

ENG 469/569
THINKING ABOUT ANIMALS
Professor LeMenager PLC 457
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Course Description: This course intends to provoke questions about the meaning of animals in human life and culture, the philosophical status of “the animal” versus the human, the cultures of animals, and the possibilities of interspecies companionship and communication. We take the arts of literature and film as our primary archive in the investigation of how it feels to be human, to be companioned by animals, to be animal, and to consider alternatives to this strong binary.

Texts:

J.M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals* (1999)
Claire Preston, *Bee* (2006)
Grant Morrison and artist Frank Quitely, *WE3* (2011)

All other readings to be posted on Blackboard

Assignments:

Participation (10%): Participation includes regular attendance and being intellectually “present” in the class to discuss course readings and films. You are allowed one unexplained absence. Every other absence must be documented.

Student-Led Discussion (10%): Student teams lead discussion about four class films. Each team must create a carefully considered, guided conversation for the class as a whole about the film in question. This will require watching the film ahead of time and meeting at least once to divide tasks and formalize speaking roles.

Midterm Exam (25%): An in-class midterm exam tests students’ knowledge of course readings and films. You will be asked to identify and explain course concepts (40% of grade) and choose three quotations and/or scenes that have challenged your way of thinking, explaining in detail why they have had this effect (60% of grade). **April 23rd.**

Student Fieldwork/Portfolio Presentation (40%): Students will enter “the field” of our local environment to record observations of animals, plants, and other life encountered in the everyday. Each student should choose a place to conduct her/his field study that is accessible from the student’s residence by bike or foot. Allow yourself to be alert and attentive to this place for at least an hour, taking down notes, taking pictures with your phone, and/or recording observations. From your field study, choose one form of life (animal, plant, etcetera) for which you will create a portfolio to upload to our class website and to present to the class. One goal of the portfolio is to make a form of life perhaps overlooked in your everyday routines into a virtual “star,” as charismatic as a grizzly or panda bear. The portfolio will include: 1) a description of your chosen life form, in your own words, derived from biological science; 2) your personal reflections on it, which may feature sketches, writing, or photos/video; 3) notation of literature, art, or films in which this life form has appeared (you can begin to find such traces with a simple Internet search). **You will upload your portfolio on or before 5/6 and present it to the class on 5/7.**

Final Gloss (Exam) (15%): A short take-home final exam requires you to identify and comment upon ten quotations from course readings after the midterm exam. **Due June 14th.**

Incompletes will be given for documented medical emergencies only.

Accessible Education

If you have a documented disability and anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please make arrangements to meet with me soon and request that the Accessible Education Center send a letter explaining what accommodations may be helpful to you in this course.

Inclement Weather

If inclement weather makes traveling to campus difficult, I will notify you by email and/or voice mail about whether we are holding class. If the weather is bad, check your email for a message from me. Whether or not I decide to hold class, you should use your own judgment about the safety of traveling to campus.

Schedule

3/31 Course Introduction

QUESTIONS OF ETHICS

WEEK 1

3/31 J.M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals* (1999)

4/2 *The Lives of Animals* (1999), René Descartes , Excerpt

WEEK 2

4/7 *The Lives of Animals* (1999), Jeremy Bentham, Excerpt

4/9 LAB DAY: Choose Your Species

UNEQUAL PERSONHOOD

WEEK 3

4/14 Martha Nussbaum, "The Moral Status of Animals"; Tom Regan, "The Rights of Humans and Other Animals"

4/16 Jonathan Franzen, "My Bird Problem" (2005); John Berger, "Why Look at Animals?" (1977)

WEEK 4

4/21 Discuss Film: *Blackfish* (Dir. Gabriela Cowperthwaite, 2013) **STUDENT-LED DISCUSSION**

4/23 In Class Midterm

OBSERVATION AND EXPERIMENT

WEEK 5

4/28 E. O. Wilson, "Bernhardsdorp" (1984), Henry David Thoreau, "Brute Neighbors" (1854)

4/30 Vicki Hearne, "A Walk with Washoe: How Far Can We Go?" from *Adam's Task* (1982); Barbara Smuts, "Encounters with Animal Minds," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* (2001)

WEEK 6

5/5 Watch Film: *Project Nim* (Dir. James Marsh, 2011) **STUDENT-LED DISCUSSION**

5/7 Citizen Humanities, Citizen Science: Report to Class on "Life Overlooked"

CULTURES OF ANIMALS/CULTURES OF EXTINCTION

WEEK 7

5/12 Excerpts from Claire Preston, *Bee* (2006)

5/14 *Bee* (cont'd), Nathaniel Rich, "The Mammoth Cometh" (2014)

WEEK 8

5/19 **Watch Film:** *Queen of the Sun* (Dir. Taggart Seigel, 2011) **STUDENT-LED DISCUSSION**

5/21 Grant Morrison and artist Frank Quitely, *WE3* (2011)

WEEK 9

5/26 *WE3*, Donna J. Haraway, "Taking Care of Unexpected Country" (2011)

HUMAN NATURE

5/28

Darwin, Excerpts from *The Descent of Man* (1871), Tim Ingold, "Humanity and Animality" (1994)

WEEK 10

6/2 *The Planet of the Apes* (Dir. Franklin J. Schaffner, 1968) **STUDENT-LED DISCUSSION**

6/4 Charles C. Mann, "The State of the Species" (2013)