Parales

Readings in Contemporary Literary Theory
Why were medieval pigs sometimes tried for murder and executed? Are babies human? Does the speech of animals count as language? Can humans liberate themselves by becoming more bestial? Why is it so tempting to compare our loved ones to animals, and so devastating to do this to our enemies? This advanced undergraduate course explores the boundary between humans and other animals in literature and critical theory. We will particularly interrogate the inextricability of human and animal life, and the ways that medieval and modern thought have policed, violated, and questioned the human-animal divide. Primary texts will include Marie de France’s Bisclavret, Shakespeare’s Merchant of Venice, Poe’s “Murders in the Rue Morgue,” and Erdrich’s The Antelope Wife, as well as additional werewolf tales, at least one sheep mystery, and excerpts from the Bible and Qur’an. We will also read critical texts by Darwin, Derrida, Agamben, Shannon, J. J. Cohen, J. Bennett, Haraway, and M. Chen.

Students in this course will write extensively and will practice researching, evaluating, and analyzing secondary sources. Some background in literary study is expected.