

Name	HOW WE BECAME POSTHUMAN: HUMAN-NONHUMAN IDENTITY IN ITALIAN CULTURE
Code	ITU33282
Semester	SEMESTER 2
ECTS credits	5
Pre-requisite	
Coordinator	

Module Content

Our knowledge of the world is based on human experience and encoded in human language. However, through literature and the arts, humans are able to shift their perspective and experience the world according to nonhuman animals, plants, objects and even cyborgs. Thus literature and film, among other media, perform a sort of “eco-translation” (Cronin) to express the viewpoint of the nonhuman. Based on these premises, this course will explore Italian texts that attempt to overturn the traditional anthropocentric perspective of human narrators through close interaction with nonhuman animals and the environment.

Our starting point will be Luigi Pirandello (1867-1936), modernist playwright and prose writer, and one of the first Italian authors who attempted to reframe human events by adopting the viewpoint of an animal, the tortoise. This non-anthropocentric gaze creates a productive distance, or a “threshold” (Godioli et al 2020) from which humans can renegotiate their place in a fast-paced world taken over by technology and riddled by conflict. While modernism was the time in which the premises for a decentring of the human were laid out, the two world wars offered the concrete opportunity during which humans could face human and nonhuman others (environment, animals and technological artefacts) in traumatic circumstances which forced them to rethink their identity. Through analysis of some war poems by Giuseppe Ungaretti and narrative work by Elio Vittorini, we will witness these writers’ attempt to discern what is it to be human, amidst the destruction and loss of lives caused by the war, and how to build a new human being in dialogue with other vulnerable others. Crucial questions will be raised around the interdependence of humans from animals and the environment, and about the development of new ethics.

During the second part of this course, we will consider texts written in the 1950s and 1960s in which writers such as Italo Calvino and Anna Maria Ortese deal with the damage inflicted to a world colonized by humans by featuring in their texts Argentine ants and exotic iguanas that bear witness to exploitative and extractivist practices enacted by humans in the age of Anthropocene. Last we will watch and analyse a film by famous director Pier Paolo Pasolini, *The Hawks and the Sparrows* (1966), in which the human-animal divide is renegotiated and “eco-translated” through the representation of an attempted dialogue between human and animal actors.

Learning Outcomes

Assuming you attend all or most lectures, actively participate in tutorials, complete assignments and engage in independent learning, at the end of this module you should be able to:

- Have an understanding of the historical, social and technological circumstances that led to a repositioning of the humans towards nonhuman animals and the environment over the course of the 20th century;
- Have developed an understanding of the key role played by representation of the nonhuman in the texts studied during this course.
- Have developed an understanding of the main tropes and stylistic features through which the relationship between human and nonhuman actors is expressed.
- Have developed an ability to discuss, analyse, compare and contrast texts by Pirandello, Ungaretti, Vittorini, Calvino, Ortese and Pasolini through the lens of some critical work on posthumanism and ecocriticism.

Assessment

- 70% coursework essay
 - 30% group presentation
-