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:

Introduction to Course Policies and Topic

R 8/25: Mind the Animals:
Talking Heads, “Animals” (1979)
“Three Little Pigs” (c. 1843)
Anna Hyatt Huntington, Fighting Stallions (1950)
Elizabeth Bishop, “Pink Dog” (1979)
T 8/30: **Horse Play:**
Robert Frost, “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” (1923) and “The Draft Horse” (1962)

R 9/1: **Animal Civilization:**
Henry David Thoreau, “The Battle of the Ants” from *Walden* (1854)

T 9/6: **Revenge of the Bovine:**
Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life” (1874)

R 9/8: Proulx

T 9/13: **Racing Animals:**
Edgar Allan Poe, “The Raven” (1845), “The Black Cat” (1843), and “Hop-Frog; Or, The Eight Chained Ourangoutangs” (1849)

R 9/15: Poe

T 9/20: “**Big, Unlucky Mammals**”:

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:**
Werner Herzog (director), *Grizzly Man* (2005)
Louis Psihoyos (director), *The Cove* (2009)

R 10/6: Midterm Exam

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

R 10/13: **Dream Animals:**
Loren Eiseley, from *The Immense Journey* (1957)
James Dickey, “The Heaven of Animals” and “The Sheep-Child”

T 10/18: **Mythic Metamorphoses:**
Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (8)
Derek Walcott, “The Sea Is History” (1979)

R 10/20: **Native Nature:**
Native Creation Tales


R 10/27: **“Cannibals All!”**:
William Faulkner, “Red Leaves” (1930)

T 11/1: Faulkner

R 11/3: **Boatloads of Animals:**
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:**

R 11/17: **Animality/Rurality:**
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:**

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:**


