LLCU199 FYS – 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 try to imagine non-human animals’ experiences, thoughts, feelings and unique ways of being. From Biblical myths to Charles Perrault’s fairy tales, from La Fontaine’s *Fables* to Franz Kafka’s “Metamorphosis,” animals populate the Western literary imagination.

In this class, we will adopt a cross-cultural perspective to analyze European texts from England, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Poland. The mix of historical and contemporary fictional texts illustrate important changes in the ways we think about human-animal relations, define concepts like consciousness, understand the role of language and critique ideologies like anthropocentrism.

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 and literary studies more specifically. You will be introduced to the critical terms and ideas of Animal Studies, and you will be asked to examine your own ideas about non-human animals and their role in everyday life.
In this course, we will take up the following questions amongst others:

- How do animals come to matter in contemporary European literary texts? Why and how do animals count as subjects in contemporary Western society?

- What literary devices are used to represent animal worlds? How do different figures of speech support or interfere with understanding animals as unique others? How do literary texts construct or deconstruct what are considered uniquely human and animal traits?

- How do cultural frameworks inform representations of literary animals? What role does language play in the short stories, fables and novels studied in class?

- 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 non-human 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 sharply contrast with your own.

Participation and attendance are key to a seminar-style course. Since not all students feel comfortable raising their hand to ask questions and those that do can dominate discussion, 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.

While the pandemic is officially ‘over,’ there are still many cases of covid going around. If you need to miss class because of illness, send me an email in advance. To avoid losing participation points, you may submit one additional online discussion post when you miss a class. Follow the Quebec government covid guidelines in terms of isolation since they are regularly updated (https://bit.ly/3QWE5uC). Whenever possible, I will accommodate requests for help or I will point students to additional resources available at McGill.

**Learning Outcomes**

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

- Define the main concepts of the field of Animal Studies as they relate to course material and use them creatively and critically in written assignments and class discussion;

- Explain and analyse literary devices and tropes such as narrative point of view, metaphor, satire, biography, anthropomorphism as they relate to course material;

- Compare and contrast the four main themes of the course: narrating animals, seeing animals, encountering animals, and becoming animals;

- Identify and critique their own socio-cultural perspectives when analyzing literary fiction, watching films and videos, reading theoretical and philosophical texts;
Apply critical frameworks to representations of non-human animals in contemporary video clips, ads, images, fiction and poetry cultural productions understood broadly.

**Required Readings**

**Fiction**


* The five novels are available at the Paragraphe bookstore located at 2220 McGill College Avenue. See the link here - [https://paragraphbooks.com/fr/collections/textbooks/LLCU-199](https://paragraphbooks.com/fr/collections/textbooks/LLCU-199)

The other required literary texts (fables, short stories, poems) will be made available online. If you are able to read the texts in their original language, please do so. We will take up the question of translation at different moments throughout the semester.

**Theory**


Theoretical texts will be posted as PDF files on the MyCourses website or made available through online links.

Additional required reading (poems, online videos, films) will be posted on MyCourses and is indicated in the course calendar.

**Course Content**

Over the semester, we will examine four main themes as they relate to the representations of animals in contemporary European fiction:

1) Narrating Animals - Who speaks for whom? How can a human tell a non-human animal’s story? What is the role of anthropomorphism when narrating non-human animals’ ways of being in the world? What new forms can language take to defamiliarize the reader? Why does it matter?
2) **Seeing Animals** - How does the act of looking at animals allow for seeing the world differently? In what way does the human gaze remain blind to animal difference? What forms of power are present when an animal becomes the object of the human gaze?

3) **Encountering Animals** – What kinds of human-animal relations are possible in literary fiction? What ethical positions are needed when encountering animals in fiction and in real life? How can an encounter with a non-human animal be understood ethically?

4) **Becoming Animals** - What forms does human animality take? How is animal-human metamorphosis imagined? What roles do the body and senses play when considering different ways of becoming animals? What new philosophical frameworks are available for thinking about becoming animals?

We will spend three weeks on each theme as it emerges in the texts we will be reading. At times, I will provide clips from films and documentaries to complement the in-class readings. The themes are meant to increase in difficulty in terms of the philosophies and ideologies they challenge. Please do not hesitate to ask questions in class or by email and to bring up other books or films or cultural content when they directly relate to these themes.

**Evaluation and Course Elements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance, participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online reading responses</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warm-up discussion</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short papers</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take-home exam</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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 will need to send me an email before class if you will be absent because you are not feeling well. If you have sent me an email, you may post an extra online discussion board post to make up for your absence. Over the semester, you are allowed two unpenalized absences (no email needs to be sent).

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

**Online reading responses (4 x 2.5% = 10%)**

Over the semester, you will post four reading responses on the MyCourses Discussion Board. In 200-250 words, you will raise an issue about the text that we will be discussing that week, identifying a point that relates to the theme as we have been discussing it. You may decide which of the required readings you would like to respond to, but you must post your reading response before midnight on the day before the first class we will be discussing that text (exact dates will be posted on MyCourses).

**Warm-up discussion (15%)**

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 and the literary text that we are discussing that week or the previous week (if we have just gotten started on a new theme, you may choose the previous week’s theme and literary text). You will spend no more than **five minutes** summarizing the main points of your example and no less than **ten minutes** leading discussion.
Be sure to time yourself in advance for the summary part of the discussion as I will stop you at the five-minute mark. You will also want to prepare more questions than you think are necessary for the discussion. Organize your questions logically, beginning with ‘what’ questions and then moving on to ‘how’ and ‘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.

Short papers \((1 \times 10\% + 1 \times 15\% = 25\%)\)

In the short papers \((750 \text{ words})\), you will respond to a prompt paragraph that I will provide two weeks before the assignment is due. All assignments must be submitted online in the appropriate MyCourses Assignment Dropbox folder before class at 4:05pm on the day they are due. Everyone must submit the first short paper (due Wednesday, 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 \((2500-3000 \text{ words})\), organized around a set of definitions, short answer questions and long essays. You will be required to develop your own critical concepts, apply theoretical ideas used in class, and interpret passages from the course material. 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 slides, 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.

- For each written assignment, you will be asked to fill out a form stating which AI tools you have used and to what extent you have used them during the writing process – brainstorming, editing, sentence generation. This class has a policy that you may use AI tools, but you must cite them correctly, do due diligence (ex. double check sources cited), and be prepared to clarify written ideas in class during discussion.

- 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 if we need to spend more time on particular texts. Changes will be announced in class and on MyCourses. Please check MyCourses at least twice a week, ideally the day before each class.

** Readings must be done before the first class during which we will be discussing the text in question.

Introduction – Literary Animals

Aug 31  Literary Animal Studies – syllabus overview, introductions, favourite animal stories

Week 1
Sept 5  Reading literary animals – content, form
   Required Reading: Selection of La Fontaine’s Fables (1668-1694)) (link posted on MyCourses)

Sept 7  (Re)reading literary animals - critical perspectives
   Required Reading: Erica Fudge’s article “Reading Animals” (2000) (PDF posted on MyCourses)

Theme 1 – Narrating Animals

Week 2
Sept 12  Human/animal binaries
   Required Reading: Rudyard Kipling’s “The Jungle Book” (1894) (Chap1)

Sept 14  Breaking down binaries - satire & imitation
   Required Reading: Franz Kafka’s “A Report to an Academy” (1917)

Week 3
Sept 19  Problems of language
   Required Reading: Virginia Woolf’s Flush (1933) (first half)

Sept 21  Pet biographies, questions of genre
   Required Reading: Virginia Woolf’s Flush (1933) (second half)
   Required Viewing: clips from My Dog Tulip (2009)

Week 4
Sept 26  Human/animal binaries revisited, cultural hybrids
   Required Reading: Alain Mabanckou’s Memoirs of a Porcupine (2006)

Sept 28  Postmodern storytelling
   Required Reading: Alain Mabanckou’s Memoirs of a Porcupine (2006)

FIRST SHORT PAPER DUE
### Theme 2 – Seeing Animals

**Week 5**

Oct 3  
Zoos & (dis)appearing animals  

Oct 5  
Sight & the power of the gaze  
And John Berger’s article “Why Look at Animals?” (1980)

**FALL READING BREAK – October 6-11, 2023**

**Week 6**

Oct 13  
Animals in/as art  

**Week 7**

Oct 17  
Reversing the gaze, being observed  
*Required viewing:* Clips from Denis Côté’s documentary *Bestiaire* (2012) (link available on MyCourses)

Oct 19  
New ways of seeing (animals)  
*Required reading:* Jean Christophe Bailly’s *The Animal Side* (2007) (Chapters 6 and 11)  
(available on MyCourses)

### Theme 3 – Encountering Animals

**Week 8**

Oct 24  
Poetic animals, the power of language  
*Required Reading:* Rainer Marie Rilke’s poem “The Panther” (1903) and Charles Baudelaire’s “Le Chat/The Cat” (1857) + Students’ selection of poetry (TBD)

Oct 26  
Animal subjects & questions of ethics  
*Required Reading:* Olga Tokarczuk’s *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead* (2009)  
AND excerpts from Peter Singer’s *Animal Liberation* (1975)

**SECOND SHORT PAPER DUE**

**Week 9**

Oct 31  
Following animal signs  
*Required Reading:* Olga Tokarczuk’s *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead* (2009)

Nov 2  
Embodied encounters  
*Required Reading:* Olga Tokarczuk’s *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead* (2009)  
AND Baptiste Morizot’s *On the Animal Trail* (2017) (Chap4)

**Week 10**

Nov 7  
Magical realism  
*Required Reading:* Olga Tokarczuk’s *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead* (2009)

Nov 9  
Humanimal deaths  
*Required Viewing:* Clips from Werner Herzog’s *The Grizzly Man*
### Theme 4 – Becoming Animals

#### Week 11
- **Nov 14**  
  Human/animal metamorphosis  
  *Required Reading*: Julio Cortázar’s “Axolotl” (1956)  
  *Required Viewing*: Students’ selection of images (TBD)

- **Nov 16**  
  Imagining animal bodies  
  *Required Reading*: Audrée Wilhelmy’s *Body of the Beasts* (2017)

#### Week 12
- **Nov 21**  
  Rethinking human animality  
  *Required Reading*: Audrée Wilhelmy’s *Body of the Beasts* (2017)

- **Nov 23**  
  Beyond human-animal binarics  

**THIRD SHORT PAPER DUE**

#### Week 13
- **Nov 28**  
  Wildness as trope  
  *Required Reading*: Audrée Wilhelmy’s *Body of the Beasts* (2017)

- **Dec 05**  
  Wrap-up – Human-animal future becomings