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Syracuse University
Spring 2008

The Nature of the Beast in American Culture

Office Hours: Tues. 11:00 a.m.--12:00 p.m.; Thurs. 12:30--1:30 p.m.
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Description

What kind of beast might be lurking inside you, barely kept in check by your self-control? What kind of instincts do wild animals have? How can representations of animals and human animality in American literary and cultural texts affect the way we think about such issues as "natural" behavior, competition, or even exploitation? From an interdisciplinary perspective, this course will explore the role of animality in American literature and culture, ranging from representations of real animals to metaphors of the beast in human culture and theories of sociobiology. Throughout the course we will explore not only advocacy for real animals, but also the ethical and political implications of using evolutionary theories to distinguish between human identity groups related to sexuality, race, gender, and class. The course will emphasize critical reading, writing, and discussion skills, as well as principles of academic argument that will be applicable to a wide range of fields and disciplines.

Texts

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

Linda Hogan, *Power* (1998)

Jack London, *The Call of the Wild* (1903)

Joseph Gibaldi, *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 6th ed. (2003)

Michael Apted, dir., *Gorillas in the Mist* (1988)

Required film screening and discussion: Tuesday, March 18th, 7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.

Additional readings on *Blackboard* by Henry James, Sigmund Freud, Franz Kafka, Ted Hughes, Octavia Butler, Ursula Le Guin, and Dian Fossey. Critical articles by Cary Wolfe, Charles Bergman, Marjorie Garber, Jonathan Auerbach, Eve Sedgwick, Bruce Bagemihl, Edward O. Wilson, Marianna Torgovnick, Peter Singer, Wendy Doniger, and Barbara Smuts.

Course Elements

- **FORMAT:** The course will be driven primarily by rigorous discussion and critical analysis of the assigned texts. Student participation is therefore vital for every class.
- **WORKSHOPS:** The first two essays will be workshopped in class by fellow students and checked by the instructor. Completed drafts will be due at the beginning of class on the day of the workshop, even if students are absent, unless approval has been granted by the instructor. Students will then have an opportunity to revise essays before handing them in to the instructor.

- **ESSAYS:** All essays will engage with critical problems related to assigned readings; the final essay will also include independent research. Essays are due at the beginning of class on the due date.
- **ABSTRACTS:** Abstracts will be summaries of your own ideas about critical papers that *could* be written based upon readings for class (i.e., you write the summary *as if* you've already written the full paper). Abstracts should be no more than one page, double-spaced, and they should indicate a clear problem statement that is being addressed.

Policies

- **ATTENDANCE:** two absences are permitted; beginning with the third absence, the student's final grade in the course will be lowered by two-thirds of a letter grade (e.g., from a "B+" to a "B-", or a "B" to a "C+") for each unapproved absence. Students are responsible for all work missed due to absence.
- **LATE WORK:** grades on written assignments will be lowered by two-thirds of a letter grade for each day they are late, unless other arrangements have been made with the instructor. Late or missing work can also significantly lower your participation grade on essay workshop days and the days abstracts are due. Incompletes are only available for emergency situations with prior approval of the instructor.
- **PLAGIARISM** in any form is a serious offense and will result in appropriate disciplinary action. Syracuse University defines plagiarism as "the representation of another's words, ideas, programs, formulae, opinions or other work as one's own either overtly or by failing to attribute them to their true source" (Section 1.0, University Rules and Regulations). For more information on Academic Integrity see <http://provost.syr.edu/provost/units/academicprograms/academicintegrity/>.
- **STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES OR SPECIAL NEEDS** are required to notify the instructor during the first week of class so that proper adjustments can be made.

Grading

- Participation: 15%
- Abstracts (3 one-page assignments): 15%
- Essay #1 (4-5 pages): 10%
- Essay #2 (4-5 pages): 20%
- Essay #3 (6-8 pages): 40%

SCHEDULE

INTRODUCTIONS

- Jan. 15 *Course overview and introductions*
- Jan. 17 Charles Bergman, "Academic Animals: Making Nonhuman Creatures Matter in Universities," *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* (2002)
Cary Wolfe, "Introduction," *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (2003)

THE CALL OF THE WILD

- Jan. 22 Jack London, *The Call of the Wild* (1903)
- Jan. 24 *The Call of the Wild* (continued)
Jonathan Auerbach, "'Congested Mails': Buck and Jack's 'Call,'" *Becoming Jack London* (1996)
- Jan. 29 *Problem statements*
- Jan. 31 Abstract #1 due

THE SEXUAL HISTORY OF THE BEAST

- Feb. 5 Marjorie Garber, "Unconditional Lovers," *Dog Love* (1996)
- Feb. 7 Henry James, "The Beast in the Jungle" (1903)
- Feb. 12 "The Beast in the Jungle" (continued)
Eve Sedgwick, "The Beast in the Closet: James and the Writing of Homosexual Panic," *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990)
- Feb. 14 Abstract #2 due
- Feb. 19 Sigmund Freud, "A Difficulty in the Path of Psycho-Analysis" (1917)
Edward O. Wilson, "The Sociobiology Controversy," *Naturalist* (1995)
- Feb. 21 Bruce Bagemihl, "Introduction" and "Unnatural Nature," *Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity* (1999)
- Feb. 26 Essay #1 Workshop
- Feb. 28 ESSAY #1 DUE
MLA documentation

ENDANGERED SPECIES

- Mar. 4 Dian Fossey, "Second Beginning: Karisoke Research Centre, Rwanda," *Gorillas in the Mist* (1983)

- Mar. 6 Marianna Torgovnick, "Dian Fossey Among the Animals," *Primitive Passions: Men, Women, and the Quest for Ecstasy* (1997)
- Mar. 11 NO CLASS: Spring Break
- Mar. 13 NO CLASS: Spring Break
- Mar. 18 (1988) 7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.: *Gorillas in the Mist*, dir. Michael Apted
Screening and Discussion replaces regular class time
Location: Link 105
- Mar. 20 Abstract #3 due
- Mar. 25 Linda Hogan, *Power* (1998)
- Mar. 27 *Power* (continued)
- Apr. 1 Essay #2 Workshop
- Apr. 3 ESSAY #2 DUE
Library orientation

WRITING THE LIFE OF AN ANIMAL

- Apr. 8 Octavia Butler, "Bloodchild" (1985)
- Apr. 10 Ursula Le Guin, "Mazes" (1990)
- Apr. 15 Rainer Maria Rilke, "The Panther" (1905)
Ted Hughes, "The Jaguar" (1957)
- Apr. 17 Franz Kafka, "A Report to an Academy" (1917)
Book reviews
- Apr. 22 NO CLASS: MayFest
- Apr. 24 J. M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals* (1999)
- Apr. 29 Reflections on *The Lives of Animals*: Marjorie Garber, Peter Singer, Wendy Doniger, Barbara Smuts

Monday, May 5: FINAL ESSAY DUE