

Sharp, via Spinoza, reminds us that we are an intimate but unmoralized part of nature, lest we as ecocritics forget this.

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***Poultry Science, Chicken Culture: A Partial Alphabet.* By Susan Merrill Squier. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2011. 256 pp. Cloth \$39.95.**

As a raiser of laying hens and lover of playful transdisciplinary scholarship, I enjoyed this study of chickens and their role in human cultures. Bookended by autobiographical scratchings on the author's own forays into chicken stewardship, *Poultry Science, Chicken Culture* recalls hybrid texts of narrative scholarship such as Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma* and John Elder's *Reading the Mountains of Home*. Professor Squier's informal voice draws me in as she tells of adopting two Cobb 700s—genetically engineered monstrosity meat chickens—from her university's Poultry Education and Research Center. These superefficient meat birds, bred for slaughter six weeks after birth, set Squier on a critique of industrial agriculture. In the process, her wide-ranging mind explores a partial ABC or *abecedarium* of chickens: “Moving from augury, biology, and culture through disability, epidemic, and fellow-feeling to gender, hybridity, and inauguration, [she] explore[s] the unanticipated effects of industrial rationality; the gendered, raced, and classed nature of agricultural as well as cultural production; and the varieties of knowledge produced by the human encounter with the chicken” (6). The book approaches science studies, animal studies, environmental studies, and the humanities (including literary and film analyses) with an ethical vision: a desire that a greater understanding of chicken culture will “help us find ways of growing food that are both sustainable and equitable” (6).

Squier's free-ranging curiosity lingers on “hen fever” in mid-Victorian England and America as she analyzes poultry breeder

handbooks and the poultry exhibition craze. In a chapter entitled "Disability," Squier analyzes *Days of Antonio*, a contemporary play that involves a disabled man who believes he's a chicken, and she then opens out to a wider investigation of embryology, teratology, and eugenics—which leads to more analysis of pop cultural texts (for example, she discusses the 1932 horror film *Freaks*, the 2007 Australian film *Yolk*, and Sherwood Anderson's story "The Triumph of the Egg"). In the concluding chapter, "Zen of the Hen," Squier says that this book took five years of "researching, writing, and living" (198). Considering the breadth of knowledge packed into these pages, I thought, "Only five years?"

Squier writes for an academic audience, as the following sentence attests: "Eggs can not only aid the production of an increasingly competitive and ideal normativity but they can also lead to the development of a non-normate sociosexual becoming" (17). Granted, this sentence is lifted out of context, but it reveals the academic style that composes much of *Poultry Science, Chicken Culture*. Because of the style, I will not assign the book to undergraduates at my state university, while I often assign Pollan's accessibly-written work on food culture. Fortunately, Squier's personal voice emerges throughout the text, especially in the introduction and concluding chapters, making this book a pleasant, informative, and ethical read for academics—especially those of us prone to chicken fever, tending flocks of our own.

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***Writing the Irish West: Ecologies and Traditions.* By Eamonn Wall. Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 2011. 232 pp. Paper \$27.00.**

The intersection of Ireland and ecocriticism is, surprisingly, a fairly new phenomenon, and Eamonn Wall's *Writing the Irish West: Ecologies and Traditions* follows closely on the heels of Tim Wenzell's *Emerald Green: An Ecocritical Study of Irish Literature* (Cambridge Scholars,