought from a wide range of disciplines: literature, history, sociology, law, environmental science, geography, political theory, media studies, philosophy, and beyond.

Themes and Topics May Include:

Ecocide - ecocrime within the Irish context: Environmental degradation through peat extraction, deforestation, water pollution, and land mismanagement; legal frameworks and potential for ecocide as a crime under international or national law; case studies (Lough Neagh, industrial agriculture, turf cutting, offshore drilling).

The economic exploitation of Irish natural resources: colonial and postcolonial dynamics in land and sea use; corporate extraction (mining, fracking, fishing) and its socio-environmental impacts; neoliberal exploitation and the commodification of Irish landscapes and seascapes; conflicting memories and narratives around natural resources.

Resistance, refuge, and re-enchantment: Irish landscapes as spaces of refuge and resistance (bogs, forests, coastlines); eco-nationalism, ‘indigenous’ ecological imaginaries, and rural activism; artistic and literary depictions of nature as a sanctuary from capitalist excess ; chthonic writing as a means of reconnection with nature ; the blue humanities as a critical renewal shaping new imaginaries

Nature and Irish cultural identity: the environmental dimensions of Irish folklore, mythology and language; ecocriticism and the Irish literary canon; representations of rural life, agrarian memory, and “the natural”; Irish ethnobotany and nature (plants, flowers, animals) as medicine ; the Irish Land within the Irish Language ; representations of the liquid elements (sea, rivers and wetlands).

Contemporary activism and environmental justice: culture and International Climate Policy Frameworks ; grassroots movements, land defence, and climate action in Ireland; environmental racism (Travellers’ community aka as *Mincéirí* recognized as an indigenous entity since 1 March 2017) and other marginalised communities displaying an alternative mode of living within the Irish environment; intersections with decolonial, feminist, and anti-capitalist frameworks.

Parks and gardens : botany and gender: domesticating science ? ; naturalists and colonial heritage; discourses on and management of “native” and “invasive” species ; gardeners as custodians ; horticulture, regeneration and care; garden diaries, memoirs, letter-writing; intersections between science and the arts/literature.

Colonial legacies & decolonial perspectives: colonialism and land appropriation; land ownership; plantations; decolonial ecologies.

Non-human animal conditions : wild species conservation and reintroduction policies (red squirrel, hen harrier, curlew...); cattle breeding: from productivism to permaculture; animal rights in Ireland; recreational practices involving animals in Irish culture (hunting, fishing, horse riding, etc.); post-anthropocentric or posthuman visions of animal life in non-fiction, literature and the arts.

Submission Guidelines:

Please send a **300-word abstract** and a short bio (100 words) by **January, 15th 2026** to marie.mianowski@univ-grenoble-alpes.fr and valerie.morisson@univ-montp3.fr

Final papers (approx. 5,000–8,000 words) will later be considered for inclusion in a peer-reviewed edited volume or special issue.

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