

E370-001  
Spring 2009  
TR 11:00-12:15  
Visual Arts F103

Prof. Michael Lundblad  
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Office: 349 Eddy Hall  
Office Hours: T 1:45-2:45; R 10-11a

## **American Literature in Cultural Contexts: Contemporary American Animality**

### **Course Description**

Animals are everywhere in American cultural texts: from children's movies to critically acclaimed postmodern writing; from Animal Planet to *King Kong*; from bestsellers on the inner lives of animals to blockbuster documentaries on people living—and dying—with wild animals. Why are we so fascinated with these various animals and the people who know them? This course will explore representations of animals—and humans as animals—in the work of contemporary writers, such as Linda Hogan, Mark Doty, Philip K. Dick, and J. M. Coetzee, as well as films, such as *Gorillas in the Mist*, *Grizzly Man*, and the 2005 remake of *King Kong*. Our interdisciplinary approach will draw upon debates from the academic fields of animality studies, American studies, and critical theory, in order to focus on several key issues: animal rights; arguments for the humane treatment of various human and animal populations; evolutionary theories used to explain human and nonhuman behavior; and narrative attempts to redeem “the human” in relation to how we interact with “the animal.” We will also pay close attention to the historical relationship between discourses of animality and the construction of human categories of sexuality, gender, and race. With these issues and questions in mind, we will dive deeply into course texts and films while developing frameworks for thinking about other representations of animality in America today.

### **Texts**

- J. M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals* (Princeton, 2001)
- Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (Ballantine, 1996)
- Mark Doty, *Dog Years: A Memoir* (Harper Perennial, 2008)
- Linda Hogan, *Power* (Norton, 1999)
- Michael Apted, dir., *Gorillas in the Mist: The Adventure of Dian Fossey* (1988)\*\*
- Werner Herzog, dir., *Grizzly Man* (2005)\*\*
- Peter Jackson, dir., *King Kong* (2005)\*\*

\*\*DVD copies of these films are available at the CSU Bookstore, but you may watch any copy that is available to you, prior to the days films are discussed in class.\*\*

### **Policies**

**ABSENCES AND LATE WORK:** Attendance will be taken and counted toward your final grade. In addition, you are responsible for all work missed due to absence. Your grade on written work will be lowered by two-thirds of a letter grade for each day of the week that it is late (successful email submission—which means I can open and read it—should occur as soon as possible, rather than waiting until the next class).

PLAGIARISM in any form is a serious offense and will result in harsh disciplinary action, which may include a zero on the assignment/exam and/or failing the course.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES OR SPECIAL NEEDS are required to notify the instructor during the first week of class if appropriate adjustments need to be made.

OFFICE HOURS AND EMAIL COMMUNICATION are great ways for you to make sure you understand course readings and get the most out of this course. Please do not hesitate to get in touch with me, one way or another, so that we can discuss any questions or concerns you might have. Please note that office hours are the best time for immediate assistance. Responses to your emails can often take several days. Please plan to ask for help well in advance of due dates.

### **Evaluation and Course Elements**

- Participation: 10%
- Quizzes: 10%
- Problem Statement: 10%
- Essay (5-7 pages): 35%
- Final Exam: 35%

**Participation** includes attendance and lateness, which will be recorded for each class. Each absence and lateness can negatively affect your participation grade. If you miss four or more classes you will receive a zero for participation. If you miss three classes your participation grade will be lowered by one letter grade. Every four latenesses will be counted as one absence. Participation also includes, of course, active participation in class discussions, diligent note-taking in class, attentive listening, and frequent willingness to ask and respond to questions that reveal critical engagement with course readings and lectures. In addition, I expect you always to read with a pen (or some other writing tool) in hand: underlining key and/or interesting passages, summarizing readings in your own words, making notes in the margins both to understand (and remember) what is there and to inspire your own critical responses to specific passages.

**Quizzes** will test whether you have completed course readings. Quizzes cannot be made up due to absence without approval of the instructor in response to unusual circumstances. Top three scores on four quizzes count.

**Problem Statement** is a one-page assignment (typed, double-spaced) that offers you an opportunity to engage and respond to critical debates based upon course readings. More information will be given later about how to formulate problem statements. The problem statement could be a starting point for your subsequent essay assignment.

**Essay** (5-7 pages, double-spaced). Begin with a problem statement in order to engage with a critical debate of your own choice based upon course readings. You may build upon arguments related to your problem statement assignment, or start with a new problem statement. More information on the essay assignment will be given later in the semester.

**Final Exam:** an open-note examination that will evaluate how well you have paid attention and understood course readings and lectures for each class period. You will also be asked to synthesize ideas drawn from different parts of the course and illustrate your own critical thinking about these ideas. No make-ups will be given for the final exam unless documentation has been provided for emergency situations, or I have met with you in advance to discuss alternative arrangements.

### Schedule

(additional readings on e-reserve or RamCT)

#### Introductions

- 1/20 Course overview
- 1/22 Student animals

#### Companion Animals

- 1/27 Mark Doty, *Dog Years: A Memoir* (2007)
- 1/29 *Dog Years*, cont.'d

- 2/3 *Dog Years*, cont.'d
- 2/5 *Dog Years*, cont.'d

**Extra credit:** Animality and Climate Change (teach-ins 2/4 and 2/5); one-page summary and response (up to 20% bonus on lowest quiz score); due Tues., 2/10

- 2/10 Marjorie Garber, "Unconditional Lovers," *Dog Love* (1996)
- 2/12 Bruce Bagemihl, "Introduction" and "Unnatural Nature," *Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity* (1999)

#### Problem Statements

- 2/17 **Quiz #1;** Introduction to Problem Statements
- 2/19 Discussion of Problem Statements
  
- 2/24 **Problem Statement due;** Franz Kafka, "A Report to an Academy" (1917)
- 2/26 J. M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals* (1999)

#### Factory Farm Animals

- 3/3 *The Lives of Animals*, cont.'d
- 3/5 *The Lives of Animals*, cont.'d
  
- 3/10 Reflections on *The Lives of Animals*
- 3/12 **Quiz #2;** Reflections, cont.'d

3/17 – 3/19 NO CLASS: Spring Break

### Endangered Species

3/24 Michael Apted, dir., *Gorillas in the Mist: The Adventure of Dian Fossey* (1988)

3/26 Marianna Torgovnick, "Dian Fossey Among the Animals," *Primitive Passions: Men, Women, and the Quest for Ecstasy* (1997)

3/31 Linda Hogan, *Power* (1998)

4/2 *Power*, cont.'d

4/7 *Power*, cont.'d

4/9 **Quiz #3**; *Power*, cont.'d

4/14 **Essay due**; Werner Herzog, dir., *Grizzly Man* (2005)

4/16 Ellen Brinks, "Uncovering the Child in Timothy Treadwell's Feral Tale," *The Lion and the Unicorn* (2008)

### Human Animality and Race

4/21 Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968)

4/23 *Do Androids Dream*, cont.'d

4/28 *Do Androids Dream*, cont.'d

4/30 **Quiz #4**; *Do Androids Dream*, cont.'d

5/5 Peter Jackson, dir., *King Kong* (2005)

5/7 *King Kong*, cont.'d

**Final Exam: Tuesday, May 12<sup>th</sup>, 9:10 a.m. to 11:10 a.m.**