

Syllabus

Course: Animals in Literature

Times: Online

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Description:

This course looks at the representation of animals in a wide range of literary and folkloric traditions. It will focus, most especially, on the ways in which the literary depiction of animals is intimately tied to changing perspectives on the human condition, which in turn reflect religious, intellectual, governmental, and technological developments.

Objectives:

- 1) To help students understand, and reflect on, to the philosophical, social and psychological issues that are raised by attempts to depict animals in literature.
- 2) To acquaint students with important literary genres that center largely on animals, for example the fable and fairy tale.
- 3) To help students pursue their own interests, as they pertain to the material of this course, whether this is primarily as educators, parents, nature-lovers, business professionals, health care providers or in some other capacity.
- 4) To help students will improve their academic skills including those needed for writing and research.
- 5) To help students understand the historical development of the animal story and its relation to broader developments in human society.
- 6) To assist students in developing the skills and contacts for effective networking and collaboration, with respect to the course material.

Required Texts:

Anderson, Hans Christian. 1998. *Hans Andersen's Fairy Tales: A Selection* Translated by L. Frohlich. New York: Oxford UP. (Abbreviated here as Mermaid; The class will read "The Little Mermaid," and other translations are acceptable.

One by H. P. Paul is available online at: http://hca.gilead.org/il/li_merma.html.)

Melson, Gail F. 2001. *Why the Wild Things Are: Animals in the Lives of Children*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP.

Sax, Boria. 1998. *The Serpent and the Swan: The Animal Bride in Folklore and Literature*. Blacksburg, VA: McDonald & Woodward/U. of Tennessee Press (Available through U. of Tennessee Press.

Sewell, Anna. 2002. *Black Beauty* New York: Signet Classics.

Wu Ch'Eng-En. 1984. *Monkey*. Translated by A. Waley. New York: Grove.

Assignments and Grading:

There are three major assignments in this course. The first is participation in weekly discussions, in which students should use questions about the reading assignments as a starting point for dialogue and debate. The second is a review-essay on a book of zoomorphic literature of the student's choice, in which students will demonstrate an understanding of ways in which identity as an animal or human being is constructed. The third is a blog, in which each student will develop personal interests and perspectives on animals in literature. All assignments are explained in greater detail in the course shell, and they will be evaluated according to detailed rubrics that accompany the assignment. The final grade will be determined by a point system as follows:

Weekly Discussion Postings	150 points (ten points each for 15 forums)
Student Blog	60 points
Book Review Essay	<u>40 points</u>
Total	250 points

To determine the final grade it is necessary only to take the number of points achieved and divide it by the total possible. Thus, for example, if a student receives 225 points, that is 90% or A-. If a student receives 200 points, that is 80% or B-.

Plagiarism:

Plagiarism is strictly forbidden at Mercy College and may be grounds for failure.

Class Schedule:

Remember that a contribution to the Discussions is due every week, though these are not indicated specifically in the schedule.

Week of Sept. 5:

For Discussion: Welcome to the class! We all share a few things even at the start. First of all, we have an interest in animals, which is actually something shared by almost everyone. Secondly, we have in literature, which is today a much more exclusive club. We will be talking about a lot of things in the course of the term, so we should start by getting to know one another, so please tell us a little about yourself. You may, for example tell about your background, your home, and your family. Then tell a bit about your previous experience with animals, whether these were in the home, in the wild, or in books. Finally, I would like you to set some personal goals for this course. What would you like to learn or accomplish? What do you hope to do with the understanding that you acquire. Please think about the goals carefully, since you will be asked to review them again at the end of the course.

Week of Sept. 10:

For Discussion: Before contributing to this forum students should read the first two chapters of *Why the Wild Things Are* by Melson. Animals tend to be closely associated with children in human culture since at least Victorian times, perhaps through human history. In your book the author gives many possible reasons for this association. Give three of these reasons, then discuss which seem most valid and important to you.

Week of Sept. 17:

For Discussion: Before writing in this forum, students should read chapters three through six of *Why the Wild Things Are* by Melson. The author discusses how many uses of animals, for example to teach animal husbandry in 4H clubs, seem to contain elements of nurturance and exploitation. Discuss one example, and give your reaction. Do the tensions indicate hypocrisy or merely different aspects of a complicated relationship? Under what conditions, and with what qualifications, do you think use of animals is legitimate?

Week of Sept. 24

For Discussion: Before writing in this forum, students should finish *Why the Wild Things Are* by Melson. In the final part of the book, Melson discusses many roles that animals play in literature, especially that for children, including guides, heroes, monsters, companions and so on. We have all read, or had read to us, books about animals when we were children. Discuss two of them in terms of the roles, and try to remember how you responded.

Week of Oct. 1

For Discussion: Before writing in this forum, students should read "The Legend of Melusine" (p. 238-245) from the appendix, and pages vii through 80 of *The Serpent and the Swan* by Sax. According to this book, tales of animal brides were created in response to a sense of growing human alienation from nature and from animals. They tell of attempts to unite the two through marriage, but the tragic endings suggest that this may now be impossible. Discuss at least one example of an animal bride or groom motif from contemporary times and

what it tells us about the relation of human beings with the natural world.

Week of Oct. 8

For Discussion: Before writing in this forum, students should read pages 81 through 140 of *The Serpent and the Swan* by Sax. Animal bride stories have become increasingly pessimistic in the industrial age, while animal groom stories are relatively upbeat. What does this tell us about the changing relationships between human beings and nature? Between men and women?

Week of Oct. 15

For Discussion: Before writing in this forum, students should finish *The Serpent and the Swan* by Sax. Briefly discuss the stories in part II and how you respond to them. Say how you might retell one of the stories in contemporary times.

Week of Oct. 22

For Discussion: Before posting in this forum, students should begin *Monkey* by Wu Ch'eng-en. *Monkey* (or *Journey to the West*) is perhaps the most widely read novel ever, and you will see illustrations from it everywhere if you go to Chinatown in New York. It is full of archane Daoist, Buddhist, and alchemical lore, but it is easy to enjoy it simply as a story. At times, the character of Monkey is taken to represent the mind, which can easily range though the world but requires discipline. What do you think of that interpretation? What do you think Monkey represents?

Week of Oct. 29

For Discussion: Before posting in this topic, students should have read at least the first half of *Monkey* by Wu Ch'eng-en. If monkey represents "mind" and the Tang Monk represents "spirit" Pigsy represents the "body." Take one of their adventures together and say what you believe it tells us about their relationship between deities, human beings, and/or the natural world.

Week of Nov. 5

For Discussion: Before posting in this topic, students should have finished *Monkey* by Wu Ch'eng-en. Can you identify stages in the development of Monkey through the course of the novel. In what ways does he change on his pilgrimage? In what ways does he remain the same? Can his journey tell us anything about the relationship between nature and human society?

Week of Nov. 12

For Discussion: Before posting in this topic, students should read *The Little Mermaid* by Anderson. The story of *The Little Mermaid* has foundations in literature and folklore that go back for many centuries, and it became one of the most popular tales for children during the nineteenth century. But today, the original story by Anderson has almost been eclipsed by images in the mass media, especially the cartoon of the story by Disney Studios. Why do you think

accounts for the enduring appeal of the story? What do you think of the ways Disney and/or others have altered it?

Week of Nov. 19 (Thanksgiving recess, Nov. 21 - 25)

For Discussion: This is the week of Thanksgiving Break, November 21-25, so there will be no additional postings or readings required, and any messages will not be graded. Students are invited, however, if they choose to use this space to reflect on the meaning of the Holidays.

Week of Nov. 26

For Discussion: Before posting in this topic, students should finish *The Little Mermaid* by Anderson. Both the Little Mermaid and Monkey are spiritualized in the course of their adventures. Monkey begins his story with a quest for immortality, and finally becomes a Buddhist saint. The Little Mermaid begins with a wish to enter human society and achieve love, and, though she does not succeed, will finally be given an immortal soul. Compare and contrast these two characters and the way in which they develop.

Week of Dec. 3

Book review-essay is due Dec. 3.

For Discussion: Before posting to this forum, students should read about the first half of *Black Beauty* by Anna Sewel. This is by far the most influential animal tale of the nineteenth century, and did much to launch the humane movement. What can you learn from this story about Victorian values, especially with respect to relations between human beings and the natural world? What elements of the story are still pertinent in the twentieth century.

Week of Dec. 10 (Term ends Dec. 22)

Blog is considered complete on Dec. 10.

For Discussion: Before posting to this forum, students should finish *Black Beauty* by Anna Sewell. The final sentence of this story concludes, "...I fancy I am still in the orchard at Birtwick, standing with my old friends under the apple trees." Do you find this ending more happy or tragic? What does it tell us about the limitations of our attempts to achieve intimacy with animals?

Week of Dec. 17

For Discussion: What have we learned? Have our goals been accomplished? Have our goals changed? Where do we go from here? Please review the goals you set at the beginning of this course. Say what you believe you have accomplished, and what you may continue to work on in the future. Say what you particularly liked, and what you did not. Finally, say how, if at all, this course may have changed your perspective on animals and on literature