

HILDA KEAN. *The Great Cat and Dog Massacre: The Real Story of World War II's Unknown Tragedy*. Animal Lives. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017. Pp. 248. \$35.00 (cloth). doi: 10.1017/jbr.2018.44

In the days following Neville Chamberlain's announcement on the BBC that as of 3 September 1939, Britain and Germany were at war, dutiful Britons prepared for the worst. Some sewed blackout curtains, while others had their pets euthanized. The decision of many Britons to have their pets killed at the start of the Second World War is a largely forgotten (but significant) episode explored in *The Great Cat and Dog Massacre* by Hilda Kean. As she explains, the massacre seemed a very English affair in the way that pet owners waiting to hand over their beloved cats and dogs were observed queuing orderly and calmly. Queues at the small Wood Green animal shelter in north London, for example, reached half-a-mile long. Demand quickly overwhelmed animal charities. The National Canine Defence League ran out of chloroform, while the incinerators at the People's Dispensary for Sick Animals could not cope with the sheer volume of corpses and offered a meadow in its grounds in Ilford as a pet cemetery. The numbers killed make disturbing reading. In the first week of the war, between 400,000 and 750,000 dogs and cats were destroyed in London alone—around one in four of the pet population. Thus, well before the horrors of the Nazi gas chambers were known, many animal charities deplored the killings as the “September Holocaust.”

It could hardly go unnoticed that Kean's title evokes Robert Darnton's classic essay in microhistory, *The Great Cat Massacre* (1984). On the surface, Kean's *The Great Cat and Dog Massacre* follows in the tradition of microhistorical analysis in the sense of analyzing a single, discrete event. In doing so, Kean's narrative raises pertinent questions: Why did the British kill their pets in such numbers in the first week of the war in orderly fashion when there was no government edict demanding or animal welfare organization advising such action? Was this a panic or a calculated killing? How should we interpret such (seemingly) anomalous and exceptional events?

But closer inspection of Kean's narrative reveals significant departures from Darnton's brand of microhistory, departures that, arguably, bring strategic advantages for gauging the historical significance of the so-called pet massacre. First, Kean is more interested in tracing materiality than in decoding layers of symbolic acts and meaning. Second, Kean does not limit her account solely to the massacre; rather, she explores how her chosen episode fits into the remaining six years of conflict. Despite the book's title, then, the actual massacre of September 1939 occupies only one of nine chapters, which take account of pet-making practices (including animal killing, attitudes towards pets) before 1939 but also their status during wartime events—evacuation, the blackout regime, changed daily routines, shelter bombardment, and food rationing. By moving backward and forward from that fatal month in this manner, Kean's intention is to explore why and how British pet owners killed their dogs and cats in such large numbers, as well as to understand the legacy of that event and its subsequent erasure from memory.

Kean is at pains to argue that the massacre was not necessarily the result of a uniform domestic panic or collapse in nerve. She accepts that the pet massacre does bear some of traces of the “black boredom” of the days after war was declared and that mass euthanasia was something citizens could do to prepare. But overall, Kean resists providing a satisfying macro-explanatory account or cultural interpretation of what led to the slew of pet deaths. Rather, she emphasizes how every decision to euthanize emerged from the context of a prior existing relationship within an individual household, which she explores by using contemporaneous personal reflections. Still, I would have liked to see more space given to the discussion of the cultural meanings of the massacre to understand its wider contemporary significance and how different British publics interpreted it at the time.

Kean's real concern turns out to be the three-quarters of pet owners who decided to not to do away with the family cat or dog. Rather than tearing them apart, argues Kean, the conditions of the home front, such as aerial bombardment and food shortages, often brought humans and their pets closer together. By placing the massacre in a wider context of human-animal relationships before and after the September killing, Kean cautions us against reading companion species relations during the war solely through a single event occurring at its outset, thus inviting a more nuanced appreciation of how companion species relations transformed, and were transformed by, the challenges of wartime life. In addition to official publications, advertisements, and the records of animal charities, Kean deftly draws upon personal stories and letters, as well as memories and stories transmitted down the years within families, to reveal the presence of animals on the home front; her sensitive handling of material illuminating daily life is one of the main strengths of this account.

Through such sources, then, Kean focuses our attention on how the lives of those spared pets became intertwined with those of humans during the Blitz. For example, under rationing, the diets of pets and owners in many ways merged; cuts of the same horse or whale were rationed for all. Such was the interspecies trading that while a cut of eel sold expressly for human consumption found its way into a cat's dish, a bone from the butcher meant for the dog might get rerouted to its owner's soup. Equally interesting is Kean's discussion of the experience of bombardment as a "joint human-animal activity." The corrugated iron shelters assembled in Londoners' yards served as new spaces of interspecies negotiation but also sociality. Some animals' airstrike anxieties kept humans from evacuating to larger public shelters; other humans felt their own fears eased by their furry compatriots. For Kean, during the bombardment of the Blitz, "humans were being [newly] trained by their animals to both observe their action and to interpret their behavior to facilitate their own—as well as their own safety" (114).

Overall, this is a well-researched and well-crafted book, and by bringing animals into the wartime narrative in their right, Kean does help to reshape our historical understanding of what has often been called the "People's War." It is not merely a well-meaning attempt to "add in" animals to existing histories of World War II, but rather Kean recovers how animals and humans meaningfully interacted and, in so doing, challenges the ways historians have interpreted the wartime experience. For this reason, this is a book that should be read not only by historians of animals but also those interested in domesticity, memory, war, and British history.

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JANICE MORPHET. *Beyond Brexit? How to Assess the UK's Future*. Shorts Insights. Bristol: Policy Press, 2017. Pp. 179. \$12.34 (cloth).
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I feared initially that this book would be rather dull—after all, most academic writing about the European Union certainly merits that description. As it turns out, however, Janice Morphet has provided a lively and readable account of the problems and issues arising from the outcome of the June 2016 referendum on the United Kingdom's membership in the European Union. Perhaps the readability of the work derives from the fact that, although clearly an expert on EU affairs, Morphet is not primarily an academic (having worked mainly in local and central government).