

## ENGLISH 300-E1: CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS IN ENGLISH

Fall 2011

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# ANIMALS

*"I know the animals are laughing at us...They don't even know what a joke is"*  
*Talking Heads, "Animals" (1979)*

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION (from the University Catalog):**

**English 300: Critical Conversations in English.** (3 credit hours) (Prerequisites: ENGL 101 and 102 with a **C or better** and 275, 276, 287, 288, or 205) Course restrictions: Required for a major. A seminar designed for newly-declared English majors, this course emphasizes critical thinking, analytical writing and textual analysis as the foundations of success in the major. Texts—connected by generic, thematic or historical factors—will vary based on faculty expertise, but will be the means to introduce students to some of the research methodologies, critical “conversations” and professional factors that are central concerns in the discipline. May be repeated for credit once under a different instructor.

### **SPECIFIC COURSE TOPIC: “ANIMALS”**

“Animals” will explore literature and other cultural textualities in conjunction with the emergent field of animal studies. The “animalistic” has often been equated with the “primitive,” understood in pejorative terms. Yet this course will work to unhinge hierarchical equations between human/modernity, on the one side, and animal/primitivism, on the other. “Animals” will examine a range of perspectives on animals and animality in a diversity of texts and cultural materials, from various mythological sources to literary texts, and from older arts (e.g., sculpture and painting) to modern and contemporary media (e.g., photography, film, popular music, digital art). Our perspectives on animals significantly influence our views on matters of ecology, ethnicity, gender, and economics, among other contested issues. Our discussions will address the following interrelated questions: What is an animal? What is a human? What, if any, are our responsibilities to nonhuman animals? Do animals have subjectivity and agency? What is the difference between civilization and wildness? How do images of human-nonhuman transformations worry the lines between species? Why are metamorphoses between humans and animals so central to a variety of mythological and religious traditions? In what ways are the world of nature and the world of culture pointedly, even painfully inextricable? In addition to current scholarship on animal studies and ecocriticism, we will examine the nature of animals in relation to earlier philosophical, religious, scientific, and eco-critical contexts.

### **ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE:**

#### **T 8/23: What Is/Is Not an Animal?:**

Introduction to Course Policies and Topic

#### **R 8/25: Mind the Animals:**

Thomas Nagel, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?” (1974)

Talking Heads, “Animals” (1979)

“Three Little Pigs” (c. 1843)

Anna Hyatt Huntington, *Fighting Stallions* (1950)

Billy Collins, “The Wolf” (1991)

Elizabeth Bishop, “Pink Dog” (1979)

T 8/30: **Horse Play:**

Frank Palmeri, "Deconstructing the Animal-Human Binary: Recent Work in Animal Studies" (2006)  
 Robert Frost, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" (1923) and "The Draft Horse" (1962)

R 9/1: **Animal Civilization:**

Cary Wolfe, "Human, All Too Human: 'Animal Studies' and the Humanities" (2009)  
 Henry David Thoreau, "The Battle of the Ants" from *Walden* (1854)  
 Natasha Trethewey, "Monument" (2006)

T 9/6: **Revenge of the Bovine:**

Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life" (1874)  
 Linda Hasselstrom, "The Cow versus the Animal Rights Activist" (1991)  
 Annie Proulx, "The Half-Skinned Steer" (1999)

R 9/8: Proulx

T 9/13: **Racing Animals:**

Lesley Ginsberg, "Slavery and the Gothic Horror of Poe's 'The Black Cat'" (1998)  
 Edgar Allan Poe, "The Raven" (1845), "The Black Cat" (1843), and "Hop-Frog; Or, The Eight Chained Orangoutangs" (1849)

R 9/15: Poe

T 9/20: **"Big, Unlucky Mammals":**

Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse Five* (1969)

R 9/22: Vonnegut

T 9/27: **For the Birds:**

Jean Jacques Audubon, selected paintings  
 Walton Ford, selected paintings  
 Alfred Hitchcock (director), *The Birds* (1963)

R 9/29: Hitchcock

T 10/4: **Reel Animals:**

Jean-Michel Cousteau, *Ocean Adventures* (2006)  
 Werner Herzog (director), *Grizzly Man* (2005)  
 Louis Psihoyos (director), *The Cove* (2009)

R 10/6: **Midterm Exam**

T 10/11: **The Ethics of Inhumanism:**

Robinson Jeffers, "Preface" to *The Double Axe* (1948), "Hurt Hawks" (1928), "Original Sin" (1948), "The Deer Lay Down Their Bones" (1954)

R 10/13: **Dream Animals:**

Loren Eiseley, from *The Immense Journey* (1957)  
 James Dickey, "The Heaven of Animals" and "The Sheep-Child"  
 Mary Oliver, from *American Primitive* (1983): "The Kitten," "The Snakes," and "The Fish"

T 10/18: **Mythic Metamorphoses:**

Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (8)  
 Derek Walcott, "The Sea Is History" (1979)

- Yusef Komunyakaa, "Monticello" (2004)
- R 10/20: **Native Nature:**  
Native Creation Tales
- T 10/25: Louise Erdrich, "Fleur" (1988)
- R 10/27: **"Cannibals All!":**  
Christopher T. White, "The Modern Magnetic Animal" (2008)  
William Faulkner, "Red Leaves" (1930)
- T 11/1: Faulkner
- R 11/3: **Boatloads of Animals:**  
Dan Albergotti, *The Boatloads* (2008)  
Charles Wright, from *Scar Tissue* (2006)
- T 11/8: **Animal Expressionism:**  
Charles Laughton (director), *The Night of the Hunter* (1955)
- R 11/10: Laughton
- T 11/15: **Unnaturalism; or, Ockert among the Animals:**  
Jason Ockert, *Rabbit Punches* (2006)
- R 11/17: **Animality/Rurality:**  
Erskine Caldwell, "The Growing Season" (1935)  
Flannery O'Connor, "The Life You Save May Be Your Own" (1955)
- T 11/22: **Thanksgiving Break**  
R 11/24: **Thanksgiving Break**
- T 11/29: **Invision:**  
Josephine Humphreys, *Rich in Love* (1987)
- R 12/1: Humphreys
- T 12/6: **Animal Artifacts:**  
Please bring in your own animal artifact and analyze its significance for the class. What does your chosen image or object suggest about how we view nonhuman animals, or about how nonhuman animals view us? Your chosen piece of animalia can be drawn from a variety of media: tangible, textual, aural, visual, digital, etc. (e.g., painting, sculpture, photography, digital art, film, television, music, cartoons, comics, animation, storybooks, folklore, advertising), but let's steer clear of live animals!

#### **CITATIONS FOR CRITICAL SOURCES:**

Buell, Lawrence. "Nature's Personhood." *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995. 180-218.

Darwin, Charles. "Chapter 13: Mutual Affinities of Organic Beings: Morphology, Embryology, Rudimentary Organs." 1859. *On the Origin of the Species*.  
<http://www.literature.org/authors/darwin-charles/the-origin-of-species/chapter-13.html>

Eiseley, Loren. *The Immense Journey*. New York: Vintage, 1957.

Ginsberg, Lesley. "Slavery and the Gothic Horror of Poe's 'The Black Cat.'" *American Gothic: New Interventions in a National Narrative*. Eds. Robert K. Martin and Eric Savoy. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1998. 99-128.

Hasselstrom, Linda. "The Cow versus the Animal Rights Activist." *Land Circle: Writings Collected From the Land*. Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum, 1991.

Jeffers, Robinson. "Preface." *The Double-Axe and Other Poems*. New York: Random House, 1948.

Lundblad, Michael. "From Animal to Animality Studies." *PMLA* 124:2 (March 2009): 496-502.

McHugh, Susan. "Literary Animal Agents." *PMLA* 124:2 (March 2009): 487-95.

Mitchell, W. J. T. "Romanticism and the Life of Things: Fossils, Totems, and Images." *Critical Inquiry* 28:1 (Autumn 2001): 167-84.

Nagel, Thomas. "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" *The Philosophical Review* 83 (1974): 435-50.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life." 1874. *Untimely Meditations*. Trans. R. J. Hollingdale. New York: Cambridge UP, 1983. 57-124.

Palmeri, Frank. "Deconstructing the Animal-Human Binary: Recent Work in Animal Studies." *CLIO* 35:3 (Summer 2006): 407-20.

Rose, Stephen. "Proud to Be Speciesist." *New Statesman and Society*. London: Guardian, 1991.

Shannon, Laurie. "The Eight Animals in Shakespeare; or, Before the Human." *PMLA* 124:2 (March 2009): 472-79.

Torgovnick, Mariana. *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1990.

Turner, Daniel Cross. "Modern Metamorphoses and the Primal Sublime: The Southern/Caribbean Poetry of Yusef Komunyakaa and Derek Walcott." *Southern Quarterly* 48:3 (Spring 2011): 52-69.

Vitamvor, Xavier. "Unbecoming Animal Studies." *The Minnesota Review*. The Feral Issue. Ed. Heather Steffen. ns. 73-74 (Fall 2009/Spring 2010): 183-87.

White, Christopher T. "The Modern Magnetic Animal: *As I Lay Dying* and the Uncanny Zoology of Modernism." *Journal of Modern Literature* 31:3 (Spring 2008): 81-101.

Wolfe, Cary. "Human, All Too Human: 'Animal Studies' and the Humanities." *PMLA* 124:2 (March 2009): 564-75.