

Making the Modern Animal
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Making the Modern Animal

This course investigates the field of animal studies in the context of 18th and 19th century literature. Beginning with the political and the social we will take up some of the most pressing questions of animal studies — what is the boundary between animals and humans? do animals have rights? and how do we as humans live with other animals? — and examine how people have addressed these questions now and in the earlier periods. We will think about the ways in which literature shapes our understanding of things like animal feelings. We will likewise think historically about how the theories and writing of the 18th and 19th century still lingers in and is relevant to our understanding of animals today. In the second part of the course we will take a focused look at the emergence of the life sciences in the long 18th century (and 19th century), and the coinciding fear and fascination with multiple forms of hybridity. In the final section the course we will open outwards to consider the environment and contemporary environmental crises, thinking especially about the intertwined nature of environmental crisis and the role of literature. Alongside each week we will read historical texts from philosophy, scientific, legal and religious discourse, and/or contemporary critical theory in animal studies, the history of science and ecocriticism which address and interact with our literary readings.

Required Texts

Virginia Woolf, *Flush*, Martino Fine Books, 2013, isbn: [9781614274902](#)

Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Grasmere and Alfoxden Journals*, Oxford UP, 2008, isbn: [9780199536870](#)

Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*, Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003, isbn: [9780971757585](#)

Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, Oxford World's Classics, 1998, isbn: [9780192833778](#)

H.G. Wells, *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, Signet Classics, 2005, isbn: [9780451529893](#)

Beatrix Potter, *Tales of Peter Rabbit and His Friends*, Random House, 2000, isbn: [9780517449011](#)

Louise Erdrich, *Future Home of the Living God*, Harper, 2017, isbn: [978-0062694058](#)

(Plus assorted readings on canvas)

Assignments

Short Paper — A 5 page paper due in week 3 of the semester which makes an argument about one of the texts, philosophical or literary, that we have read so far.

Annotated Bibliography — An annotated bibliography of 8-10 sources. Your annotation should reproduce in a few sentences the main argument of the work and should also include, in a few sentences, how you plan on engaging with the thesis of the work you have summarized.

Prospectus — A two-page (500 word) document outlining your proposed research topic. A good prospectus should include a brief introduction of your text, its significance or interest to a larger critical conversation, the method or critical theory with which you plan to approach the text and a sketch of your proposed argument.

Draft Workshop — In week 10 of the semester we will have a mandatory workshop of your research paper drafts. The goals of this workshop are to give you useful feedback on your paper and to practice giving feedback to your peers. As such, you will be required to submit a 15-20 page draft to the whole class the Sunday before our workshop meeting and to bring to our meeting a one page (300 words) response to each of the other papers.

Research Paper — The culminating assignment of the course, the research paper is a 20-25 page critical research paper on a text of your choice. You may write on any text from any period, on or off our syllabus, as long as you are engaging with at least one of the theories our course investigates (animal studies, ecocriticism, history of science, post-colonial studies, children's literature, etc. — your topic can be very flexible). The final paper should engage productively with the critical conversation around your text and the theoretical field in which you are working.

Junior Tutorial Meetings and Conference — The junior tutorial program includes three required meetings during the semester and a final conference at which students from all the tutorials will present on their research papers.

Grading

Attendance/Participation — 20%

Short Paper — 5%

Annotated Bibliography — 10%

Prospectus — 10%

Draft Workshop — 15%

Research Paper — 40%

Schedule

Part 1: The Political and the Social

Week 1

Categorizing the animal/human divide

How can we understand and articulate our relationship to animals? Do we use the language of rights? Of feelings? What do our discourses on animals tell us about our understanding of ourselves and of human rights?

Virginia Woolf, *Flush*

Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*

John Locke, excerpts from *Essay on Human Understanding* and *Second Treatise on Government*

Week 2

Radical Vegetarianism: the moral difficulty of animal lives

Why is it so difficult to acknowledge the value of animal lives? How are animal lives represented in literature? Or plant lives? In what ways is the affirmation of animal life a radical act? How does that affirmation alter our understanding of human-ness?

Percy Shelley, "Mutability," "The Sensitive Plant," "To a Sky-Lark"

Shelley, "A Vindication of Natural Diet"

Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, excerpt

Tutorial Meeting 1, Date TBA

Week 3

The cult of sentiment: representing animal emotion

What options does 18th century sentiment (sympathy, feeling) offer for understanding and representing animal life? What sorts of societies does literature of sentiment imagine? Does anthropomorphizing deny or explore the otherness of nonhuman creatures?

Robert Burns: "To a Mouse," "To a Louse," "The Death and Dying Words of Poor Mailie," "Poor Mailie's Elegy," "The Auld Farmer's New Year Salutation to his Auld Mare, Maggie,"

William Cowper: "Letter to Mr. Urban" (description of his tame hares, published in the *Gentleman's Magazine*)

Tobias Meneley, *The Animal Claim*: Introduction and Chapter 1

Erin Parker, "Doubt Not An Affectionate Host: Cowper's Hares and the Hospitality of Eighteenth Century Pet-Keeping," *Eighteenth Century Life*, Vol 38.2, 2014

Short Paper Due

Week 4

Living with animals: investigating nonhuman mediation

What does it mean to live with another species? What symbioses — cellular, molecular, behavioral, cultural — do we experience in our daily lives? How is our experience of significant otherness historically and culturally located?

Christopher Smart: "My Cat Geoffrey," from *Jubilate Agno*
Anton Chekhov, "Kashtanka"

Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*

Library Research Visit (required, date TBA)

Tutorial Meeting 2, date TBA

Part 2: Hybridity and the History of Science

Week 5

Hybridity, Travel and Animal Others

How is animalhood/personhood tied to location? How does travel alter or disrupt the travelers own location and the locations of those he encounters? What kinds of hybridities are created in these cultural encounters?

Jonathan Swift: *Gulliver's Travels* parts 1-2, 4 (skip part 3)

Jessica Durgan, "Souvenirs of the South Seas: Objects of Imperial Critique in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*," *Eighteenth Century Thing Theory in a Global Context*

Richard Nash, *Wild Enlightenment*, Chapter 4 "Unimaginable Communities"

Annotated Bibliographies Due

Week 6

Between matter and symbol: animacy in early botanical practice

How do botanical descriptions work to both reinforce and elide the plant/animal divide? How do these poetic hybrids draw on a long history of shapeshifters within literature? What can we learn by thinking with matter, acknowledging the active processes of matter?

Erasmus Darwin: excerpts from *The Botanic Garden: The Loves of the Plants*
excerpts from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

Theresa M. Kelley, *Clandestine Marriage*, "Botanizing Women"

Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, Introduction

Packham, Catherine, "The Science and Poetry of Animation: Personification, Analogy and Erasmus Darwin's Loves of the Plants," *Romanticism*, 2008 Vol 10.2

Prospectus Due

Tutorial Meeting 3, date TBA

Week 7

The Anatomical Imagination

Why are anatomical hybrids so compelling? How do texts of experimentation engage with earlier texts of exploration? What claims does the anatomical imagination make about the human/animal divide?

H.G. Wells: *The Island of Dr. Moreau*

Charles Darwin, excerpts from *On the Origin of Species*

Kimberley W. Benston, "Experimenting at the Threshold: Sacrifice, Anthropomorphism and the Aims of (Critical) Animal Studies," *PMLA*, 2009

Week 8

Classification in the popular imagination

How did scientific and other images of animals contribute to a popular conception of nature? How were such images disseminated and consumed by the public?

Beatrix Potter: *Jemima Puddle-duck*, *Peter Rabbit*, *Squirrel Nutkin*, scientific and popular illustrations, conservation letters and journal excerpts (possible Houghton visit)

Harriet Ritvo, *The Platypus and the Mermaid*, Introduction and Chapter 1

Beth Fowkes Tobin, "Revisiting The Virtuoso: Natural History Collectors and Their Passionate Engagement with Nature," *Environmental Criticism for the Twenty-First Century*

Part 3: Literature and the Environment

Week 9

Defining Environment: Pastoral, wild, built

What constitutes an environment? Who belongs? How has our literary inheritance shaped what we consider an environment?

James Thomson, *The Seasons*, Winter and Spring

Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*, chapter 1 “Pastoral Ideology”

Ursula Heise, “The Hitchhiker’s guide to ecocriticism,” *PMLA*

Denys Van Renen: “‘A hollow Moan’: the contours of the non-human world in James Thomson’s *The Seasons*,” *Animals and Humans: sensibility and representation, 1650-1820*

Week 10

Observing the Natural World

What does it mean to take an ecological approach in literature? What modes of looking does literature offer us? How does literature adjust or alter our modes of looking?

Dorothy Wordsworth, excerpts from the Grasmere and Alfoxden journals

William Wordsworth, Mt. Snowden from the 1805 Prelude

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Preface to Lyrical Ballads

Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, “The Image of Objectivity,” *Representations*, No. 40, Special Issue: Seeing Science, 1992

Riffaterre, Michael, “Interpretation and Descriptive Poetry: A Reading of Wordsworth's ‘Yew-Trees,’” *New Literary History*, vol. 4, no. 2, 1973

Week 11

Workshop Day — Full Draft Workshop

Week 12

Altered Landscapes: enclosure, habitat loss and environmental justice

How are conservation efforts historically and culturally located? How is land use tied to animal and environmental justice?

John Clare, “The Lament of Swordy Well,” Sonnet sequence on Badger and Fox, “The Pettichap’s Nest,” “The Yellowhammer’s Nest,” “Trespass,” “The Fallen Elm”

Ursula Heise, *Imagining Extinction*, chapter 3 “The Legal Lives of Endangered Species”

Gary Harrison, “John Clare’s Poetics of Acknowledgment,” *Romanticism*, 2012, Vol.18.1

Week 13

Thanksgiving Break

Week 14

Living in the Anthropocene

What are our responsibilities as part of a global community? In the face of global climate change, how can literary studies bring indigenous and under-represented voices to the table? How does global climate change precipitate and intersect with issues of class, race and gender?

Louise Erdrich, *Future Home of the Living God*

Hsuan Hsu, "Literary Atmospheric," *Literary Geographies*, Vol 3.1, 2017

Karen Thornber, "Climate Change and Changing World Literature," *Teaching Climate Change in the Humanities*

Final Conference