

## Graduate Seminar Syllabus

### A Modern Bestiary: The Animal in Literature and Philosophy

The medieval bestiary, or *bestiarum vocabulum*, was more than an illustrated compendium of creatures; it juxtaposed natural history with lessons in morality, reinforcing the belief that nature itself was part of the symbolic language of God. While the rise of Darwinism and the biological sciences radically altered our view of the natural world, modern and contemporary thinkers have continued to treat animals as ciphers for human virtues, vices, and ideas, even—or especially—in the absence of a divine symbology. Now, faced with a critical menagerie of “becoming-animals,” “animal-machines,” and “wolf-men,” we may very well ask: what has happened to the *literal animal*? What relationship exists, if any, between tropes of animality and the lived experience of sentient beings? How are political, sexual, and racial issues bound up with questions of animal rights? Drawing upon a range of texts—from children’s books and fairy tales, to modernist novels and poems, to theoretical and philosophical works—this course tracks the simultaneously allegorical, ideological, and material traces of the “beast.” Together, we will consider the extent to which 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>-century representations of animals, like their medieval counterparts, open a space for moral and ethical inquiries.

Students will complete two papers and a final exam. Students will also receive an additional grade based on attendance and class participation.

#### Grading

Paper 1	30%
Paper 2	30%
Final Exam	20%
Participation	20%

#### Week 1, Introduction to Literary Zoography

Wallace Stevens, “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird”

Claude McCay, “Birds of Prey”

Steve Best, “The Rise of Critical Animal Studies”

Slide: Pablo Picasso, *Guernica*

#### I. Unnatural Habitats

##### Week 2, The Pastoral

Kenneth Grahame, *The Wind in the Willows*

##### Week 3, The Imperial

Rudyard Kipling, *The Jungle Book*

##### Week 4, The Urban

Jean de Brunhoff, *The Story of Babar*

George Orwell, “Shooting an Elephant”

Nigel Rothfels, “Zoos, the Academy, and Captivity”

## **II. Literary Taxonomies**

### **Week 5, The Feline**

T. S. Eliot, *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*  
James Joyce, "The Cats of Copenhagen"

### **Week 6, The Canine**

Robert Browning, "Tray"  
Virginia Woolf, *Flush*  
John Updike, "Another Dog's Death"

### **Week 7, The Equine**

D. H. Lawrence, *St Mawr* and "The Rocking-Horse Winner"  
Peter Shaffer, *Equus*

### **Week 8, The Taurine**

Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* and *Death in the Afternoon* (excerpt)  
Slides: Pablo Picasso, *Bull (Plate V)* and *La Corrida*

### **Week 9, The Porcine**

George Orwell, *Animal Farm*  
Ted Hughes, "Pig" and "View of a Pig"

### **Week 10, The Lapine**

Wallace Stevens, "A Rabbit as King of the Ghosts"  
Richard Adams, *Watership Down*

## **III. Zoontologies**

### **Week 11, The Becoming**

Fran Kafka, "The Metamorphosis," "A Report to an Academy," and "Investigations of a Dog"  
Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (excerpt)

### **Week 12, The Open**

Rainer Maria Rilke, "Elegy 8" from *The Duino Elegies*  
Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal* (excerpt)

### **Week 13, The Naked**

Karel Čapek, "From the Point of View of a Cat"  
Jacques Derrida, "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)"