“That’s all, folks!”

The Fascination with Animals in American Literature and Culture

Room and time: Seminar Room (Attemsgasse 25, Top Floor, SR 34.D2), Wednesday, 11:45-13:15
First session: March 9, 2016 · Course number: 512.312
Lecturer: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Stefan L. Brandt · Office hours: Thursdays, 4-6 p.m. (Room DG-0036) · Email: stefan.brandt@uni-graz.at

Description: Perhaps more than other countries, the USA have developed a cult around animals, starting in the 1890s. Since Ernest Thompson Seton’s Wild Animals I Have Known (1898) and Jack London’s The Call of the Wild (1903), hordes of dogs, horses and other animals have populated the fictional realms of cinema, literature, and television. Disney films have added numerous animals to this list, in a long series of animated films beginning with Dumbo (1940) and Bambi (1942), leading all the way to Finding Nemo (2003), and a number of documentaries, from The Living Desert (1953) to the recent Monkey Kingdom (2015). What could explain this obsession with anthropomorphized animals who are sometimes seen as symbols of Darwinist survival strategies (e.g., Seton’s grey wolf Lobo), personifications of the human desire for acceptance (as in E.B. White’s 1945 tale Stuart Little) or even civil-rights activists (as the speaking horse ‘Mister Ed’ from the 1960s CBS sitcom)? The course will also look at representations of animal testing, the food industry, and animal aggression, as well as ecocritical approaches involving non-human creatures.

Teaching and Learning Method: This is an interactive course. Participation in group discussions as well as contributions to the discussion forum on the Moodle course site will be part of the final grade. Each meeting will be held by ‘experts’ who organize the session by means of questions, games, video clips, and group work. The most relevant facts will be conveyed in a short information block. The experts will upload their questions for the discussion forum 6 days in advance!

Materials: All texts will be made available on Moodle. Please watch films and TV episodes in the Media Archive!

Aims: The course will familiarize participants with the key goals of Animal Studies as well as the most important features of texts dealing with animals (composition, background, effect).

Assessment: A) Regular attendance (no more than 2 absences!); active in-class participation; 10 discussion forum entries (1/3);
B) Presentation as part of an expert session plus 3-page handout and forum questions for fellow students (1/3);
C) 2-page research proposal and 10-page final paper (1/3).

Deadline for Final Papers: Wednesday, June 29, 2016, in class. There is no (!) extension of this deadline.

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Syllabus

09 March
Introduction - Why Look at Animals?
Basic texts:

16 March
The Animal as Mirror - Nature Writing and the Invention of the Wild
Main text (reading required):
Ernest Thompson Seton, “Lobo,” from Wild Animals I Have Known (1898). [Moodle]
Companion texts (optional):
Theodore Roosevelt, “Nature Fakers” (1907) [Moodle]
Ernest Thompson Seton, “Raggylug,” from Wild Animals I Have Known (1898). [Moodle]
Keywords: Conservationism; ‘Humanity’ of Animals; Morality; Nature Writing; Sociobiology; Wolf Metaphor.

13 April
Jack London’s Naturalist Vision - Atavism and Evolutionary Theory
Main text (reading required):
Jack London, ch. 12 & 13 from The Call of the Wild (1903). [Moodle]
Companion text (optional):
Keywords: Atavism; Darwin/Spencer; Evolutionary Theory; Naturalism; ‘Speciesism’ (C. Wolfe).

20 April
Of Mice, Clownfish, and Elephants - The Animal as ‘Other’
Main example (viewing required):
Dumbo (1940, Disney); Watch in the Media Archive!
Companion texts (optional):
Keywords: Anthropomorphism; Disability; Disney; Marginalization; Mickey Mouse; Other; Quest; Solidarity.
27 April  

**Research Proposal**


**Keywords:** Bugs Bunny; Chuck Jones; Daffy Duck; Looney Tunes; Merrie Melodies; Tex Avery; Trickster Figure.

08 June

**Animals as Food**

- **Going Green – Ecological Awareness and Nature Preservation**
  - Main example (viewing required):
    - **Bambi** (1942, Disney). [Watch in the Media Archive!]
  - Companion texts (optional):
    - **Flipper** (1966–67, NBC); **The Lion King** (1994, Disney); **Happy Feet** (2006, Warner Bros).
  - Keywords: Ecology; Environmentalism; Free Willy (movie); Green Screen; Hunting.

15 June

- **Mother Earth and Her Beautiful Creatures – (Native) American Animal Myths**
  - Main text (reading required):
  - Additional texts (optional):
    - Native American Origin Myths (Heath Anthology); **Brother Bear** (2003, Disney).
  - Keywords: ‘Allomorphism’ (Garrard); Coyote Imagery; Indiogeny; Native Origin Myths; Poetry; Turtle Metaphor.

22 June

- **The Animal in Us: Allegories of Aggression, Suppression, and the Unconscious**
  - Main example (viewing required):
    - **Life of Pi** (2012, dir. Ang Lee). [Watch in the Media Archive!]
  - Companion texts (optional):
  - Keywords: Aggression; Allegory; Animal Cruelty; Animal Metaphors; ‘Id’ (Freud); Instincts; Zoomorphism.

29 June

- **Animals as Food – The Ethics of Meat Production**
  - Main text (reading required):
  - Additional examples (optional):
    - Upton Sinclair, **The Jungle**, esp. ch. 1-3 (1906); **Food, Inc.** (2008, dir. Robert Kenner).
  - Keywords: Animal Rights; Factory Farms; Food Factories; Junk Food; Veganism; Vegetarianism.

**Deadline Research Proposal TODAY!**

01 June

- **Non-Humans as Guinea-Pigs – Animal Testing in the Horror Sci-Fi Genre**
  - Main example (viewing required):
  - Additional text (optional):
  - Keywords: Animal Lib; ‘Critical Anthropomorphism’ (Garrard); Gaze; Laboratories; Research/Science; Subjectivity.

04 May

- **Creating Wild Life – Animals in U.S. Documentary Cinema**
  - Main examples (viewing required): **White Wilderness** (1958, Disney) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xMzlSg9yY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xMzlSg9yY)
    - **Monkey Kingdom** (2015, Disney), trailer: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xXf9ja5drz0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xXf9ja5drz0)
  - Additional text (optional):
  - Keywords: Discovery Channel; Documentary; Fakery; Infotainment; Lemming Suicide Myth; Staging.

11 May

- **Man’s Best Buddies – Animals as Family and Friends in Young Adult Fiction**
  - Main example (reading required):
    - E.B. White, excerpts from **Stuart Little** (1945). [Moodle]
  - Companion texts (optional):
    - **Courage of Lassie** (1946, dir. F.M. Wilcox); **Stuart Little** (1999, dir. R. Minkoff); **Cats & Dogs** (2001, dir. L. Guterman).
  - Keywords: Anthropomorphism; Children’s Books; Dogs; Domesticity; Family Culture; Pets; Young Adult Fiction.

18 May

- **Political Animals – Animal Television and the Civil Rights Movement**
  - Main example (viewing required):
  - Additional text (optional):
  - Keywords: Beatniks; Civil Rights; Daktari; Emancipation; Patricia Highsmith; Slavery/Segregation.

25 May

- **The Animal Empire Strikes Back – Tales of Terror and the Unknown**
  - Main example (viewing required):
    - **Jaws** (1975, dir. Steven Spielberg). [Watch in the Media Archive!]
  - Companion texts (optional):
  - Keywords: Disaster Movies; Fear of the Unknown; Man vs. Nature; Moby-Dick; ‘Natural Horror’; Shark Imagery.

**FINAL PAPER DUE TODAY!**