

COURSE SYLLABUS – LLCU199
2021-2022 - FALL SEMESTER

Class schedule: T, Th 2:35PM-3:55PM
Location: 688 Sherbrooke, Room 451
Requirements: Open to newly admitted students in U0 or U1 who may take only one FYS

Professor: Stephanie Posthumus
Office: 688 Sherbrooke, Room 331
Email: stephanie.posthumus@mcgill.ca
Office hours: Tuesday, 12pm-2pm

LLCU199 – Literary Animals



Portrait of a Monkey with Books (2008)
Olivier Richon

Course Overview

Study of the representation of animals in different European literary texts from both a thematic and a theoretical perspective. Questions about narrative voice, alternate worlds, and the human/animal binary will be raised within the larger political context of animals as Other in today's contemporary society.

Course Description

In *L'Animal littéraire. Des animaux et des mots* (2010), Jacques Poirier insists that we can never really know what animals see when they look at us nor how they think about the world and themselves. Yet literature is full of examples of texts that imagine non-human animals' experiences, thoughts, and subjectivities. From Biblical myths to Charles Perrault's fairy tales, from La Fontaine's *Fables* to Franz Kafka's "Metamorphosis," animals haunt the Western literary imagination.

In this class, we will adopt a cross-cultural perspective to analyze texts from Europe, including England, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, and Spain. Published over the last hundred years, these texts illustrate important changes in the ways we think about human-animal relations, define concepts like consciousness, and critique ideologies like anthropocentrism.

To better understand the role of literature's representation of animals, this course also includes contemporary documentaries that explore the boundaries of cinema when imagining animal worlds. In this sense, the course looks more generally at European cultural texts in which animals are sites of critical reflection for questioning what it means to be human in a constantly changing global world.

Finally, this course is squarely situated in the field of Animal Studies that has emerged over the last thirty years to examine some of the humanist assumptions within the humanities. You will be required to read theoretical texts that introduce you to this field and help you examine your own personal assumptions about animals and their role in everyday life.

In this course, we will take up the following questions:

- How do animals come to matter in contemporary European cultural texts? Why and how do animals come to matter in contemporary Western society?
- What literary devices are used to represent animal worlds? How do figures of speech like metaphor support or interfere with understanding animals as others? How do literary texts construct or deconstruct assumptions about uniquely human and animal traits?
- How do contemporary European animal documentaries work within and beyond the human paradigms of literature? What role does the cinematic gaze play when trying to relate to animals as subjects?
- How do cultural frameworks inform representations of literary animals? What role do language and culture play in documentaries?
- What future literary texts and films about animals are needed? Why do humans continue to tell stories about animals?

Instructional Method

Given that this is a seminar-style course, you will be expected to contribute to class discussions regularly. I will introduce new topics and theories, but you will give shape to the course content through your questions, critiques, and discussions. The subject of animals lends itself well to debate and can be quite controversial. Please come to class with an open mind, prepared to respect perspectives that may be in opposition to your own.

Participation and attendance are key to a seminar-style course. I realize that not all students feel comfortable raising their hand to ask questions and those that do can dominate discussion. With this in mind, I will integrate different forms of participation in the class structure: think-pair-share exercises, small-group discussions, short writing activities, on-line discussion forums, etc. I will also create as open and inclusive environment as possible in the classroom.

Pandemic life has been extremely difficult on students and professors over the last year and a half. Being in a classroom, sitting next to each other, and wearing masks (making comprehension more difficult) will take some getting used to. Whenever possible, I will accommodate requests made for help with this transition.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the semester, students will be able to creatively, individually, and collectively:

- Define the main concepts of the field of literary animals as presented in the course material;
- Explain and analyse literary devices and tropes such as narrative point of view, metaphor, satire, biography, anthropomorphism in the literary texts studied in class;
- Identify and discuss various cinematic devices used to represent animal worlds in the documentaries;
- Compare and contrast the main elements of the four course themes, that is, narrating animals, seeing animals, encountering animals, and becoming animals;

- Identify cultural and linguistic differences as they relate to the short stories, novels, and documentaries studied in class;
- Apply critical frameworks to representations of animals in contemporary video clips, ads, images, cultural productions understood broadly.

Required Readings

Novels

Tokarczuk, Olga (2009). *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*. Originally written in Polish under the title *Prowadź swój pług przez kości umarłych*. Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones. New York: Riverhead Books, 2019.

Woolf, Virginia (1933). *Flush: A Biography*. Originally published in English. Penguin Little Black Classics, 2017.

* The novels are available at the Paragraphe bookstore located at 2220 Avenue McGill College.

Short Stories

Calvino, Italo (1983). Excerpts from *Mr Palomar*. Originally published in Italian. Translated by William Weaver. Suffolk: Picador, 1985.

Cortázar, Julio (1956). "Axolotl." *Blow-Up and Other Stories*. Originally published in Spanish. Translated by Paul Blackburn. N.Y.: Pantheon Books, 1967. 3-9.

Kafka, Franz (1917). "A Report to an Academy." *The Complete Stories and Parables*. Originally published in German. Edited and translated by Nabum N. Glatzer. New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1984.

Volodine, Antoine (2006). "Wong I" and "Wong II." Originally published in French. Translated by Addison Woolsey. *Nos animaux préférés. Entrevoûtes*. Paris: Seuil, 2006.

* The short stories will be posted as PDF files on the *MyCourses* website.

Theoretical Texts

Berger, John (1980). "Why Look at Animals?" *About Looking*. New York: Pantheon, 1980. 1-28

Bernaerts, Lars, Marco Caracciolo, Luc Herman, Bart Vervaeck. "The Storied Lives of Non-Human Narrators," *Narrative* 22.1 (2014): 68-93.

Clark, Timothy. "Anthropomorphism." *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011. 192-201.

Derrida, Jacques (2006). "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)." *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. Originally published in French. Translated by David Wills. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008. 1-51.

Fudge, Erica (2000). "Introduction to Special Edition: Reading Animals," *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture & Ecology* 4.2. 101-113.

Waldau, Paul (2013). Excerpts from *Animal Studies: An Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press.

* The theoretical texts will be posted as PDF files on the *MyCourses* website.

Required Viewings

Becoming Animal. Directed by Emma Davie and Peter Mettler with the words and presence of David Abram. Switzerland/UK, Maximage, 2018.

**Bestiaire*. Directed by Denis Côté. Quebec, Metafilms, 2013.

Grizzly Man, Werner Herzog. USA, Lions Gate Films, 2005.

**La Marche de l'empereur*, Luc Jacquet. France, Bonne Pioche, 2005. Translated as *March of the Penguins*, Warner Independent Films.

* These films are on reserve at the McGill Library in DVD format. You can stream *Grizzly Man* from the McGill Library website (Criterion on Demand) and I will make *Bestiaire* available to you on the *MyCourses* website.

Course Content

Over the semester, we will examine four main themes as they relate to the representations of animals in the literary texts and documentaries: 1) Narrating Animals; 2) Seeing Animals; 3) Encountering Animals; 4) Becoming Animals. These four themes build on each other by moving from questions of language and speech (narrating animals) to questions of perception (seeing animals), from questions of human-animal relations (embodied encounters) to questions of our own expressions of animality (becoming animal). Please feel free to bring up other books or films or cultural content when they directly relate to these themes.

We will spend three weeks on each of the four themes, reading a novel and/or short story for each theme as well as viewing one documentary. At times, you will be required to read additional theoretical or non-fiction articles to further develop your critical vocabulary for discussing class themes (see the detailed course calendar below). Readings must be done before class whereas documentaries will be viewed in class.

Evaluation and Course Elements

Attendance, participation	15%
Warm-up discussion	10%
Online glossary entries	10%
Short papers (15%, 20%)	35%
Take-home exam	30%

Attendance and participation (15%)

In a seminar course, you are expected to come to all classes and to participate regularly. You will be penalized 1% for each unexcused absence up to a total of 10%. More than ten absences will result in an automatic F in the class. You are allowed one unpenalized absence during the semester.

Class participation means coming to class with the readings done, questions prepared, interesting passages underlined, comments and critiques noted in the margins. We will regularly break up into small groups so that you will have a chance to discuss your questions with your peers.

Warm-up discussion (10%)

With a partner, you will lead a warm-up discussion about animals as represented in a contemporary example from the arts understood broadly (film, video game, painting, photography, poetry, art installation, etc.). Your example should relate **directly** to the theme we are discussing that week and **ideally** illustrate one of the concepts in the online glossary. You will spend no more than **5 minutes** summarizing the main points of your example and then lead discussion for **10 minutes**.

Be sure to time yourself in advance for the summary part of the discussion as I will stop you at the 5-minute mark. You will also want to prepare more questions than you think you will need for the discussion. Organize them in a logical order beginning with 'what' questions and then moving on to 'how' to 'why' questions (avoid yes/no questions).

You will prepare no more than **three** PowerPoint slides for your discussion (one for an image of your example, one for your questions, and one for your references), and you will post your slides on the *MyCourses* Discussion Board before 9pm the **night before** your warm-up discussion.

The schedule for warm-up discussions will be determined the second week of class.

Online glossary entries (10%)

You will define in three sentences or less two of the key theoretical concepts from the online 'Literary Animals Glossary' (shared Google Doc). You will use your own words and provide a definition that refers explicitly to course material and so is specific to our class discussion and use of these concepts. This part of the assignment is worth 5%.

The other part of the assignment (5%) will be editing and commenting on another student's two definitions. You will provide constructive feedback and correction where needed.

The first group of definitions will be due October 7 with editing and commenting completed a week later, which will be a Friday, October 15 because of the Fall Break.

The second group of definitions will be due November 11 with editing and commenting completed by November 18.

Short papers (15%, 20%)

In the **750-word** short papers, you will apply an idea from a theoretical reading to one of the fictional texts or the documentaries. I will provide you with a prompt paragraph two weeks before the assignment is due. All assignments must be submitted online in the appropriate *MyCourses* Assignment Dropbox folder before class at 2:35pm on the day they are due. Everyone must submit the first short paper (due Tuesday, September 28) and you will have the choice to submit either the second or third short paper.

Dates: September 28, October 26, November 23

Take-home exam (35%)

The take-home exam will be an eight- to ten-page, double spaced text (**2500-3000 words**), organized around a set of short and long answer questions. You will be required to develop your own critical concepts, apply theoretical ideas used in class, and develop your own interpretations of passages from the literary texts and documentaries.

If plagiarism is suspected, I will ask you to produce previous drafts of your answers as well as photocopies of all your sources. You will submit your take-home exam on *MyCourses*. No late submissions will be accepted.

Date: TBD

Course Policies

- The learning platform *MyCourses* will be used to post Keynote presentations, required readings, assignment descriptions, etc. You should check the site regularly (at least twice a week, in the evening on the days before we have class) for any changes or updates.
- Assignments will be submitted on *MyCourses*. You will be penalized 10% for late submissions (including 10 minutes after the time due) and an additional 10% for each day after the due date.
- Attendance will be taken at the beginning of class. Please arrive on time and do not leave before the end of class, as it disrupts the class and distracts other students.
- Laptops are permitted in class if all students agree that they are essential to taking notes. No YouTube, Snapchat, Instagram, Netflix, etc. during class.
- Please turn off mobile phones and any other device that might make noise during class.
- Email will be answered Monday to Friday between 9am and 5pm and not on weekends or evenings.
- In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, you may submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded. Please be aware that impeccable grammar is required whether you choose

to write in French or in English. // Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté, sauf dans le cas des cours dont l'un des objets est la maîtrise d'une langue.

Academic Integrity

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/).

L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/)

Course Calendar

* Please be aware that I may make changes to this schedule depending on any additional time we need to spend on particular texts. Changes will be announced in class and on *MyCourses*. You need to check *MyCourses* at least twice a week ideally the day before each class.

** Readings must be done before the class during which we will be discussing them. Documentaries will be viewed during class.

Introduction – Literary Animals

Thurs 9/2 Literary Animal Studies

Theme 1 – Narrating Animals

Week 1

Tues 9/7 Satire & animal narration

Required Reading: 1) SHORT STORY – Kafka’s “A Report to an Academy” ; 2)
Newspaper article – Andrew O’Hagan’s “Fiction’s Talking Animals” (available online at
The Guardian - <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/may/01/andrew-ohagan-talking-animals>)

Thurs 9/9 (Re)learning to read animals

Required Reading: Theoretical article – Erica Fudge’s “Reading Animals”

Week 2

Tues 9/14 Pets & animal biography

Required Reading: NOVEL – Woolf’s *Flush*

Thurs 9/16 Relating (to) animal worlds

Required Reading: 1) NOVEL – Woolf’s *Flush*; 2) Theoretical article – Lars Bernaerts’ et al.
“The Storied Lives of Non-Human Narrators”

Week 3

Tues 9/21 Voice-over & narration

In-class viewing: DOCUMENTARY – *La marche des penguins* // *The march of the penguins*

Thurs 9/23 Types of anthropomorphism

Required Reading: Theoretical article – Timothy Clark’s “Anthropomorphism”

Theme 2 – Seeing Animals

Week 4

Tues 9/28 Sites of observation

Required Reading: NOVEL – Excerpts from Calvino’s *Mr Palomar*

Thurs 9/30 Animal (dis)appearance
Required Reading: Theoretical article – Berger’s “Why Look at Animals?”

Week 5

Tues 10/5 Forms of agency
Required Reading: NOVEL – Excerpts from Calvino’s *Mr Palomar*
Required Viewing: TEDTalk– Stephanie Braccini Slade’s “Why Animals in Zoos Need Choice”
(https://www.ted.com/talks/stephanie_braccini_slade_why_animals_in_zoos_need_choice)

Thurs 10/7 Cinematic gazes
In-class viewing: DOCUMENTARY – *Bestiaire // Bestiary*

FALL READING BREAK – October 9-13, 2021

Week 6

Fri 10/15 Slow cinema and perception
Required Viewing: Conference Round Table – “AV Festival 12: Slow Cinema Discussion”
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ru_zMSHZW-E)

Theme 3 – Encountering Animals

Week 7

Tues 10/19 Animal as hunted/hunter
Required Reading: NOVEL – Tokarczuk’s *Drive Your Plow*

Thurs 10/21 Following animal traces
Required Reading: NOVEL – Tokarczuk’s *Drive Your Plow*

Week 8

Tues 10/26 Embodied encounters
Required Reading: NOVEL – Tokarczuk’s *Drive Your Plow*

Thurs 10/28 Animals in poetry (capture & release)
Required Reading: NOVEL – Tokarczuk’s *Drive Your Plow*

Week 9

Tues 11/2 Loving animals
In-class viewing: DOCUMENTARY – *Grizzly Man*

Thurs 11/4 Humanimal deaths
In-class viewing: DOCUMENTARY – *Grizzly Man*

Theme 4 – Becoming Animals

Week 10

Tues 11/9 Metaphor & Metamorphosis
Required Reading: SHORT STORY – Cortázar’s “Axolotl”

Thurs 11/11 Narrative genres & worldviews

Required Viewing: TEDxTalk – John Reid’s “The Power of Animism”
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lmhFRarkw8E>)

Week 11

Tues 11/16 Animals (caught) in language I

Required Reading: Theoretical article – Derrida’s “The Animal That Therefore I Am”

Thurs 11/18 Animals (caught) in language II

Required Reading: Theoretical article – Derrida’s “The Animal That Therefore I Am”

Week 12

Tues 11/23 Human animality

In-class viewing: DOCUMENTARY – *Becoming Animal*

Thurs 11/25 Becoming (animal) nature

In-class viewing: DOCUMENTARY – *Becoming Animal*

The Future of/with Animals

Week 13

Tues 11/30 Post-apocalyptic animals

Required Reading: SHORT STORY – Volodine’s “Wong I” and “Wong II”

Thurs 12/2 Local/global perspectives on extinction

Required Viewing: WEBSITE – Maya Lin’s “What’s Missing?” Database
(<http://whatismissing.org>)