

Abrahams-Curiel Department of Foreign Literatures & Linguistics

Academic year 2024-25 (תשפ"ה)

Course title (English): Literary Animals: Animal Characters and Narrators in Contemporary Fiction

Course title (Hebrew): חיות ספרותיות: בעלי חיים כדמויות ומספרים בספרות עכשווית

Course number: 132.1.0465

Course slot (semester/s, weekday/s, hours): Yearly, Mondays 16:00-18:00

Lecturer: Ruth Wenske

Lecturer's conference hour and contact details: Mondays 14:00-16:00, room 517, wenskeru@bgu.ac.il

Course description & objectives:

From folk tales to the Biblical story of Jonah, animals are some of the most popular and omnipresent characters in written texts. These are not just children's tales: animal characters allow authors to voice scathing (and controversial) political critiques, like in George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and NoViolet Bulawayo's *Glory*. In other cases, the narrators themselves are animals, giving us an unusual point of view on human society, and the relationships that different cultures have with animals.

In this course we will read and watch a range of literary works which center animals. While we will talk about the historical development of animals in literature, our reading will be focused on contemporary literature (21st century), as well as reading texts from a wide range of cultural contexts, with a particular focus on African literatures. We will talk about the way these narratives reflect human societies' relationship with animals, and how literary genres register this relationship. We will learn about animal studies, traditional religions and their role in configuring the relationships between humans and animals, and understand why these relationships—and these literary works—are an important part of environmentalism today.

Course requirements:

- Attendance and participation: 10%. Mandatory attendance
- Moodle writing assignments: 15%
- Quiz: 10%
- Two writing assignments: 65%

Total: 100%

Topics & bibliography

Preliminary reading list (subject to change):

Novels (we may read sections from some of these):

- Haruki Murakami, *Kafka on the Shore* (2002)
- Alain Mabanckou, *Memoirs of a Porcupine* (2011)
- Karen Joy Fowler, *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* (2013)
- NoViolet Bulawayo, *Glory* (2022)

Short stories:

- Lauren Groff, “Above and Below” (2011)
- Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi, “Memoirs of Naamaso” (2018)
- Nnedi Okorafor, “Spider the Artist” with sections from *Lagoon* (2014)
- Randa Jarrar, ““Testimony of Malik, Prisoner # 287690” (2019)

Audiovisual:

- *Anansi the Spider*, selected folk tales
- George Orwell, *Animal Farm* + animated adaptation ([1954] 1984)
- Ziphozakhe Hlobo and Lena Posch, *Khazimla's Adventure* graphic novel (2016)
- Pippa Ehrlich, James Reed, and Craig Foster, *My Octopus Teacher* (2020)

Essays:

- Nelles, William. "Beyond the Bird's Eye: Animal Focalization" (2001)
- Jacques Derrida, “The Animal That Therefore I Am” (2002)
- David Herman, "Animal Autobiography; or, Narration Beyond the Human” (2016)
- *Animals and Science Fiction*, edited by Nora Castle and Giulia Champion (2024)