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Animals in the Fiction of Cormac McCarthy by Wallis R.
Sanborn III (review)

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Wallis R. Sanborn III, *Animals in the Fiction of Cormac McCarthy*.
Jefferson NC: McFarland, 2006. 200 pp. \$37.95.

Wallis R. Sanborn takes on a monumental task in *Animals in the Fiction of Cormac McCarthy*; he has committed to a close reading of all of Cormac McCarthy's novels, as well as some of his plays and two short stories, with an eye to enumerating and understanding McCarthy's use of animals. The animals that McCarthy includes in his work are both deeply symbolic of the disruption between the world of nature and the human world and also necessary plot devices for signaling critical moments in the texts. For instance, in his first chapter Sanborn posits that animal deaths are linked to human death in some of McCarthy's lesser-known works, while in other chapters animals are linked to levity, hierarchy, metaphor, and ballet. In each case, though, Sanborn theorizes that McCarthy's work "contains a bounty of non-human animals and species-specific themes and arguments. Dominant among the themes are survival in a biologically deterministic world, animals as harbingers of human death and man's ceaseless desire and attempt to control the natural world" (13).

The work is interesting for the sheer number of animals covered and the depth of Sanborn's reading. He meticulously picks apart each novel for the animals involved and searches for their possible symbolic weight. However, the work suffers from two problems. The first is that there does not seem to be any overarching theory behind either Sanborn's choices or the way that he reads McCarthy's animals. Sanborn notices the animals, feels that they must be important, if only because there are so many, and tries to assign meaning to the ones he reads as most important in the work, but without any coherent approach to why or how they are used. That lack of coherence means that some chapters have a strong argument, while others are much weaker. For instance, chapter 1, "Animals and Death in *The Gardener's Son*, *The Stonemason*, 'Bounty,' and 'The Dark Waters,'" does a great job of describing McCarthy's fascination with death and control, particularly control of man over nature. But chapter 6, "Canine Hierarchy in *Blood Meridian*," feels forced and repetitive and is undermined by the fact that hierarchy

does nothing to protect those who come into contact with the judge from their horrific fates. In fact, those who are powerful seem even more likely to die, as Glanton and most of his gang do. As much as a lot of us who work with McCarthy's writing would love to see everything in his work as deeply symbolic and important, the truth is that sometimes a bat is just a bat, or a cat is just a cat, even in Cormac McCarthy's novels.

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Gordon Haber and Marybeth Holleman, *Among Wolves: Gordon Haber's Insights into Alaska's Most Misunderstood Animal*. Fairbanks: Snowy Owl Books / U of Alaska P, 2013. 328 pp. \$29.95.

With the recent resurgence of predator control measures across the state of Alaska, nothing could be more timely than Haber and Holleman's *Among Wolves*. This science-based but personal account of Dr. Haber's forty-three-year career as a wolf biologist studying wolves in Alaska's backcountry offers insights into one of the most misunderstood but remarkable species of the animal kingdom.

Haber's photographs, which include rare glimpses of wolves at play, at rest, and on the hunt, are interwoven with "Snapshots" (tweets and field notes), as well as observations of Haber by those who knew him; this combination, alongside denser passages of text, creates a highly satisfying visual layout and also simplifies note taking for those wishing to jump through chapters and locate specific information. Coauthor Holleman deserves credit for creating comprehensive introductory material and a well-organized book (gleaned from Haber's journals and notes). Readers will share Haber's intimate experiences with the Toklat wolves of Denali National Park and Preserve and those of the Yukon-Charley region of east-central Alaska.

Reading *Among Wolves* gives us an appreciation not only for Haber's subject but also for the man himself. Growing up in Michigan and spending summers at a family cabin on Lake Huron in Ontario, Haber was a self-made naturalist. As an adult working in Alaska, his approach to fieldwork included intense hours of obser-