Literary Animals

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Office Hours: on Google Calendar
Office: 285 Mercer, 8th floor

Spring 2020
M W 3:30-4:45p
12WV L113
Course Description

What do we learn from animals in literature? As the interdisciplinary field of Animal Studies grows, scholars have opened a space for considering pressing questions centered around sympathy, compassion, care, ethics, violence, and kinship in relation to literary engagements with animals. This course engages a range of literary texts from children’s stories and poetry to novels and films in order to unpack how animal presences animate our stories; we will think of stories both within and beyond the context of literature. The course turns around questions of representation—the mode through which animals appear in literary texts—that offer a rich landscape to explore the relationship between humans and animals, as well as “real” and literary animals. How do literary animals shape our more general understandings of and relationships to animals in the world? What strategies do authors take to represent animals in literature? In what forms do animals show up on the page? By paying close and critical attention to literary animals, not simply as symbols and metaphors of human concerns, but agential beings that reveal important insights into human-animal relationships, it may be possible to cultivate a more reciprocal relationship between human and non-human animals.

Required Texts

All texts are available at NYU Bookstore, NYU Classes, Bobst Library, and through other vendors. Please note that all readings are subject to change.

J.M. Coetzee’s The Lives of Animals (1999)
Ruth Ozeki’s A Tale for the Time Being (2013)
Munro Leaf’s The Story of Ferdinand (ISBN: 9780140502343)
Rudyard Kipling’s The Jungle Book (ISBN: 9781509805594)
Ceyda Torun’s Kedi (film 2016)
Karen Joy Fowler’s We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves (2014)
Jane (film 2017)
Grading Criteria and Overview

Grading Criteria:
This seminar is designed to develop close reading, critical thinking, and conceptual analysis across a range of interdisciplinary subjects and texts. Active participation alongside careful reading and analysis is required to work through assumptions, unpack prior knowledge, and build an awareness of the significance and implications of the course topics. For all assignments (including participation) the grading criteria seeks: comprehension, clarity in presentation and writing, and innovative, critical thinking. All written assignments must use current MLA formatting and be submitted through NYU Classes.

Participation (20%):
The success of our seminar depends on active, lively, and thoughtful engagement with both the readings and your fellow students' work. You are expected to read the required materials for the week, bring them to class with you, be prepared to discuss them during the seminar, and to listen attentively. Since the seminar runs on active discussion, I cannot re-teach you the material you miss if you are absent. If you cannot make it to class, please email me in advance and arrange to get notes from your peers. Participation will be evaluated based on: attendance, attentiveness, and the quality of your contributions. Missing more than one class without permission, lateness, distracted and distracting use of electronics, and infrequent, anecdotal, or off-topic contributions will negatively impact your grade.

Seminar Presentation (15%):
Within the first few weeks, I will assign your presentation date. More details about this presentation can be found on NYU Classes.

Short Assignment (10%) 2 double-spaced pages: You will be expected to complete one short assignment that builds your analytical skills in relation to your everyday life. More details can be found on NYU Classes.

Representation that Works Assignment (15%): Find a text that you think represents animals well and in a complex way. Your writing (4 double-spaced pages) should explain, analyze, and justify your choice of text. It cannot be a text from the course. You will also present your choice of text to the class later in the term.

Final Essay Pitch and Final Essay (40%): Responding to feedback and revising both ideas and writing are crucial parts of writing an effective essay. You will be required to complete a pitch for your final essay that thoroughly introduces, explains, and justifies your topic choice. Then, your final paper will have to build on feedback you receive about the pitch as it examines the main concerns of the course through your own lens. Pitch: 4 double-spaced pages, Final Paper: 8-10 double-spaced pages.
Participation Grade 20%

**GRADE: A-RANGE**
Regular, prepared attendance; active, engaged participation that demonstrates knowledge of the texts; frequently responds to presentation questions; is never distracted, listens carefully, and offers relevant, thoughtful ideas.

**GRADE: B-RANGE**
Regular, prepared attendance with a few absences; attentive and engaged, but irregular participation; not distracted; generally engages with presentation questions; listens carefully and often offers clear, thoughtful ideas.

**GRADE: C-RANGE**
Frequent, unexcused absences; attentive, but not active participation; sometimes distracted; unprepared for class; not demonstrating knowledge or completion of the readings; distracted or distracting group participation; does not participate in conversation.

**GRADE: D-F**
Frequent, unexcused absences; distracted and distracting use of electronics; sleeping; unprepared for class; not demonstrating knowledge of readings; no engagement in conversation or with presentations.
Class Administration

Students who require accommodation for a disability should consult with the Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at www.nyu.edu/life/safety-healthwellness/students-with-disabilities.

Plagiarism results in failure in the class and referral to an academic dean. Plagiarism includes: copying sentences or fragments from any source without quotes or references; not citing every source used in your papers; citing internet information without proper citation; presenting someone else’s work as your own; or copying verbatim from any source. You are subject to CAS’s guidelines on plagiarism: cas.nyu.edu/page/ug.academicintegrity.

Email Policy: Other than coming to my office hours, email is the best way to communicate with me. I will respond to emails within two days of receiving them and may take longer over the weekends or holidays.

Extensions/Incompletes: Extensions and incompletes will only be granted under exceptional circumstances. Please get in touch and discuss these requests with me well in advance of the assignment deadline.

Late Policy: Late assignments will be subtracted one grade-point for lateness starting immediately after the due date/time.
Schedule

Week 1 – 1/27: Introductions + Syllabus
1/29: Attentiveness, real, represented, and read animals + Alexandra Horowitz’s “Fledgling Grief” + Mohsin Hamid’s "The Kites are Leaving"

Week 2 – 2/3 & 2/5: Representing Animals Shapiro & Copeland’s “Toward a Critical Theory of Animal Issues in Fiction” + Alexander Macleod's "Lagomorph"

Week 3 – 2/10 & 2/12: The Lives of Animals J.M. Coetzee’s The Lives of Animals

Week 4 – 2/17: President’s Day (No Classes)
2/19: Animals in Human Stories Ruth Ozeki’s A Tale for the Time Being

Week 5 – 2/24 & 2/26: Animals in Human Stories - Animal Homes Ruth Ozeki’s A Tale for the Time Being

Week 6 – 3/2 & 3/4: Animal Stories (Allegorical Animals) Munro Leaf’s The Story of Ferdinand + Rudyard Kipling’s The Jungle Book


Week 8 – 3/16-22: Spring Recess (No Classes)


Week 11 – 4/6 & 4/8: Animal Characters Karen Joy Fowler’s We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves

Week 12 – 4/13 & 4/15: Animal Characters Karen Joy Fowler’s We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves

Week 13 – 4/20 Poetic Animals: Ted Hughes, Vicki Hearne, Aimee Nezhukumatathil 4/22: + Animals in/as Politics: "Tyger Tyger" by Neel Sethi


Week 16 – 5/11: Last Class