

Course Evaluation
ENG4474 The Nature of the Beast in American Literature
Spring 2014
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1. Course overview

Content and scope:

From an interdisciplinary perspective, this course will explore the role of animality in American literature and culture. Drawing upon debates from the academic fields of animal and animality studies, ecocriticism, American literary and cultural studies, and critical theory, we will explore issues such as evolutionary theories used to explain human and nonhuman behavior, different ways of thinking about human/animal difference, and the historical relationship between discourses of animality and the construction of human categories such as race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, disability, and class. Texts: Mark Doty, *Dog Years*; William Faulkner, "The Bear" in *Go Down, Moses*; Linda Hogan, *People of the Whale*; Henry James, "The Beast in the Jungle" in *Tales of Henry James*; Ursula K. Le Guin, "Mazes"; Jack London, *The Call of the Wild and White Fang*; Terry Tempest Williams, *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place*; Karen Tei Yamashita, *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*; Michael Apted, dir., *Gorillas in the Mist: The Adventure of Dian Fossey*; Peter Jackson, dir., *King Kong*; Marianne DeKoven and Michael Lundblad, eds., *Species Matters: Humane Advocacy and Cultural Theory*; Michael Lundblad, *The Birth of a Jungle: animality in Progressive-Era US Literature and Culture*.

Teaching:

Seminar, two hours per week for ten weeks, 20 hours in all.
Attendance is obligatory in at least 8 out of 10 seminars.

Examination:

The assessment of the course is based on a term paper of approximately ten pages (4000 words). This does not include references and bibliography. The student is given an opportunity to submit a draft of the term paper and receive individual feedback on both the form and content of the draft.

2. Course objectives

I believe the course description gives a good description of the knowledge that students should have acquired after finishing the course.

Learning outcomes:

After completing this course you will have: acquired an overview of key ways animals and animality have been represented in American literary texts, along with the significance and implications of those representations; acquired an introduction to important recent theoretical developments in the fields of animal and animality studies, as well as ecocriticism; developed your skills in literary and cultural analysis, with close engagement with key texts, while connecting those texts to theoretical debates related to race, class, gender, sexuality, and species; developed your skills analyzing literary texts in relation to dominant discourses and historical and cultural contexts.

3. Assessment

Grades, dropouts, complaints :

15 registered, 2 ikke møtt, 12 graded (10 pass, 2 fail; 5 A/B, 4 C/D, 3 E/F)

Appropriate content, level, prerequisites: yes

Student evaluations (mid-term): (9 surveys)

Professor rating (1-5, 5=highest): avg.=4.33; 100%=4 or 5, 33%=5

Course rating (1-5, 5=highest): avg.=4.22; 100%=4 or 5, 22%=5

Comments: generally positive about the curriculum, the course, and the instructor, including, e.g., comments about the instructor being very engaged and also approachable.

“The curriculum is great.”

Student evaluations (at end of course): (5 responses; not very representative)

Comments: generally positive; also including the suggestion that an introduction to theory course should be taught earlier in the MA program.

4. Changes since the last periodic evaluation

This was a new MA seminar.

5. Suggestions for improvement

As one of the comments reinforces, it would be good to require an introduction to theory course very early in the MA program. Courses like this one could then build upon that basic foundation. I enjoyed teaching this course and look forward to teaching it again.