

EN2L2-15 The Question of the Animal

26/27

Department

English and Comparative Literary Studies

Level

Undergraduate Level 2

Module leader

Jonathan Skinner

Credit value

15

Module duration

9 weeks

Assessment

100% coursework

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

In an age of mass extinction, the meanings of human being and the uses of technology seem drawn into a circle bounded by the question of the animal. Through philosophical, artistic, literary, cultural, religious, and scientific studies, this course focuses on the trouble animals bring to human self-understanding. The investigation proceeds both as an inquiry from within the Western tradition, which locates humanity in an expulsion of the animal, and as an examination of traditions in which the differences between humans and animals are more varied and integrated.

[Module web page](#)

Module aims

Themes include the wild and the tame, meat, religion, animal rights, sex and gender, race, languages, colonialism, companion animals, and animal representations and performances. Discussions focus around cultural cases drawn from literature, the arts, and contemporary media. The seminar aims both to cover some of the history of cultural relations to the animal and to help participants theorize the "animal" in their own engagement with humanist tradition. The seminar thus also includes a basic introduction to "posthumanist" theory, from Heidegger through poststructuralism to systems theory, feminist, postcolonial and science studies.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

1. TALKING ANIMALS; CHILDHOOD, SEXUALITY, MONSTERS; ANIMALS AND DEATH
Brothers Grimm, "Little Red Riding Hood" (versions); Claude Levi-Strauss, "The Totemic Illusion"; Philippe Descola on animism (diagram from *Beyond Nature and Culture*); Andrew Peynetsa, "The Boy and the Deer" (as translated by Dennis Tedlock).
2. MEAT OR EATING SOULS; RELIGION, ANIMAL LETTERS
Plutarch, "The Eating of Flesh"; Eric Rohmer, *Summer* (clip, in class); Claude Levi-Strauss on the "raw and the cooked"; Carol J. Adams, "The Sexual Politics of Meat"; Michael Pollan, "The Ethics of Eating Animals," from *The Omnivore's Dilemma*; David Abram, "Animism and the Alphabet" (excerpts, pp. 123-135 of *The Spell of the Sensuous*); Viveiros de Castro, "Cosmological Diexis and Amerindian perspectivism" (excerpt).
3. PREHISTORY, AESTHETICS, ANIMAL ART
Clayton Eshleman, Juniper Fuse (selections); Paul Shepard on ritual use of "the others"; animal poetry (Ted Hughes, "The Thought Fox"); Steve Baker on the postmodern animal
4. THE ENLIGHTENMENT HUMANIMAL
J.M. Coetzee, *Disgrace*; Jacques Derrida, "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)"
5. BECOMING ANIMAL
Deleuze and Guattari, "Becoming-Animal"; Franz Kafka, "The Metamorphosis" (excerpts); Julio Cortazar, "Axolotl"; Darwin on sexual selection (excerpts); Alphonso Lingis, "Animals Body, Inhuman Face"; Marcus Coates, selected works.
6. PERFORMING ANIMALS, ANIMAL SPECTACLES
Vicki Hearne, *Adam's Task* (selections); John Berger, "Why Look at Animals?"; Werner Herzog/ Timothy Treadwell, *Grizzly Man*
7. ANIMAL SUBJECTS, ANIMAL RIGHTS
J.M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*; Jeremy Bentham, "Principles of Morals and Legislation" (pp. 8-9 *The Animals Reader*); Peter Singer, "Animal Liberation or Animal Rights?" (pp. 14-22 *The Animals Reader*); Tom Regan, "The Rights of Humans and Other Animals" (pp. 23-29 *The Animals Reader*)
8. SCIENTIFIC ANIMALS, COMPANION ANIMALS
Lynda Birke, "Into the Laboratory"; Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*; Jacob von Uexküll, *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Men* (excerpts); Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (excerpts);
9. ANIMISM, OTHER TRADITIONS, POSTCOLONIAL ANIMALS
Mudrooroo, *Master of the Ghost Dreaming*; Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture* (excerpts); Montaigne, "An Apology for Raymond Sebond"; Bhanu Kapil, *Humanimal* (excerpts).

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate in broad outline a grasp of key moments in the history of cultural human-animal relations.
- Develop some understanding of recent posthumanist theory connected with animal studies.
- Develop a critical approach to the question of the animal that enables the construction of an argument, in both oral and written formats, through commentary on relevant (primary) cultural texts.
- Demonstrate critical reading skills and an ability to develop a question about relevant literary and cultural texts that brings some theoretical (philosophical, anthropological, aesthetic, ethical, or scientific) context to bear on the analysis of one or more of these texts, making some appropriate use of scholarly reviews and primary sources.
- Demonstrate ability to organize research on set module materials, showing appreciation for complexity and capacity to examine the premises of an argument.

Indicative reading list

[Reading lists can be found in Talis](#)

Subject specific skills

Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the history of cultural human-animal relations.

Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of some of the posthumanist theory connected with animal studies.

Transferable skills

Demonstrate developed oral and written communication skills focused on complex theoretical material.

Demonstrate critical thinking and an ability to analyze literary and cultural texts to uncover theoretical (philosophical, anthropological, aesthetic, ethical, scientific) contexts, and to synthesize ideas across a range of media and disciplines.

Demonstrate independent research skills and ability to conduct “serious play” with module materials.

Study

Study time

Type	Required
Seminars	9 sessions of 2 hours (12%)
Private study	132 hours (88%)
Total	150 hours

Private study description

Reading & Research

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Assessment group A1

	Weighting	Study time	Eligible for self-certification
Assessment component			
Portfolio of contributions	10%		Yes (extension)
Portfolio of contributions (150 word weekly responses to set texts) to group Moodle discussion forum			

Reassessment component is the same

Assessment component			
Assessed essay 1	30%		Yes (extension)
1 x 1,000 word essay			

Reassessment component is the same

Assessment component			
Assessed essay 2	60%		Yes (extension)

Weighting**Study time****Eligible for self-certification**

1 x 2250 word essay

Reassessment component is the same

Feedback on assessment

Tabula and face to face.

Availability**Courses**

This module is Core optional for:

- Year 2 of UCXA-QQ39 Undergraduate English and Classical Civilisation

This module is Optional for:

- Year 2 of UENA-Q300 Undergraduate English Literature
- Year 2 of UENA-QP36 Undergraduate English Literature and Creative Writing
- Year 2 of UENA-VQ32 Undergraduate English and History
- Year 2 of UENA-VQ34 Undergraduate English and History (with a term in Venice)
- Year 2 of UTHA-QW34 Undergraduate English and Theatre Studies
- Year 2 of UFIA-QW25 Undergraduate Film and Literature
- Year 2 of UPHA-VQ52 Undergraduate Philosophy, Literature and Classics

This module is Option list C for:

- Year 2 of UCXA-QQ37 Undergraduate Classics and English

This module is Option list D for:

- Year 2 of UPHA-VQ72 Undergraduate Philosophy and Literature