Rethinking Fables in the Age of Global Environmental Crisis

Final Conference

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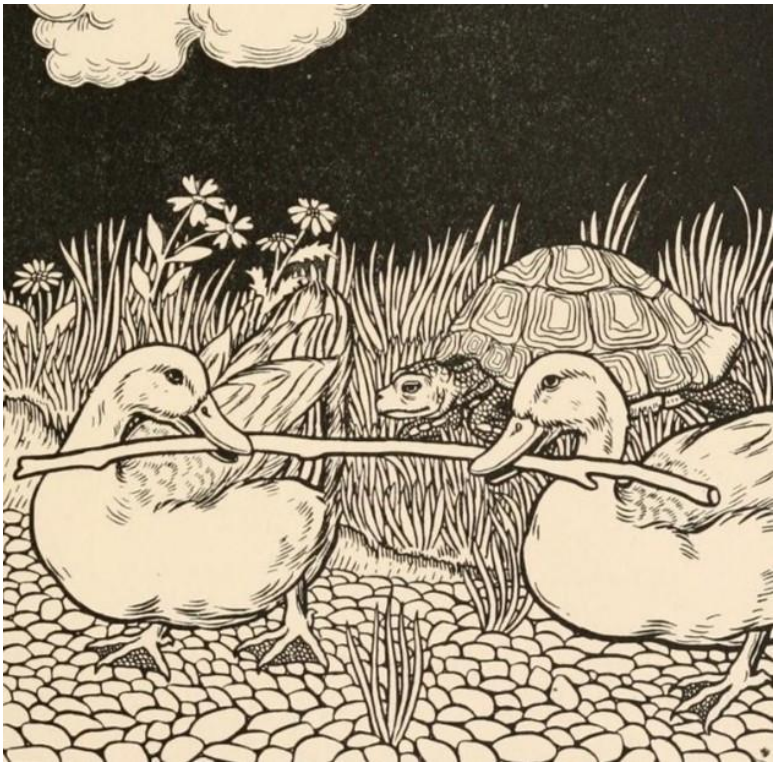

Conference abstracts

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Keynote Speakers

Professor Susan McHugh, Just Fairy Tales? Beyond the Scientific Schism between Plant and Animal Fables

Animal fables are fast gaining interest through new scientific approaches that affirm how old stories reflect leading-edge knowledge of more-than-human capacities, particularly concerning behavior, sentience, cognition, and communication. An added benefit to this development is that it subtly but firmly advances pro-animal politics by affirming literal ways of reading fabled animals as animals, and not just as metaphors for human ways of being. However, emerging understandings of similar complexities in plant life present a striking contrast, at least, in the popular writing of many scientists who state explicitly that their discoveries are not the stuff of "fairy tales," and implicitly not the basis for revolutions in plant politics. What accounts for the difference? How might contemporary narratives model movement away from dismissing talking plants and animals as just fairy-tale nonsense, and toward appreciation that links science and fable traditions to more-than-human justice initiatives?

> **Susan McHugh** is Professor of English at the University of New England, USA. All of her research and some of her teaching focus on literary, visual, and scientific stories of species. She is the author of three monographs: Love in a Time of Slaughters: Human-Animal Stories Against Extinction and Genocide (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019), Animal Stories: Narrating across Species Lines (University of Minnesota Press, 2011), and Dog (Reaktion, 2004; 2019). McHugh has numerous edited collections, which include Indigenous Creatures, Native Knowledges, and the Arts: Human-Animal Studies in Modern Worlds (2017; with Wendy Woodward); Animal Satire (2022; with Robert McKay), and, with Garry Marvin, the four-volume collection Human-Animal Studies (2018) as well as The Routledge Handbook of Human-Animal Studies (2014). McHugh's ongoing research focuses on animal and plant studies.

Professor Vinciane Despret, Becoming fabulous Humanimal with Michel Serres

In this talk, Professor Vinciane Despret will discuss Michel Serres's final book *La Fontaine* (Le Pommier, 2021) to examine his engagement with the French fable tradition to explore the workings of the human-animal relationship, and to also reflect on her own practice as 'a fabulist'.

> **Vinciane Despret** is a Belgian philosopher of science. A foundational thinker for the consolidating field of animal studies, Despret's transdisciplinary approach is located across philosophy of science, epistemology and behavioural science. Her research began to focus on the relationship between observers and the observed during the conduct of scientific research. She since then Investigate the political consequences of our theoretical choices, she undertakes a critical understanding of how science is fabricated, following scientists doing fieldwork and observing how they actively relate to their objects of study. Some of her books had been translated in English, as *The dance of the Arabian Babbler, What would animals say if we asked the right questions?, Living as a bird,* and *Our Grateful Dead.*

Conference papers

Sarah Allen, Clever Beasts: The Horse and the Human at the End of the World

The importance of Friedrich Nietzsche to the discipline of rhetoric cannot be overstated. The field's most beloved work by him, "Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense," opens with a fable about the life and death of humanity within an indifferent cosmos. Nietzsche places this fable alongside a comment about how the species of any conscious animal sees the world through its own lens. Consequently, most readers dismiss the fable as another example of his emphasis on perspectivism. However, what Nietzsche's fable suggests within the context of the longer essay is that all knowing – for all animal species – is conditioned not only by the limits of perception, but by the necessity of animorphizing. That is, while humans anthropomorphize, the horse, for example, equumorphizes, and both species do so out of the will to knowledge. Extending Nietzsche's insight and building on the work of Vinciane Despret, Eva Meijer, Donna Haraway, and others, I suggest that the horse learns to speak "human" by learning how he is being anthropomorphized. Humans, too, learn how to speak "horse" by learning how they are being equumorphized; only, this is not how humans talk about learning from horses because human discourses about horses are exactly that – about horses (not constituted with them). I would like to suggest that by examining how our learning is shaped by our being equumorphized, humans might bear witness to the interior lives and communication styles of the horse in ways that affirm that horses are intelligent, rhetorical beings, who are our interlocuters in the midst of ecological crises.

> **Sarah Allen** is an Associate Professor of Rhetoric and Composition and the Associate Chair in English at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. In her latest book project, she is re-rooting rhetoric in the pre-Socratics' conceptions of logos (with special emphasis on that of Heraclitus) to "rewild" the field. *Kairotic Inspiration: Imagining the Future in the Sixth Extinction* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2021) brings together Nietzsche's work on the Dionysian and Donna Haraway's commentary on becoming-with and producing-with to offer a theory of inspiration that centers on transformative, interspecies connectivity. Her first book, *Beyond Argument: Essaying as a Practice of (Ex)Change,* was published in 2015 with WAC Clearinghouse and Parlor Press.

Candice Allmark-Kent, Of Facts and Fabular Wolves: Looking for the Real Lobo Within the Legend

What is the connection between fables and real animals? Ernest Thompson Seton's "Lobo, The King of Currumpaw" is a modern animal fable with a foundation in fact. Published in 1894, the story retells Seton's real experiences of hunting wolves in New Mexico. Recognised as his most famous story, "Lobo" received worldwide attention and has been retold multiple times across several formats, genres, and languages for over 120 years.

Lobo the wolf became such a figure of fable to wildlife enthusiasts, animal advocates, and conservationists that he was dubbed "The Wolf That Changed America." Within the story, he is characterised on the grand scale of a fabular wolf: enormous, destructive, cunning, and elusive. Yet in death, he becomes a symbol of lupine loyalty and wild dignity. His story conveyed a moral message of sympathy for wolves at a time when they were hunted as vermin.

Despite his epic characteristics, many believe that Lobo was a real wolf. A wolf skin with his name hangs in the Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico. Two wolf skulls in the Canadian Museum

of Nature in Ottawa have been labelled as Lobo and his mate Blanca. There are also photographs, supposedly of these two wolves, with their legs held in traps. Yet Seton's own records of the hunting trip give details of encounters with multiple wolves, some of which contradict his famous story. Through history and legend, these real individuals have merged into the characters of Lobo and Blanca.

This paper begins the work of doing justice to the wolves Seton killed in New Mexico by uncovering the facts and disentangling their histories from the fable of Lobo. Running throughout is the difficult question of how fables can relate to the lives of real animals.

Candice Allmark-Kent is an independent scholar specialising in literature and science, history, and human-animal studies. She is the author of *Literature, Science, and Animal Advocacy in Canada: Practical Zoocriticism* (2023). She serves as the Associate Editor for literature at *Sloth: A Journal of Emerging Voices in Human-Animal Studies* and as a peer reviewer for the journal *Society & Animals*. She is also a contributor to *NiCHE: Network in Canadian History & Environment*. Previously, she was a council member for the British Association for Canadian Studies.

Dr. Allmark-Kent earned her PhD from the University of Exeter, where she also lectured and taught undergraduate courses on British, Irish, and North American literatures. During her studies, she spent a year at Carleton University in Canada. Her specialist expertise lies in the history of animal representation in Canadian literature, including the wild animal story and the Nature Fakers controversy.

Jamie Ashworth, 'Of Universal Application': Fables and Environmental Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century Aotearoa

In the mid-nineteenth century, European settler-colonists adopted dramatic and broad-reaching policies promoting the exploitation and alteration of Aotearoa New Zealand's forest environments. During this period, both Māori and Pākehā would create more-than-human narratives in the form of fables, exploring the destruction and subsumption of the native environment from the perspective of Aotearoa's indigenous fauna.

This paper serves as a comparative exploration of colonial and Indigenous fables in re-defining forest ecologies during this period of extreme change. European writers such as William Golder and Thomas Bracken sought to recontextualize forest ecologies to legitimize imperialistic expansion, for instance, with stories such as *The Pigeons' Parliament* and *The Bird and the Idol* adopting the perspectives of birds in exploring the effects of colonialism on the landscape. European writers would also appropriate Māori fables and re-shape them according to their own value systems, transforming these stories through cultural imperialism. Meanwhile, Māori fabulists such as Tutakangahau and Tamarau would employ their stories in resisting colonial efforts to clear forests, weaving metaphor-laden tales of solidarity and anti-imperialist opposition surrounding the non-human inhabitants of the complex ecological networks that so define Aotearoa's forests.

This paper argues that, throughout Te Ika-a-Maui in the mid-nineteenth century, forest fables became instruments of intercultural discourse within the context of land clearance, afforestation, and pastoral development. Ultimately, fables engaging with the diverse and unique forest environments of Aotearoa amounted to powerful literary instruments of colonialism or resistance thereto.

Jamie Ashworth is an environmental historian from Te Whanganui-a-Tara, Aotearoa. Their research interests centre around employing critical approaches in appraising colonial and Indigenous experiences of nature, natural resources, and land management.

John Bessai, Digital Fables and the Canadian Aporia: The NFBC's Role in Mediating Human-Nature Relations

This paper explores how digital storytelling by the National Film Board of Canada (NFBC) functions as a contemporary fable, engaging with environmental crises and the human-nature relationship. In particular, it focuses on NFBC projects like *Bear 71* and *Biidaaban: First Light*, which exemplifies the emergence of digital fables that respond to the **Canadian aporetic condition**—the unresolved tensions between environmental stewardship and industrial exploitation, colonial legacies, and Indigenous sovereignty.

Bear 71, an interactive documentary, tells the story of a grizzly bear navigating a human-encroached landscape while *Biidaaban* reimagines a future in Toronto through the lens of Indigenous cosmologies. These projects serve as digital fables, blending speculative storytelling with real-world ecological concerns. By anthropomorphizing non-human entities and foregrounding their experiences, these works invoke the ancient tradition of fables to explore the ethical and moral dimensions of humanity's impact on nature.

The paper will argue that the NFBC's digital fables are tools for environmental advocacy and reflection on Canada's aporia, where conflicting narratives of reconciliation and resource extraction collide. Through immersive technologies, these digital fables prompt viewers to actively rethink the human-nature relationship, offering new ways of narrating the Anthropocene. The NFBC's digital storytelling thus represents an essential evolution of the fable genre, reshaping it for the age of environmental crisis.

John Bessai, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor at the University College of the North, specializing in the intersection of digital storytelling, environmental studies, and public engagement. His research focuses on the role of the National Film Board of Canada in fostering public dialogue on ecological conservation, Indigenous rights, and societal narratives. Dr. Bessai's work bridges media studies, Canadian politics, and the digital humanities, with particular attention to how digital platforms contribute to cultural and ecological discourse in the Anthropocene.

Camellia Biswas, *Sensing the Wild*: The factual vs fictional Dynamics of Wild Animals in Sundarban

This paper explores the socio-ecological and cultural relatedness through phenomenological and sensorial experiences between the marginalised communities in Sundarban and wild animals through fables and religious tales. It will focus on three animals: tigers, snakes, and wild boars, each occupying distinct positions and engendering hierarchies within themselves and the human world, thereby influencing the notion of sharing space. Employing an embodied sensory representation approach that includes sight, hearing, taste, and touch, the paper draw upon extensive ethnographic evidence that includes phenomenological representations of real and factual animals. For example, the sounds produced by a tiger, known locally as *daak*, have multiple meanings. A long roar, for example, indicates territorial marking and serves as a dialogue with other tigers, whereas many brief roars may signal agitation or the loss of prey. The flavour of wild boar meat is often regarded as exceptional when its source is not disclosed. However, once the animal's name is mentioned, people's psychological reactions shift, associating the taste with notions of filth and dirt instead of superiority. Animal relationalities are not only passed down orally through generations but are also enacted in rural folk theatre (*Jatra*), which serves as a means of knowledge dissemination entwined with religious epiphanies of folk deities such as *Manasa* (the Serpent Goddess) and *Bonbibi* (the Forest Goddess) influencing the local customary practices induced with fear and reverence. Likewise, within these folk theatres, actors adorned with masks and makeup imitating tigers or snakes embody a shape-shifting concept where humans transform into animals and vice versa, blurring the distinction

between human and animal.

The paper concludes by bridging how localised animal representations contribute to the socio-cultural and ecological stewardship of the region. Phenomenology helps us understand how people personally experience and are affected by these portrayals (interms of cohabitation/coexistence), while sensoriality reveals the cultural and sensory aspects of how animals are shown in a real and factual way in the community.

Camellia Biswas completed her PhD in June 2024 from the Humanities & Social Sciences Department of the Indian Institute of Technology Gandhinagar majoring in Environmental Anthropology. Her research interests encompass Political and Cultural Ecology, environmental (in)justice, Indigenous and decolonial epistemologies, adaptation to climate change, and disaster studies. She has received several grants and awards, including the Inlaks-Ravi Sankaran Conservation Grant (2021-22), the British Council Women Leadership Program (2022), the Earth Scholarship (2023), the Cultivating Humanities and Social Sciences Small Grant by the Association for Asian Studies (2024), INTACH Research Scholarship (2023-24) and won the IIT Gandhinagar Director's Gold Medal for Overall best performance in PhD (2024).

Debanjali Biswas, Loktak Ethnographies: Water Worlds through Multimodal Perspectives

This presentation attends to the ways embodied and ecological issues, bodies and beings living along Loktak have been expressed through fables and performance cultures. The Loktak lake in Manipur, India, has been a veritable lifeline of biodiversity ranging from human habitation on floating islands of biomass and conservation area housing an endangered species of deer – the Sangai. The freshwater ecosystem nurtured by the lake can be viewed as tangible evidence of water worlds as distinctive sites from which cultural life, amongst others, can be revealed, interpreted and analysed. In the last decades, the hydrosocial lifeworld or the limit of 'littoral community' (Asem 2020) has been transformed as development and conservation projects undertaken by various authorities as well as degradation of bioresources by unpredictable climate crisis continued. In such contexts fables and art have played two primary roles: they foreground insights and microhistories of past and present, and registers resistance voicing the human and animal lives locked in dilemma. Art here emphasises the sustenance of traditional ecological knowledge that has nurtured fisheries, community-based and state-made ecotourism and aquaculture. This presentation draws from multiple sources - contemporary iterations of ancient Meitei ballads from *Loktak Lairembee Seitharol* and *Moirang Saiyon*, an essay on conservation titled *Keibul Lamjao* (1973) by author-activist M.K. Binodini Devi, staged choreography of the fables and film *Sangai - The Dancing Deer* (1984/88), and conservation documentaries, namely, *Phum Shang* (2014) and *Loktak Lairembee* (2016) by director Haobam Paban Kumar. The richness of multiple narratives teases the limits of textual analysis but works towards understanding water ethnographies through interdisciplinary/multimodal perspectives.

Dr. Debanjali Biswas is an early career researcher in social anthropology and theatre, performance and dance studies, and has extensively trained in Manipuri, with a performing career of over two decades as a dance practitioner and a performance maker. Over the years Biswas's research has been funded by the British Academy, Theatre and Performance Research Association, Showtown, Women's History Network, the Smithsonian Institution, Commonwealth Scholarship Commission and the Felix Scholarship Trust. Besides classical Manipuri performances as a soloist and ensemble artist, Biswas's choreographies have been supported by the Tower Hamlets Council in partnership with Queen Mary University of London, South Asian Arts-UK, Indian Council for Cultural Relations, Gati Dance Forum, Temple of Fine Arts, Künstlerhaus Mousonturm, and International Young Choreographers' Project Kaohsiung, Taiwan.

Gray Black, Untangling Fur-tures: Alter-Human Imprints on Queer Eco-Politics

As sea levels rise and arsenals multiply, it is contended that the 21st century is a “slow violent” (Nixon, 2011) reckoning with humanity’s social and ecological dis-integration. Our collective anxiety has reached feverish heights as we struggle to fathom mythological binaries being reified around and by us—self and other, private and public, materialism and idealism, human and non-human. Queer ecology scholarship has done much to underscore the connective ways that human and nonhuman bodies / identities are imagined, politicized, and governed. With a comparative plenitude of empirical research that shines a light on theories of queerness within the more-than-human world, my research aims to flip this priority on its head by presenting the more-than-human world as the place where theories of queerness originate and flourish. To achieve this, my research engages with and examines a demographic that lies in the median of some of the most prevalent existential dichotomies: alter-humans. Definitionally, "alter-human" refers to individuals born and classified as *Homo sapiens* whose personal identities do not align with their assigned species. With the numerical majority of alter-humans also self-identifying as members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, the countercultural disidentification (Muñoz, 1999) of alter-humans from Euro-American cultural and material practices indicates not only potential alienation from the mainstream queer community but, most interestingly, clashing ontologies where non-humans are coaxial. My research looks at the ethical and political reasons behind alter-humanity's phenomenological lateralisation and sympoiesis (Haraway, 2016) with the non-human animal animal, and how these stories of entangled identity can act as a pre-figurative politic for multi-species coalition building. Through the practice of speculative fabulation (Haraway, 2013) and the lens of intra-action (or “becoming within”) (Barad, 2007), my scholarship frames alter-humans as embodied fables, with the non-human animal as the agential character at the heart of queer care ethics and liberation.

Gray Black is a doctoral researcher within the School of International Relations at the University of St Andrews. As a multi-species liberationist and a former mental health professional, Black’s work is supplemented by an intense desire to help resolve—from macro to micro levels—the primary catalyst for trauma: disconnection. Informed by ecosophy, cultural anthrozoology, and geopolitics, their scholarship seeks to serve as a matrix upon which the eco-conscious collective can nurture cross-genus mutualism and a planetary network of belonging. Black can be reached at glgb1@st-andrews.ac.uk and encourages questions, communion, and collaborations.

Özgün Emre Can and Şeyda Fikirdeşici Ergen, Wolves: Beast or an Evil Species?

Throughout history, in regions where grey wolves (*Canis lupus*) and humans coexisted, the two species competed for resources like space and wild prey. As a result, humans have extirpated wolves from many parts of their historical range. Today, wolf distribution is mainly confined to forest, tundra, mountain, desert and swamp habitats across North America, as well as parts of Europe and Asia. Much of what we know today about wolves and their interaction with humans is based on studies conducted in North America and Europe. Although Central Asia region is home to one third of the global wolf population, it has received very little attention in wolf research. This represents a major gap in our current understanding of the human-wolf relationship. According to the dominant view in the literature, communities vulnerable to wolf depredation developed a deep hatred for wolves. In the Western world, wolf was demonized and regarded as an evil creature. In the medieval thought, the wolf was considered the “evil species”. On the other hand, there were also regions where communities have always been vulnerable to wolf depredation throughout the history. Nevertheless, in those regions, the wolf was and is a respected legendary animal, as seen in Native American culture. Similarly, the wolf is likely the most important animal in ancient Turkish mythology and one of the

most respected animals among Turkic-speaking peoples in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Although generally referred to as a "beast" by rural people, the wolf has never been considered an evil animal in Turkish culture. Arguably, for wolves, being considered as a beast is preferable to being regarded as evil. We argue that the dominant view of the human-wolf relationship is oversimplified and that the reality is far more complex. Why did some societies exterminate wolves while others managed to coexist with them? We will tackle this question by drawing on evidence from peer-reviewed literature across several academic disciplines, including wildlife ecology, psychology, neuroscience, and by examining Turkish myths, legends, folktales, and fables.

Özgün Emre Can, PhD is interested in the ecology of human-carnivore conflicts from the scale of neurons to landscapes. He is a former Society for Conservation Biology (Europe), International Association for Bear Research and Management (USA) Board Member, and Oxford University (UK) scientist. He is currently an Assistant Professor in the Department of Biology at Ankara University, Turkey.

Şeyda Fikirdeşici Ergen, PhD: Dr. Ergen's research primarily focuses on the impact of pollutants (such as heavy metals, nanoparticles, microplastics, etc.) that threaten aquatic ecosystems, as well as methods for their removal. She has a keen interest in the human-animal relationship. She is currently an Associate Professor in the Department of Biology and the Vice Dean of the Faculty of Science at Ankara University, Turkey.

Ayşe Ece Cavcav, The Lion, the Ass and the Dove: Relative Anthropocentrism and the Fabular in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*

The prevalent understanding of the fable has been as a genre that makes only allegorical use of animals since its principal aim is to deliver moralising messages to and about humans. However, this essentially Cartesian perspective, which assumes "an absolute distinction between humans and animals," is being challenged by scholars of animal studies, especially by those working on early-modern literature, since they recognise that "a much more indistinct notion of the human" is often found in pre-Cartesian literary texts (Fudge 2021). Thus, it is now more commonly accepted that animals in allegory are not just "fabulous," but they can be interpreted from multiple perspectives and studied with regard to real animals, human-animal relationships and the discursive construction of species boundaries. Likewise, Edmund Spenser's (1552/53-1599) use of fabular elements and animals in his allegorical epic, *The Faerie Queene* (1590-96), enables the study of human-animal relationships, divisions and hierarchies in the early-modern context. While Spenser wrote satirical fables such as *Prosopopoia, or Mother Hubbard's Tale* (1591), there is also an abundance of the fabular in his epic which not just makes moralising use of animals, but also reflects his "relative anthropocentricism" (Boehrer 2002). Accordingly, this paper will study some of *The Faerie Queene*'s agentic animals, comprising Una's Lion and Ass from Book I, other predominant equines, and Timias's Dove from Book IV. While they are used in a "fabular" mode, that is, for a moralising effect, it will be claimed that the actions of these figures are not necessarily unnatural or "fabulous," since they can be expected of or observed in real animals, not just humans. Moreover, by contrasting the righteous actions of these animal figures with those of erroneous human characters, Spenser disrupts the human-animal hierarchy and adopts relative anthropocentricism according to which not all humans are innately superior to or distinct from animals.

Ayşe Ece Cavcav received her BA degree from the Department of English Language and Literature at Hacettepe University, Ankara-Turkey, as well as a minor degree from the Department of Archaeology. She recently completed her MA studies with her thesis titled "Pre-Cartesian Representations of Animals and Humans in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*" at the same department and also commenced

her PhD studies there. Her research interests include animal studies, Spenser studies, ecocriticism, postcolonial studies, early modern literature, and contemporary novels.

Matthew Chrulew, Refabulating the Animal Sciences

One way to frame the modus operandi of philosophical ethology is as refabulation of the animal sciences. Following Latour and Stengers in attending to ecologies of practice, Vinciane Despret and Dominique Lestel have reopened questions of significance and relationality in the sciences of animal behaviour. From case studies combining philosophical analysis and speculation to experimental theory-fictions in the vein of Le Guin and Flusser, their work has illustrated how the history of animal psychology and ethology—from counting horses and talking apes to tool-using birds and diplomatic sheep—consists not only of epistemic trials that disclose the natural capabilities of nonhuman species, but of cosmopolitical experiments that dynamically compose new ways of being-with. The upshot is not—as in the meanest types of constructivism—that all biology is mere fabulation, anthropomorphic and domesticating. Revealing the fabular heart of the animal sciences—as a salon of contending tales with more or less explicit and didactic morals (Are animals stupid or clever? Is nature cruel or kind? Is evolution competitive or cooperative?)—only deepens the irony of their composition, and heightens the stakes of articulating them well. The question that scientists and their critics never seem to stop asking—What is the moral of the story?—is hereby transformed into an existential task: What might we make the lesson out to be?

Matthew Chrulew is a writer and researcher from Boorloo/Perth, Australia, where he is Senior Research Fellow at Curtin University. His fiction has appeared in Westerly, Cosmos, Plutonics and Ecopunk! and his essays in Theory, Culture and Society, New Literary History, Trends in Ecology & Evolution and Biosemiotics. He edited the volume Kin: Thinking With Deborah Bird Rose with Thom van Dooren, and the speculative fiction anthology Phase Change: Imagining Energy Futures. He was founding associate editor of Environmental Humanities journal, and edits the book series Animalities at Edinburgh University Press.

Sam Collier, ‘The Fable’: Multispecies Dance for Choreographing New Stories

In November 2024 at Majoda Stables in Moorestown, New Jersey, choreographer JoAnna Mendl Shaw and her dance group The Equus Projects presented a new dance piece called The Fable, in which human dancers performed with several horses and a miniature donkey. The piece upended some of the key characteristics of traditional fables and invited horses into the story as creative, agentive individuals. The Fable began in a pasture, with the audience standing along the fence, as the ensemble of dancers performed a choreographed folk dance and a few curious horses walked over to investigate and move around them. After that, the performers moved to a round pen, bringing horses one at a time to participate in improvisational scores with the dancers. The outdoor performance space also created an opening for a number of other species to lend their presence to the piece: three pet dogs in the audience, barn cats sauntering by in search of a patch of sun, sparrows rustling and chirping in the bushes, and even a herd of deer running across the far edge of the pasture and leaping over a fence in the final minutes of the show. The Fable, as with many previous works by The Equus Projects, was created through a collaborative process between humans and horses, using techniques such as “physical listening” that JoAnna Mendl Shaw has developed through her decades of interspecies work. Having taken a workshop with JoAnna, and now having seen The Fable, I will draw upon the work of Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca and Florence Fitzgerald-Allsopp in their groundbreaking new book Interspecies Performance to put the work of The Equus Projects in conversation with other recent examples of interspecies performance and

scholarship. In this article, I will consider how this type of interspecies collaboration creates an opportunity for human artists to learn directly from nonhuman animals in ways that can reshape human thinking, our behavior, our art, and perhaps even our long-term future.

> **Sam Collier** is a PhD Candidate in Theatre and Performance Studies at the University of Colorado Boulder, where she researches multispecies performance and theater about climate change. She is also a playwright and holds an MFA from the University of Iowa Playwrights Workshop. She co-hosts the playwriting podcast Beckett's Babies.

Ashley Coutu, Elephant Biomolecules as Fables

This talk will explore the potential of using biomolecular data from historic elephants to enrich the fables that we tell about elephants and their past, present, and future. By using isotope analyses to understand what a historic elephant ate, drank, and where they roamed, we are able to understand where a collection of historic ivory objects gathered from across the UK as part of an ivory amnesty, originated. But can we re-create its life history in a fable instead of just in scientific data? Ultimately, what do measuring these molecules mean for the fables we tell about elephants in the present, and the way we think and protect them in the future?

> Dr Ashley Coutu is Research Curator (African Archaeology) and Deputy Head of Research at the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

Chris Danta, Fabulous Devourment in Philip K. Dick

According to Philip K. Dick: "The ultimate in paranoia is not when everyone is against you but when every*thing* is against you. Instead of 'My boss is plotting against me,' it would be 'My boss's phone is plotting against me.'" Dick often introduces chaos into his fiction by turning objects against their human users. In his 1953 story "Colony," a team of surveyors on Planet Blue discover to their horror that a nonhuman organic lifeform on the planet is impersonating humanmade objects such as microscopes, belts, cars and spaceships to devour the human colonizers. Dick constantly describes technological objects camouflaging themselves by impersonating human or animal form ("Second Variety," *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*). Underpinning Dick's fiction, I argue, is the fantasy of apparently inert objects becoming animate and devouring the human subject. We can trace the origin of this fantasy to Dick's first published story, "Beyond Lies the Wub" (1952), which tells of how the human Captain Franco kills and eats a highly intelligent pig-like creature from the planet Mars called the wub, only then to be psychically possessed by this creature. Here, then, is the truly Dickian fantasy of the human colonizer being devoured by the apparently inert object it colonizes/devours. Dick's interest in devourment and the intimate relationship between predator and prey stems partly from his interest in the ancient genre of the beast fable. Fables commonly feature a stronger animal devouring a weaker animal. In adapting the fable to the newly emergent genre of science fiction, Dick rejects the fable's assumption of a naturalized or biological hierarchy among the animals (wolf as predator, lamb as prey). In his fablelike world, it is the supposedly weaker character (the lamb) that devours the supposedly stronger character (the wolf) after being eaten by it.

> **Chris Danta** is Professor of literature in the School of Cybernetics at the ANU in Canberra, Australia, and was recently an Australian Research Council Future Fellow (2021-24). His research operates at

the intersection of literary theory, philosophy, science and theology. He is the author of *Literature Suspends Death: Sacrifice and Storytelling in Kierkegaard, Kafka and Blanchot* (2011) and *Animal Fables after Darwin: Literature, Speciesism, and Metaphor* (2018). He is currently working on a book titled *Vital Machines: Literature, Evolution and Artificial Intelligence*.

Sakti Sekhar Dash, Lessons from the Animal Kingdom: Anthropomorphism and Ethical Stewardship in *The Panchatantra*

The Panchatantra, an ancient Indian collection of fables, uses anthropomorphism to impart moral lessons through relatable animal characters. By endowing animals with human traits, these tales foster empathy, enabling readers to reflect on their own behaviors and responsibilities toward the environment. One significant fable, "The Lion and the Mouse," illustrates that even the smallest creatures can have a profound impact. The mouse saves the lion, teaching humility and the importance of recognizing the value of all beings. Such narratives highlight the interconnectedness of life, a core principle of ethical stewardship. *The Panchatantra* also addresses the consequences of neglecting responsibilities toward others and nature. In "The Tortoise and the Geese," the tortoise's greed leads to disaster, emphasizing the need to heed wise counsel and respect the balance of the ecosystem. Similarly, "The Monkey and the Crocodile" serves as a cautionary tale about predatory behavior, illustrating that ethical relationships are essential for maintaining harmony in nature. These stories resonate deeply with contemporary environmental challenges, encouraging readers to reflect on their roles as stewards of the Earth. The moral imperatives presented in these fables advocate for a sense of responsibility that extends beyond human interactions to encompass our treatment of the natural world. *The Panchatantra's* anthropomorphic narratives convey timeless lessons about empathy, responsibility, and interconnectedness. As we face pressing environmental issues today, these fables remind us that ethical stewardship is a collective commitment essential for nurturing a sustainable future. By embracing these teachings, we can better understand our role in the ecosystem and work towards a harmonious relationship with all living beings. The stories promote a sense of responsibility towards the environment by illustrating how ethical behavior towards one another extends to our treatment of nature. *The Panchatantra* invites us to consider how our choices—whether in consumption, conservation, or community engagement—impact not only our immediate surroundings but the global ecosystem as a whole. By fostering empathy and moral responsibility, these tales urge us to adopt a stewardship mentality, recognizing that protecting the environment is a collective responsibility.

Dr. Sakti Sekhar Dash is a Fellow of Social Science Research Council, Open Association of Research Society, USA. He holds a PhD from Ravenshaw University, India. With a profound interest in literature, history, and culture, he has extensively studied the myths, legends, and folklore of ancient Greece, Egypt, Rome, and India. As a researcher he loves to revisit and re-examine ancient texts from multiple perspectives. An experienced educator and honorary member of Illinois Medieval Association, he has served as the editor-in-chief of an international peer-reviewed journal. He has extensively written and published on a diverse range of topics, including, modernism, Greek drama, environmental studies, Theatre of the Absurd, and Shakespearean drama.

Nükhet Okutan Davletov and Timur Davletov, A Shamanistic Interpretation on Human-Animal Relations in Khakas Fables

In this paper, the effects of monotheistic religions and changing regimes on human-nature or human-animal relations in the fables of the Khakas, one of the indigenous Turkic peoples of Siberia, which is considered as the *locus classicus* of Shamanism, are discussed. It is known that the ancestors of the

Khakas people living in the Khakas Republic in the present-day Russian Federation have been making complex animal depictions on various objects since the *Okunev* period, an Early Bronze Age culture. The design called “animal style” by art historians, in which animals are depicted individually or in groups, also emerged in those lands. In the medieval runic inscriptions from the same region, there is also a significant use of animal metaphors. And all these concrete depictions and linguistic material can only be explained by religion, that is, by Shamanism in the case of the Khakas and Turkic culture in particular. Indeed, contrary to the common belief in monotheistic religions, in Shamanism, nature and animals are not created for mankind and are not considered to be in people's service. On the contrary, animals and nature itself are seen as the relatives of humanbeings. In addition, in Khakas epics, animals can speak the human language, help the heroes in battles, and even go with them to the underworld after death. For this reason, due to the influence of the Tsarist and Soviet periods, there are social, economic and religious criticisms in the fables of the Khakas, however traces of the egalitarian Shamanic philosophy at the basis of Khakas culture can still be seen. In this paper, the relations between animals and humans in Shamanism is explained more clearly through examples. In this way, it will be possible to analyze what humanity can learn from cultures that preach living in harmony with nature.

Nükhet Okutan Davletov completed her PhD in 2020 at Hacettepe University Institute of Turkish Studies. She accomplished the project of artistic reinterpreting the death masks of the Tashtyk period (2nd century BC-5th century AD), an archaeological culture unique to Khakassia. The photo exhibition of this project, “Yenisei Death Masks”, first met with academics, students and art lovers in January 2017 with the support of Hacettepe University Institute of Turkish Studies; in the following three years, she held a conference titled “Shamanism and Khakas Death Masks: Turks 2000 Years Ago” in nearly 10 universities and CSO's. Together with her husband Dr. Timur Davletov, who is a member of the Khakas, one of the indigenous Turkic peoples of Siberia, they translated and prepared *Bilgeler Sözü*: *Proverbs and Idioms of the Khakas Turks.* This book was published in 2018; *Kün Sarığ Khan*: *The Epic of a Khakas Woman* in 2021, and her monograph *Hakas Türklerinde Şamanizm ve Ölüm* (Shamanism and Death in the Khakas Turks), based on her doctoral dissertation, was also published in 2021.

She also edited Timur Davletov's book *Şaman Masalları: Üç Alem Gezgini* (Shaman Tales: The Traveler of the Three Realms), and inspired by this work, she developed a project to photograph the heroes of Turkic mythology. This Project was introduced by *Magma* Magazine in 2019. She is currently teaching undergraduate and graduate courses on Shamanism, Turkic runic inscriptions, pre-Islamic Turkic culture, Turkic and Greek mythologies at Cappadocia University (Türkiye), where she started to work as an Assistant Professor in the 2020-2021 academic year.

Timur Davletov works as Siberian Specialist at the General Secretariat of the International Organization of Turkic Culture (TURKSOY). Since October 2023, he has been teaching postgraduate courses at Cappadocia University (Nevşehir, Türkiye).

Davletov was born in Kyrgyzstan in 1974 and grew up in Khakas community, a Shamanist native people of Siberia. After graduating from Leningrad (St. Petersburg) Olympic Reserves High School (Freestyle Wrestling) and working as a shepherd in his homeland, he attended Nikolay F. Katanov Khakas State University, Faculty of History for one year. He then completed his undergraduate program in International Relations, at Istanbul University, Faculty of Political Sciences. Davletov completed his master's degree and PhD at Hacettepe University, Department of Sociology.

Davletov served as the Representative of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Khakassia (RF) to the Republic of Turkey from 2000 to 2008 and as the Permanent Representative of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Khakassia (RF) to TURKSOY from 2008 to 2016. Mr. Davletov has been a member of the Editorial Board of the International TURKSOY Journal since 2004. He gave lectures on Shamanism at about 50 universities and various non-governmental organizations in Turkey. As of October 2024, he has written about 260 scientific and popular articles in Turkish, Russian and English, about 900 news and

translations of scientific and popular articles, and about 200 poems in Khakassian; about 35 books have been published, of which he is the author (6), compiler, compiler, translator, editor and prepared for publication.

Laura Del Vecchio, Buzzing Against Collapse: Response-able Storytelling to Care for a Precarious World

This paper explores stories told by more-than-human beings that are different from Cartesian thought structures that perpetuate hierarchies between humans and nature—and among humans themselves. By examining alternative cosmologies and storytelling practices as an effort to oppose collapse, this work advocates for a shift away from the centrality of the human and proposes relational communication practices that acknowledge the subjectivity of diverse life forms. The present paper proposes the concept of 'buzzing' as a communicative practice that challenges human exceptionalism and promotes response-able understandings of planetary dynamics. Through autoethnographic research conducted on-site with a beekeeper allergic to bees, this paper illustrates how recognizing the agency of more-than-human beings can provide entirely new avenues to inhabiting a precarious world. The results of this autoethnographic research are analyzed through two cardinal aspects: composting storytelling (Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble* 2016) and environmental care ethics founded on indigenous knowledge and wisdom (Danowski and Viveiros de Castro, 2014; Kimmerer, 2013; Rayner Fried, 2019; Whyte and Cuomo, 2019). This approach moves beyond catastrophic discourses and established thought structures and emphasizes the importance of the narratives produced by subjects commonly marginalized, disregarded, and forgotten in Western canons of knowledge.

Laura Del Vecchio (she/her) is a multidisciplinary researcher, artist, musician, editor, and translator whose work lies at the intersection of culture, ethics and politics of care, decolonisation, and the intricate entanglements of human and more-than-human worlds. Since 2017, Del Vecchio has developed methodologies and coordinated research groups, collaborating with UNESCO, the Austrian Chamber of Commerce (WKO), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH and many others. She has presented research on decolonial and multispecies storytelling at international conferences such as the Futures Literacy Summit organized by UNESCO in 2020 and the 2024 international Theatre and Performance Research Association (TaPRA) conference, as well as publishing articles in various outlets, including Up Future Sight, Uol Tab, techDetector and La Directa. With an MA in Construction and Representation of Cultural Identities from the University of Barcelona, Del Vecchio continues to explore the ever-evolving planetary landscapes in a multispecies, composting Solaris as a PhD candidate in Cultural Studies at the University of Balearic Islands. She is part of the research project "Cinema and Environment 2: Ways of seeing Beyond the Anthropocene", funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities.

Ellie Dobbs and Jessica Fisher, Malagasy Fables: Spatial variation in attitudes, beliefs and customary institutions relating to the aye-aye (*Daubentonia madagascariensis*) across Madagascar

1. Madagascar faces a myriad of anthropogenic pressures, impacting species longevity and facilitating the extinction vulnerability of the island's many endemic species. The aye-aye (*Daubentonia madagascriensis*) is one such endangered and exceptionally evolutionarily distinct species of lemur, threatened by complex cultural institutions that underpin multifaceted fables and beliefs and translate into complex attitudes held by Malagasy people.
2. Here, we collate the existing literature documenting attitudes towards the aye-aye, supplemented by 37 questionnaires and eight key informant interviews. We then conducted a thematic analysis of the beliefs, folklore, and fables uncovered through this process, categorising them into attitude types beyond simply positive or negative, and mapping them spatially.
3. We found that across the aye-aye's range, there were nuanced differences in how aye-ayes are viewed by Malagasy people. Attitudes were primarily negative, with aye-ayes often killed in response to encounters, or avoided due to fears of spiritual repercussions. Reports of dead aye-ayes were also found bordering protected areas and outside of their known range.
4. Avoidance behaviours in response to various beliefs could, arguably, offer much needed protection for aye-ayes, demonstrating that negative attitudes towards wildlife may not always be detrimental and positive attitudes may not always improve the species' survival.
5. People hold diverse values for biodiversity, informed by memories, past experiences, and cultural and social norms. Understanding the spatial variability and diversity of attitudes and folklore derived from beliefs toward species could help inform and target intervention strategies to improve their conservation.

Key Words: Attitudes; Cultural Institutions; Conservation Management; Madagascar; Persecution; Protected Areas; Spatial Variation

Eleanor Dobbs is multidisciplinary conservationist, with experience across various taxonomic groups, but specialises in herpetology. Her expertise includes researching distributions of Maltese reptiles, British herpetofauna ecology, and Madagascan primate folklore. With a background in ecology and conservation, Eleanor completed her first MSc with the Durrell Institute for Conservation and Ecology (DICE, University of Kent) and then undertook an additional master's in education and now lectures in Countryside Management and Biology at Canterbury College.

Dr Jess Fisher is an interdisciplinary conservation scientist, specialising in mixed-methods approaches to tackling social and environmental challenges. Her expertise includes the health and wellbeing benefits of biodiversity, a major and accelerating focus across research, policy, and practice. With a background in ecology and conservation, Jess undertook her PhD in social science at the Durrell Institute for Conservation and Ecology (DICE, University of Kent) exploring human-wildlife interactions in urban Guyana. As a research fellow at DICE, Jess combines ecological and social science approaches, including participatory processes and visual methods.

Jeanne Dubino, Virginia Woolf's Fabulous Taxidermic Fiction

Virginia Woolf deployed the genre of the fable in her two short stories featuring taxidermied animals. In the first of these stories, "Lappin and Lapinova," she uses the imagery of a taxidermied hare to convey the demise of a marriage between a human couple who animalize—and exoticize—their relationship by their terms of affection for each other. In the second, "The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection," Woolf makes the taxidermied animals come alive. If "Lappin and Lapinova" ends on a note of the posthumous, "The Lady in the Looking Glass" features revivification. The taxidermied animals in this story emerge from a cabinet and come alive, performing in a beautifully choreographed ballet. In both fables, Woolf suggests worlds separate from and not dependent on human consciousness. She dramatizes what Jane Bennett calls "thing-power": "the strange ability of ordinary, man-made items to exceed their status as objects and to manifest traces of independence or aliveness . . . a liveliness intrinsic to the materiality of the thing." As I will show, using taxidermied animals to propel the narratives makes the fabulous point that though these animals may be, in fact, dead, as stuffed creatures they remind readers that their bodies once had rich cultural lives of their own.

Jeanne Dubino is a professor of English, Global Studies, and Animal Studies at Appalachian State University, North Carolina, USA. She has been a visiting assistant professor of literature and Women's Studies at Bilkent University, Turkey; a Fulbright Scholar/Researcher at Egerton University, Kenya; Fulbright Specialist at Northeastern University, China; visiting scholar at Ain Shams University, Egypt; and Fulbright Specialist at the Federal University of Paraíba, Brazil. Some of her most recent publications include the edited volume *Virginia Woolf and the Literary Marketplace* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); and the coedited *Representing the Modern Animal in Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), *Virginia Woolf: Twenty-First-Century Approaches* (Edinburgh University Press, 2014), *Politics, Mobility, and Identity in Travel Writing* (Routledge, 2015); *Virginia Woolf: Critical and Primary Sources* (Bloomsbury, 2020); *The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf and Contemporary Global Literature* (Edinburgh University Press, 2021); *Travel and War* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2023); and essays, articles, and reviews on Woolf, travel and Animal Studies. She is currently working on a book on stray/street/free-ranging dogs in literature.

Remeen Firoz, Beauty and the Beast: Fabulist Bengal Tiger

Figure: Folk Art by Tiger Nazir, Alliance Francais, Dhaka, Bangladesh (February 2024)

The Bengal Tiger (*panthera tigris*) is a charismatic megafauna of Sundarban – the largest contiguous mangrove forest on earth, world heritage site and transboundary ecosystem shared between Bangladesh and India. The big cats are described as "clime maker" of this shape-shifting deltaic waterscape, as apex predator maintaining ecological balance. Their population is an indicator of the integrity of their habitat; in sanctuaries of Sundarban-Bangladesh 125 tigers are recorded. As the national animal of Bangladesh, the "face of the tiger" represents hyper nationalism, sovereign power and conservation politics. The flagship species' status is affectively recognized by Munda, who venerate sylvan goddess Bonbibi as an adaptive measure or spiritual governance for coexistence with the tiger demon Dakkhin Rai. Tigers have been subject to economic, cultural and religious appropriations throughout history, oscillating between "Beauty and the Beast" – depending on the gaze and clout of the beholder. In this chronicle (presentation), I attempt to narrate the "lived experiences" of a tiger from Kalinchi, a village in Sundarban and how it is the "hunter and hunted". Envisioned as a fable in the age of "global crisis" with local manifestations, the "speaking tiger" tells us about the forest, science, myths, conflicts and conservation spanning pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial regimes.

Remeen Firoz is an Environmental Humanities scholar, currently enrolled as a PhD candidate in Anthropology at the School of Culture, History and Language, Australian National University. She is academically trained in environmental humanities, with degrees in Bachelor of Arts in Environmental Studies and Masters in Development Studies from North South University, Bangladesh. Remeen worked as an environmental practitioner for nearly two decades in the fields of biodiversity conservation and climate change adaptation. Her key areas of interest are traditional environmental knowledge, Munda indigenous communities, Sundarban mangrove ecosystem, environmental memory and visual anthropology.

Remeen's research focuses on Munda indigenous communities – their lives and livelihoods in Sundarban (Bangladesh) – the largest contiguous mangrove forest in the world and a biodiverse transboundary ecosystem shared with India. She is mapping five material elements: rice, salt, fish, honey and fire that signify Munda cosmologies in times of climate change to understand how their identities are shaped by human agencies like the Forest Department and more than human entities such as tidal rivers, bees, tigers, fish and Bonbibi (Forest Goddess).

She is documenting the knowledge and practices of Munda in Sundarban to identify how they are utilized for engaging with such diverse agencies, and to co-exist with flora and fauna of this World Heritage Site. The main argument of the thesis is that Munda in Kalinchi, a village in Sundarban, encounter polycrisis in this Anthropocene epoch, that is characterized not simply by climate change and anthropogenic environmental degradation but compounded by exclusionary forest policies, socio-political discrimination and severe marginalization. As coping mechanisms to respond and adapt to the increasingly challenging circumstances, they engage in multiple strategies, including but not limited to illicit practices, recourse to folk deities, seasonal and permanent migration, reconstruction of their identities and "quiet resistance in everyday forms.

Erica Fudge, A Fable Without Nature: Twelfth Night for example

What if there is no non-human natural world present, how might the ideas about beast fables be useful then? This talk will explore the potential for beast fabling to be a key to thinking about a text that is not apparently concerned with the representation of the natural world. It will take Shakespeare's Twelfth Night as its example and read Illyria as a landscape for thinking differently about fabling. Where Blue Humanities work (Brayton, Mentz) has explored the play's seascape that bounds the land and the action of the play, this talk will explore the absence of non-human nature (there is a box tree in Act Two) and its meanings for Rethinking Fables in the Age of the Environmental Crisis.

> **Erica Fudge** is Professor of English Studies in the Department of Humanities at the University of Strathclyde and was director of the British Animal Studies Network from 2007-2024. She works on early modern English literature and history, and on the historiographical implications of animals. Her most recent publications include Quick Cattle and Dying Wishes: People and their Animals in Early Modern England (Cornell 2018); a follow-up to her 2006 'Rumination' on animal history in Humanimalia 13:1 (2022); and an essay on Hamlet in Derek Ryan ed. The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Animals (CUP, 2023).

Pablo Alonso García, What would octopuses say if we asked them the right questions?

The Pacific Northwest tree octopus was hunted by trappers to be sold as ornamental decorations for hats, and the octopus vulgaris from Rías Baixas is being reared by scientists to be farmed as food. The tree octopus was invented by a writer, and the farmed octopus vulgaris by entrepreneurs. One lives on the Internet, the other in a laboratory. It is said that one is not real and the other is. But both are produced as goods, one to be dressed and the other to be eaten. Both are fictions of a market-based bio-economy.

To follow the trajectory of the octopus that inhabits the Internet is also to follow the trajectory of the octopus that inhabits the laboratory. Looking at the traps of the Pacific Northwest and the aquariums of the Rías Baixas makes it possible to reflect on how the engineering of innovation, the designs of the landscape, and the architectures of the market, assemble the bio-economisation of these two octopuses. But what would these octopuses say about their own bio-economisation?

Following Despret's work on *right questions* (2016) and *anticipation stories* (2021), I propose a storytelling about how it would be to design collective meetings to design questions on this topic near octopuses as companion species. This is meant to be a tentacular fabulation inspired by the *speculative fabulation* of Haraway (2016) and the *speculative pragmatism* of Debaise and Stengers (2017). How to design right meetings to design right questions? Which humans and non-humans would participate in these meetings? In which ways the questions for both octopuses are connected? Would these creatures want to tell us about their birth and extinction? What multispecies ethics would emerge from this process of tentacular fabulation?

> **Pablo Alonso García**: BA in Sociology (2022) and MA in Research Methodology in Social Sciences: Innovations and Applications (2024) at the Complutense University of Madrid (UCM). I am currently working as a doctoral researcher at the Care and Preparedness in the Network Society (CareNet) group of the Internet Interdisciplinary Institute (IN3) of the Open University of Catalonia (UOC). My doctoral research (*Tentacular territories: octopus aquaculture and the coastal landscape as matters of care*) is interested in the controversies surrounding animal and territorial care in octopus farming from the perspectives of science and technology studies (STS) and multispecies studies.

Sarah Henstra, Animal Castaways: Elegy and Counterhuman Subjectivity in *Flow*

This paper examines the award-winning Latvian animated feature film *Flow* (dir. Zilbalodis, 2024) as an example of a post- or counter-human animal fable in the context of climate catastrophe. Drawing on such venerated survival/adventure tales as *Noah's Ark*, *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Incredible Journey*, Flow departs from these human-centred templates by opening on a near-future world haunted by signs of human nonsurvival. The protagonist is a small domestic cat who sleeps alone in the empty bed of its absent master. When a tsunami forces the cat to interact with diverse other castaway animals—a dog, a capybara, a secretarybird, and a lemur—the group must teach each other trust and cooperation in order to survive. The film features no dialogue, only the animal's native "voices" (e.g., mews, grunts) plus a lush musical score, and is acclaimed for the beauty and virtuosity of its animation style.

My analysis of the film takes up Laura Brown's (2023) concept of the counter-human force in fables to note that the interspecies "language games" through which the animal characters learn each others' ways (Meijer 67) are spurred on via a continuous series of dangerous intrusions not only by "enemy" animals but also by the nonanimal world: the rain from which they seek shelter, the storm that nearly capsizes their boat, the tree in whose branches they become caught, and so on. The film's (human, of course) audience identifies with the animal heroes in their struggle for social decorum and political order in the face of nature's overwhelming, directionless, heterogeneous agentic power. Further, while this fable's "lesson" might be about the possibilities of animal nonextinction, continuance and even interspecies democracy on a "posthuman" planet, the film's formal qualities confront viewers with an elegaic, spectral portrait of our own absence. The conceit of human nonsurvival serves ironically and urgently to underscore what is at stake as our human-induced climate crisis worsens.

Sarah Henstra (she/her) is Associate Professor of English at Toronto Metropolitan University. She is the author of four novels, including The Red Word (Grove Atlantic, 2018), which won the 2018 Canadian Governor General's Literary Award for fiction, The Lost Tarot (Doubleday, 2024), We Contain Multitudes (Little, Brown, 2019) and Mad Miss Mimic (Penguin, 2015). Henstra's monograph, The Counter-Memorial Impulse in Twentieth-Century English Fiction (Palgrave, 2009), examines the narrative effects of unmournable loss in the fiction of such writers as Ford Madox Ford, Doris Lessing, and Jeanette Winterson. Henstra's current research program explores concepts of human nonsurvival in contemporary climate-crisis fiction and film. With composer Henry Renglich, she is writing an animal-fable opera titled Ferals.

Isaac Waanzi Hillary and Cherry Leonardi, 'Elephants are stories now': the significance of fables amid the loss of elephants in South Sudan

South Sudan's elephants once numbered well over a hundred thousand but have been almost wiped out during recent decades of armed conflict; increasingly only the oldest human generations have any personal memories of encountering the animals. Yet elephants abound in the oral literatures of South Sudanese communities, some of which were recorded by anthropologists or colonial officials as well as being passed on orally through the generations. Elephant fables and proverbs contain moral messages and political commentaries for human audiences. But the elephants are not simply larger-than-life humans in these fables: the bodies and behaviours of the animals fundamentally shape the stories told about them, reflecting long histories of human-elephant interactions and observations. The paper will explore how elephants have played an active part in constituting the landscapes, cultures and value systems from which these fables emerge, and it will ask what the disappearance of living elephants means for these environments and societies.

Isaac Waanzi HILLARY is a South Sudanese Zande social anthropologist and ethnographer. He is a passionate storyteller of his people in his native Pazande and English. Hillary has published and coauthored a report and articles with Prof. Cherry Leonardi, Prof. Luisa Lombard and Dr. Bruno Braak. Hillary continues to write for his blog https://worondimo.wordpress.com on different aspects of the Azande customs.

Cherry Leonardi is a historian at Durham University, UK, whose previous research has focused on histories of traditional authority, local justice and land governance in South Sudan and northern Uganda. More recently she has been working on histories of human-wildlife relations in South Sudan, with a particular focus on elephants and the ivory trade, published as an article in Environmental History and a report co-authored with Isaac Waanzi Hillary and Machot Amuom: ELEPHANTS ARE STORIES NOW – Rift Valley Institute. Her current book project on elephant-human relations in South Sudan's history will explore oral and material cultural productions, including fables about elephants.

Anchit Jain, From Fables to Praxis: Reflections on Animal Agency, Ethical Concerns, and Pragmatism in Jainism

In the era of "post-domesticity" in the animal-human relationship, as Richard Bulliet characterizes it, reflecting upon fables can reveal cultural contours of the past, raising ethical issues pertinent to the current environmental crisis. More than two decades ago, William Cronon's "Nature's Metropolis" linked the emergence of capitalistic centers like Chicago with the mechanization of meat processing and pig-killing machines, indirectly linking some of the mushrooming environmental issues with an over-exploitative regime over nature and animal resources. How would have animals responded to this? Ancient religious orders, at least, enjoyed the flexibility of giving voice to distressed animals as didactic concerns for their ethical treatment. In this regard, Jainism—one of the oldest surviving religions, originating in IndiaS—emerged as a champion for advocating the protection of animals, a concern that strongly permeated its monastic rules and praxis. Besides dietary rules, lay followers, with an entangled relationship with draught animals, are subject to strict rules against over-exploitative burdens. These concerns transcend law books to innovatively use fables to address animal pain by a) blurring the boundaries of the human-animal distinction in a reincarnative cycle and b) offering spiritual agency to animals. These fables are often reproduced in religious art, particularly on temples, for the audience to interact with and reflect upon. The animal concerns in its fables are not just limited to ethical idealism but also reflect a pragmatic approach for a pre-modern society entangled with animals for practical purposes, as evident from its inscriptional and textual records. Considering this, would it be surprising that, according to tradition, Vardhman Mahavira, the founder of this religion, is said to have been a lion in a previous birth who performed advanced spiritual austerities?

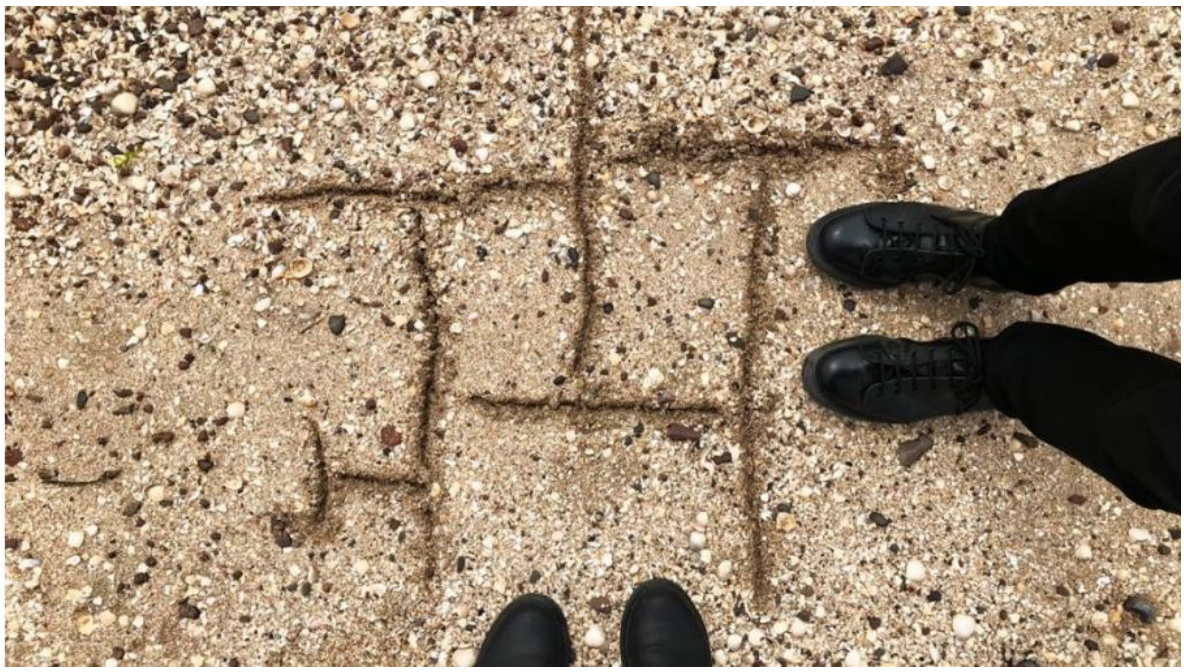
Anchit Jain is a doctoral student at the University of Delhi. He also teaches subjects like Global Environmental History and Art History to undergraduates as a Guest Lecturer at Delhi College of Arts and Commerce and is also working with Jio Research Institute for the Temples of India Project. Besides his research projects on the history of Jain Monasticism and Art, he is keenly interested in situating environmental history at the juncture of Art, Economic, Religious, and Social History- a central methodological approach followed during his MPhil thesis on Osian, a medieval temple town in arid terrains of Rajasthan, India, whose emergence was linked with the role of camels and pastoral economies. He is working on the history of Camel Domestication in Indian subcontinent, a part of which is reflected in one of his publications, "Situating camels and other animals in the Early Medieval efflorescence of the Thar," and also, "Animal discourse as a methodological tool for history writing: Case study of Hyecho's travelogue". He has presented his research at major conferences in Germany, France, and England, along with many such events in India.

Eri Kato, Sacred Wolves of Bushu Mitake Shrine: Nature Worship in Japan and Its Modern Relevance

This presentation explores the evolving nature of "Oinusama Shinkou," a form of nature worship in Japan that venerates wolves/dogs as sacred beings. The wolf worship is accompanied by numerous folklore and legends about them, many of which tell stories of wolves helping humans. Focusing on the case of Bushu Mitake Shrine in Tokyo, it examines the historical and cultural significance of wolf worship, reflecting Japan's deep-rooted respect for nature and animals. Historically, wolves in Japan were regarded as protectors—guardians of crops, homes, and even communities during crises such as epidemics. These beliefs were deeply intertwined with Japan's mountainous landscape, agricultural practices, and spiritual traditions. However, modernization and urbanization have diminished the relevance of these practices, leading to a decline in traditional followers. Surprisingly, recent years have seen a resurgence in visits to Bushu Mitake Shrine, largely driven by pet owners seeking blessings for their dogs. This is likely due to the fact that the concept of "Oinusama" blurs the boundaries between wolves, dogs, and deities, illustrating the fluid categorization of animals in Japanese culture. This presentation examines how this flexible belief continues to provide spiritual solace while facing challenges to its sustainability. By analyzing the cultural and environmental lessons embedded in this practice, it argues that wolf worship offers valuable insights into fostering more ethical and sustainable relationships between humans and non-human animals. Ultimately, this study invites global perspectives on how traditional beliefs can contribute to addressing contemporary environmental and ethical challenges.

Eri KATO is a researcher specializing in Area Studies with a focus on human animal relationship, food culture, and American cultural history. Kato holds a Master's degree from the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at the University of Tokyo. From 2017 to 2024, Kato served as a full-time lecturer at Toyo Gakuen University and has also been lecturing at Rikkyo University since 2021. Since April 2024, Kato joined Asia University as an assistant professor in the Department of Business Administration. She has been teaching “Humans and other animals” course which focuses on the cross cultural views on animals and their roles in human societies. Kato's scholarly works include research papers such as Diversification of Animal Welfare Initiatives in Asia (2023) and Conflict over Images of “Appropriate Nature” for Hawaii (2023), and Asian Settler Colonialism and Wildlife of Hawaii (2023). Kato has also delivered lectures and conference presentations on topics ranging from animal welfare in Japan to sustainable food practices in the U.S.

Kaisu Koski and Nick Dunn, Fabular Music for Rodent Rights: Pied Piper Goes Wonderland



This artistic practice develops musical-performative interventions for rodent rights and well-being, considering performance art as an ecological practice. It builds bridges between performance studies and critical animal studies, centering on the complexity of the human-rodent relationship. When we consider our relationships with other species, we typically bring to mind our daytime experiences and, thus, the nonhumans that we might encounter or anticipate being active. However, most rodents are crepuscular or nocturnal, going about their lives out of sight and out of mind of most people. We seek to address this gap in knowledge and understanding by questioning our relationships with nonhuman life after dark. Our work develops performative practices about and for rodents as wild animals subject to extinction and intelligent survivors able to invasion. We will present aspects of our speculative interventions drawing from the Medieval legend of the Pied Piper of Hamelin. The legend is considered a multi-layered and early version of nonhuman displacement engineered by humans and stigmatizing another species (Dunn and Koski, 2023). We will also share how the project is now expanding to support the endangered Hazel Dormouse by being inspired by the dormouse character in Lewis Carroll's (1865) *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. The primary media used in our practice are music videos. Some of our songs are composed as a homage to extinct rodent species. Some of them aim to expand the rodents' intellectual capacities and, hence, their chances of survival. Fundamentally, the songs aim to decolonize human attention from consumerism and human-centrism and reframe rodents as holders of knowing and mammals worthy of thriving.

Kaisu Koski is a cross-disciplinary artist with a background in performance, film, and biological materials. She is an Associate Professor of Art and Design at Sheffield Hallam University. **Nick Dunn** is the Executive Director of Imagination, the design-led research lab at Lancaster University, where he is also a Professor of Urban Design. He is the founding Director of the Dark Design Lab, exploring the impacts of nocturnal activity on humans and nonhumans. As the electro-acoustic postpunk duo Burn City Pipers, Kaisu and Nick create songs, music videos, and sound poems about and for more-than-human justice. They are working on their first album, Exit Songs, which is dedicated to endangered and extinct nonhuman animals in anthropogenic climate change.

Cass Lynch, Nathan Morehouse, Josie Turnbull, Kaori Nagai, 'How to read a poem to a spider'

How can – and should we – read a poem to a spider? If the fable is a genre which stages an encounter between language and the nonhuman world, what happens when we touch spiders with our words, and how might we do so caringly, so as not to harm their world?

'How to Read a Poem to a Spider' is a fruit of interdisciplinary conversations and collaboration, emerging from the 'Rethinking Fables' networking project. This art/science collaboration originated in the Spider Fable Workshop, designed for the project by Prof. Lisa-Jean Moore in January 2024. Since then, we have remained in touch, dreaming up and developing ideas for spider fables. Apart from Lisa-Jean, who has worked on the spider goat, our team includes Nathan Morehouse, an expert in spider vision who provided scientific insights; Noongar writer Cass Lynch, who volunteered to weave our ideas into fables; British artist Josie Turnbull, who joined us to visualise /materialise these fables; and Kaori Nagai, who grounds the conversation in the fable genre.

'How to Read a Poem to a Spider' takes the form of a poem, 'visualised' by a spider sculpture and enriched with annotations from both scientific and fabular perspectives. In this talk, each participant discusses the making of this 'spider fable', exploring their experience of and take on it, together with their sense of how to talk to a spider in this age of global environmental crisis.

Cass Lynch is a Noongar woman, and writer and researcher. She is currently a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Curtin University in Perth, and her PhD explored Aboriginal stories that reference climate change. She is a member of the Wirlomin Noongar Language and Stories group who focus on the revitalisation of song and language connected to south coast Noongar people. Her borongur/totem is the Trapdoor Spider and this inspires her in writing about ecology, deep time, relationality, temporality, and language.

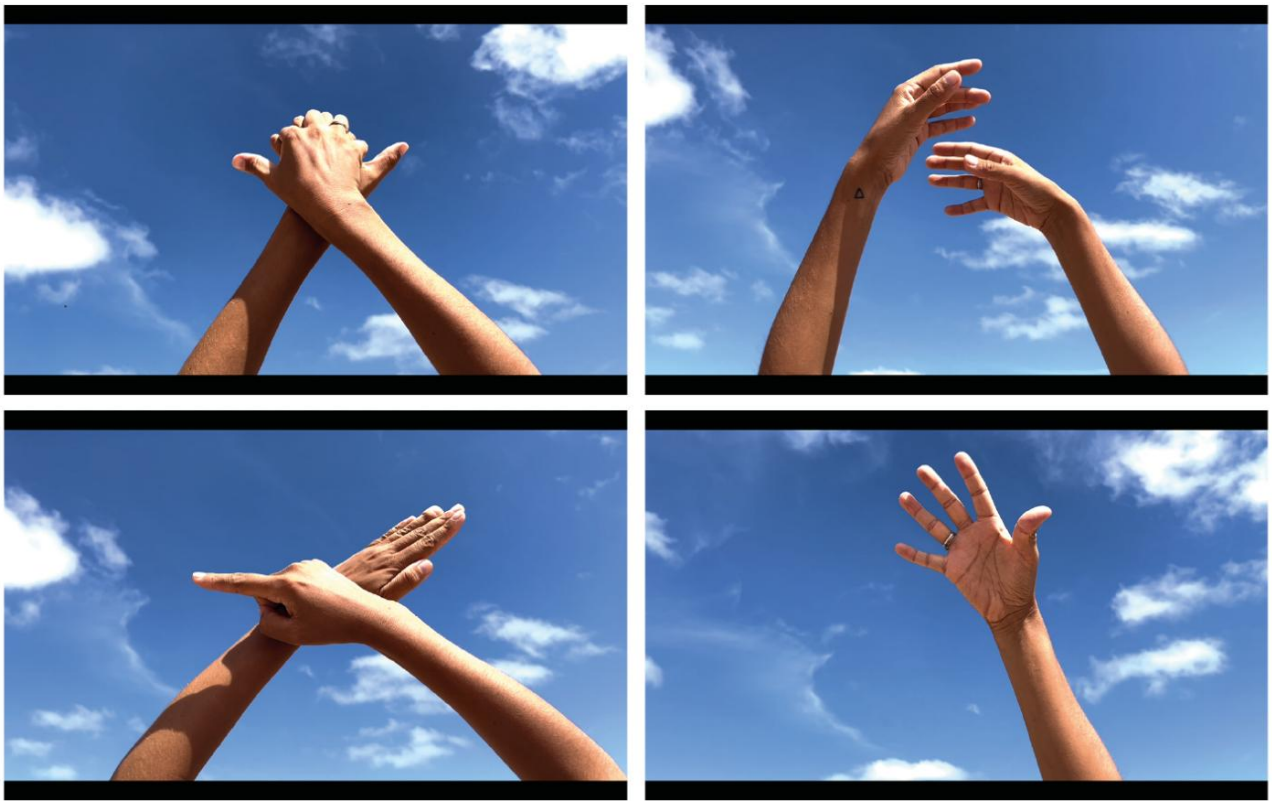
Nathan Morehouse is an Associate Professor of Biological Sciences at the University of Cincinnati, where he leads a large team of researchers studying how animals see. He is also the founding director of the Institute for Research in Sensing, a transdisciplinary research institute focused on sensing, perception, and sensor technology development through deep integration between STEM, the humanities, and the arts. As a poet, photographer, and musician himself, Dr. Morehouse feels at home playing, dreaming, and building at the interfaces between art and science.

Josie Turnbull is an interdisciplinary artist and freelance artist facilitator/educator based in London, with a practice that currently spans textiles, sculpture, printmaking, and lens-based media. In her practice, she is particularly interested in the concept of the "absolute fake," using it as a tool to reveal latent truths about our excessive systems of extraction. Through bricolage and chance processes, she recodes throwaway consumer materials, to create visual languages led by artificial colour relationships and material glitches. This exploration often leads to absurdist projects that interrogate the intersections of the animate, inanimate, artificial, and hyperreal.

Lisa Jean Moore is a medical sociologist and SUNY Distinguished Professor of Sociology and Gender Studies at Purchase College, SUNY. Her books include *Catch and Release: The Enduring, yet Vulnerable, Horseshoe Crab* (NYUP) and *Our Transgenic Future: Spider Goats, Genetic Modification and the Will to Change Nature* (NYUP), which investigates the creation of spider goats, a genetically modified species that lactates spider silk protein.

Kaori Nagai is Senior Lecturer in Victorian Literature at the University of Kent and the principal investigator of 'Rethinking Fables in the Age of Global Environmental Crisis.'

Naho Matsuda, Tracing the Ocean with your Hands



‘Tracing the Ocean with your Hands’ (*HD video, 9min, colour, stereo sound, 2024*) shows marine life hand signals with a voice narration describing the hand gestures, sharing personal memories and talking about the devastating effects of the climate crisis.

Marine life hand signals are used underwater to communicate the sighting of animals. Most commonly the hand signals mimic the animal’s appearance, its movement or sometimes resemble the animal's namesake. They are used internationally by divers and marine biologists around the world. However these signals are somewhat fluid – divers often invent new signals or adapt existing ones to sign local or rare species.

By looking at our non-verbal communication of the natural environment ‘tracing the ocean with your hands’ is an attempt to consider our relationship with some of the most endangered marine life. I’m interested in these very simple, silent and gestural ways that we use to communicate about other species. What happens if one day the species itself disappears but one form of remembering is a movement of our hands that imitates its way to swim.

The work is part of an ongoing research about signals and gestures, where I’m exploring how we use our hands to understand and communicate with the world around us.

HO Cat, 2022

‘HO Cat’ consists of a 4-colour RISO print and an official letter from the UK Government. It is a diagrammatic composition of Larry the cat, the official ‘Home Office cat’ living in Downing Street No10, the UK’s Prime Minister’s office, since 2011. As a seemingly apolitical being living in the midst of British politics, Larry has survived so far six prime ministers, purring before and after Brexit, slept through international politician’s visits and has seen many back-stories to events and

incidents that we, the general public, have only heard official versions about. Can Larry sense when a politician lies? Does he care at all about British politics?

The print shows phonetic cat sounds based on Mildred Moelk's research on cat sound vocalization, a cat tree built from parts of No10 interior, Brexit reflections in the cat's eye, a long-tongued yawn and a pile of shit. Next to the print I will exhibit an official response from the Home Office that confirms the receiving of an edition of the print itself.

For the 'Rethinking Fables in the Age of Global Environmental Crisis' conference I would like to create an update of the current print with an extension that includes the change of government and the new UK Prime Minister.

Naho Matsuda is a visual artist and researcher based in Munich and London. She is part of the Interaction Research Studio of Northumbria University. Naho's work examines forms of languages and modes of communication often in context of human and non-human power structures. Her recent projects explore how men apologize, if dogs can be weaponized and how we use our hands to imitate animals. nahomatsuda.com

Paul March-Russell, A Fable for the World That Has Ended: Laura Jean McKay's *The Animals in That Country*

Laura Jean McKay's debut novel won the Arthur C. Clarke Award in 2021. It takes both a real-world and science-fictional trope - a global pandemic - but imagines a fresh apocalyptic outcome: the disintegration of language barriers between human and non-human animals. The novel therefore reworks the fable trope of talking animals whilst also drawing upon a similar convention in children's fantasies, from Hugh Lofting's Doctor Doolittle stories to the demons in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*. McKay, however, emphasises the post-Darwinian reality of such a conceptual breakthrough: the sudden discovery of communication undermines the anthropocentrism associated with the fable and foregrounds the human as just another entity within the web of life. In that sense, McKay's novel complements the cosmic horror of contemporary fictions - for example, Liu Cixin's *Remembrance of Earth's Past* trilogy - whilst also articulating a notion of what Doris Lessing once termed 'cosmic need'. I will argue that, unlike other apocalyptic novels such as Emily St John Mandel's *Station Eleven* (2014), which offer an encomium for the world that has ended, the foregrounding of need in *The Animals in That Country* presents a fable for being within a radically transformed ecology.

Paul March-Russell is editor of *Foundation: The International Review of Science Fiction* and co-founder of Gold SF (Goldsmiths Press). His most recent book is *J.G. Ballard's Crash* (Palgrave, 2024) and he has also published several articles and book chapters on landscape and non-human encounters in the work of Jenn Ashworth, Zoe Gilbert, Sarah Hall, Daisy Johnson and Lucy Wood.

Robert McKay, Animals, Fables and Political Aesthetics under the Blacklist: The Case of *The Brave One* (1956)

Wolf Chases Pigs (1942), *Lassie Come Home* (1942), *My Pal Wolf* (1944), *The Brave Bulls* (1951), *The Brave One* (1956), *Torero!* (1956), *The Misfits* (1960), *Hud* (1963), *The Sandpiper* (1965), *Born Free* (1966), *Planet of the Apes* (1968), *Watership Down* (1978). These films, in all of which morally-fraught human–animal relations are crucial, share something surprising: the creative importance of artists subject to political suppression and blacklisting after refusing to testify before the US House Un-American Activities Committee. In this paper, I explore

why blacklisted film-makers might be so interested in animal fables, and why their portrayals of animals matter, by focussing on the most significant film involved—*The Brave One,* for which Dalton Trumbo won the Motion Picture Story Oscar under the pseudonym of Robert Rich, a ruse whose exposure fatally weakened the blacklist.

The Brave One (1956) is a cinematic fable about the exploited emotional labour of farming families, the objectified animal labour of blood sport performance, and the moral labour of aesthetic and political resistance. A tenant-farmer's child, Leonardo (Michel Ray) befriends a bull, Gitano (uncredited) whose mother dies in labour. After Gitano is misappropriated by the landowner and sent to fight in the corrida, Leonardo petitions unsuccessfully to save his life, which is eventually reprieved, at the hands of a captivated public, on account of Gitano's own bravery and forbearance. I interpret the film as a case study of how the fable mode connects the interpenetrating issues of animals, political aesthetics, and labour, complicating both the aesthetics of the blacklist and the history of the popular cultural representation of animal protection. Focusing on the film's fabular effects, I will ask:

1. How does the animal labour of evading, resisting or suffering violent treatment employ the moral and political values (indefatigability, determination, sacrifice, honour, dignity) most prized by blacklisted artists?
2. How does the moral labour of protecting animals from violence express the progressive political labour of defending fundamental democratic principles in an era of state repression?
3. How does critique of the human appropriation of animal labour, as a violent expropriation of animal life to be resisted by animals and their human defenders alike, allow for the continued (if complicated) cinematic circulation of leftist thought under the blacklist?
4. And how is our understanding of pro-animal agency—the moral impulses, mundane practicalities, and revolutionary horizons of political labour for animals—itself shaped by portrayal under the aesthetic conditions of the blacklist.

Robert McKay is Professor of Contemporary Literature at the University of Sheffield, where he is also co-Director of the Sheffield Animal Studies Research Centre. With Susan McHugh and John Miller he co-edits *Palgrave Studies in Animals and Literature,* which has over 40 books in print. He has published widely on the cultural representation of animals and animal-human relations in literature and film.

Hani Min, The Fabulous Mole

In his 1904 letter to Max Brod, Franz Kafka juxtaposes us with a mole: "We burrow through ourselves like a mole and emerge blackened and velvet-haired from our sandy underground vaults, our poor little red feet stretched out for tender pity." Later, Gilles Deleuze draws upon a part of Kafka's letter in his essay 'Literature and Life' to unfold the death of a mole with respect to the beginning of literature: "Literature begins with a porcupine's death, according to Lawrence, or with the death of a mole, in Kafka."2 The death of the nonhuman animal is closely linked to the beginning of the so-called literature. In this context, the mole is a fabulist, the creator or writer of fables. At the heart of fables, there are radical tensions between the fantastic and the realistic, the literary and the political, and even mimetic and prosthetic. As a writer, the mole burrows deep into the underground, channels the chthonic chambers anew, and digs side tunnels to find ways to confront our current crises. By reading mole fables or fabled thoughts of mole writers, such as Aesop, Kenneth Grahame, D. H. Lawrence, and Kafka, among others, I explore how the fabulous mole puts unprecedented pressure on the 'realism' of moles and the environment. The foundation of old civilizations is binary, hierarchical oppositions, and the mole exposes the fact that these

hierarchical value systems result from the arbitrary drawing of lines, bringing to the surface those who are excluded or repressed for the system to function. The mole renews the relationship between surface and underground, above and below, life and death, day and night. The fabulous mole is mapping our thinking of the chthonic, reconfiguring the relationship between fictive and real, between fantastic and real in a new way.

Hani Min is currently a final-year PhD student in English at the University of Sussex. Her research focuses on rethinking the relationship between human, nonhuman, and the environment, with a particular interest in the works of Jacques Derrida and Hélène Cixous. The title of her PhD thesis is 'The Creatureal: Towards a New Eco-Poetics', which proposes a portmanteau of 'creature' and 'the real' to rethink literary realism in the era of global warming, climate crisis, and mass species extinction. Her thesis is reading for/with five creatures or what she calls five creatureals: mole, whale, ray, starling, and ants.

Terefe Mitiku, An Ecocritical Analysis of Oromo Oral Fable: Lesson for Animal Study and Global Environmental Crisis

Fables are a prominent literary form involving the depiction of animals (Harel, 2009). In recent animal studies, some scholars have dismissed fables as merely anthropomorphic and anthropocentric. However, other researchers argue that fables hold significant potential for ecocriticism and serve as valuable resources for understanding animal studies (Schönbeck, 2019; Harel, 2009; Hartigan, 2014). These scholars highlight how fables can explore and theorize the relationships between texts, animals, and their environments, emphasizing their "theoretical potential." Moreover, fables can bridge the gap between fact and fiction, bringing contemporary research to life (Wimpenny, 2021). This suggests that studying fables may enhance our understanding of posthuman knowledge production.

In animal studies there is a growing tendency to reason from alternative frameworks than the anthropocentric, stressing a parallel connection rather than a relationship between subjects and objects when it concerns humans and non-humans (Freire, 2010). This perspective suggests that humans are not inherently in a dominant position, freeing them from the tendency to exploit the environment (Wahyuni et al., 2023). Given the widespread acknowledgment of environmental crises and the efforts to mitigate harm and protect the planet, it is an opportune time to explore new avenues for reconsidering human-animal interactions and their ecological impact.

This research addresses the Oromo oral fable, an emerging area in fable studies. It aims to decolonize the research on oral narratives, particularly fables, as Haase (2010) highlighted, reasoning from a South perspective. The interpretation of Oromo fables will be approached contextually, bringing in the perspectives of narrators and audiences. Much theorization and methodology in fable research start from published editions of fables. In this study, I emphasize fables in performance, rendered orally in the Oromo language. Based on fieldwork, the connection between textuality, orality, performance, and meaning is examined. Additionally, this research explores new stories from a cultural, historical, and linguistic background that is so far under-studied. With this, I hope to contribute to and expand the field of fable studies, as well as contribute to the decolonization of knowledge surrounding fables and animal studies.

To that end, the research focuses on the oral Oromo fables, focusing on ecological themes through an analysis of characterization and plot, linking these to discussions with narrators and audiences during the fieldwork. The research is guided by the hypotheses and arguments of Zapf (2022), which regard fables as significant sources for studying human-animal interactions amid an ongoing global environmental crisis.

Terefe Mitiku is an assistant professor at the Department of Oromo Folklore and Literature, Jimma University, where he contributed to teaching, research, and community services. He holds a BA degree in Folklore and Literature from Jimma University, Ethiopia, and an MA in Folklore and Cultural Studies at the same university. Currently, he is a Ph.D. candidate at Ghent University, Belgium (Department of Languages and Cultures) and Jimma University, Ethiopia (Department of English Language and Literature) under the BOF-Dos scholarship scheme. His project is titled “Human and non-human Interaction in Oromo Oral Fables", and he is participating as a member in the project ‘’Oral Literature for Development"—"Storytelling and Young People Coping with Crisis: Oral Narratives and Crisis Management in Kenya and Ethiopia’’ with other colleagues.

Senjo Nakai, Reimagining Human-Nature Relationships Through the Lens of the *Januke* Fable in Kiso Valley, Japan

This study examines the role of folklore in reconsidering human-nature relationships through the lens of the *januke* (snake run-off) fable in Japan’s Kiso Valley. In this area prone to mass movements, a long-standing belief has existed that the movement of a mythical water serpent inhabiting local water bodies causes devastating debris flows. This fable has provided residents with wisdom to understand the causes, characteristics, and precursors of debris flows, enabling them to coexist with unpredictable natural threats. This anthropomorphic narrative of nature might seem incompatible with modern disaster management paradigms. However, it promotes a perspective that views nature not merely as an object to be controlled, but as an active agent. This recognition of human vulnerability reinforces the need for a humble attitude towards nature. In conclusion, the folkloric insights represented by the *januke* fable provide valuable perspectives that complement contemporary scientific approaches to disaster management, highlighting the importance of preserving local disaster memories, passing down collective wisdom about human-nature coexistence, and challenging the positivist assumption of human dominion over nature.

Dr. Senjo Nakai holds a Ph.D. in International Communication and serves as an associate professor at the International Center of Tokyo Metropolitan University, specializing in intercultural communication and media studies. His current research focuses on how communities facing challenges such as epidemics, natural disasters, economic hardship, and political oppression leverage local resources to create "tactical media"—including rumors, popular songs, graffiti, and folklore—to address these issues. For his doctoral dissertation at an Australian university, he conducted two years of field research in northern Thailand, exploring how HIV-positive individuals and their supporters generate survival wisdom. Additionally, he examines the social roles of vernacular narratives in Asia, with a particular emphasis on Thailand and Japan.

Vedran Obućina, Spiritual Narratives and Nonhuman Agency: Rethinking Religious Fables in the Age of Environmental Crisis

This paper will explore the intersections of religion and the fable genre, specifically in the context of the environmental crises. Religions, with their deep-rooted traditions, have long employed allegorical storytelling to convey moral lessons and ethical guidelines. The genre of fables, which often features animals as symbolic figures, presents a unique opportunity to examine how religious traditions conceptualize the human-animal relationship and how these ideas intersect with current ecological concerns. In many religious narratives, animals are not mere metaphors but moral agents or spiritual beings. For example, in Buddhist Jataka tales, animals embody virtues such as compassion and wisdom, offering models of ethical behavior for humans. Similarly, in Hinduism, animals like

Hanuman and Garuda represent powerful spiritual forces, blurring the boundary between the human and nonhuman worlds.

This paper seeks to extend these discussions by considering the role of religious fables in addressing contemporary environmental challenges. How do religious fables, through their depictions of animal protagonists, contribute to our understanding of nonhuman agency? Can they offer alternative worldviews that challenge anthropocentrism and foster more harmonious relationships with nature? These questions invite a rethinking of fables in the context of religious traditions, placing them within the broader discourse of multispecies ethnology, animal studies, and environmental humanities. By incorporating religious fables into the conversation, this abstract aims to highlight the potential of these narratives to offer spiritual and ethical insights that can help navigate the complexities of the environmental crisis, ultimately fostering more compassionate and sustainable modes of coexistence between humans and nonhumans.

Dr. Vedran Obućina is a Croatian political scientist, historian, and theologian with a PhD in Religious History from the University of Regensburg (Germany). He currently leads the Centre for Interreligious Dialogue in Rijeka, Croatia, with an emphasis on eco-theology and interreligious integrative societies. He is the peace fellow of the Chulalongkorn University (Bangkok, Thailand), and the permanent fellow and trainer of the Kaiciid International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (Lisbon, Portugal).

Rosina Pastore, Rethinking non-human animal agency in the *Pañcatantra* by Viṣṇuśarman (300 CE)

This paper represents a first attempt at counter-reading the Sanskrit tales known as *Pañcatantra* by Viṣṇuśarman (300 CE). While it is difficult to overcome an anthropocentric interpretation of the book as its purpose is to teach the art of governance to human princes, this paper seeks to complicate the reading of its first book (On creating dissension among allies). On the basis of scholarship on the role of non-human (talking) animals in Indic literature and their anthropomorphizing in the collection (Olivelle 2013), this paper shows that non-human animals in the *Pañcatantra* are yes overwhelmingly represented as metaphors of humans, yet they also appear as speaking for themselves and behaving as animals in some instances, making their portrayal complex. Resorting to recently-developed methodologies of reading literary sources from the perspective of animal history (i.e. Lönngren 2021), this paper proposes a conceptualization of animal agency which goes beyond comparison to human forms of agency and interprets the close-read passages of the book as clues to the interdependency of human and non-human worldviews.

Rosina Pastore is FWO postdoctoral fellow at Gent University (Belgium). She obtained her PhD in 2022 from the University of Lausanne (Switzerland) in Indian Studies. Her main domain of research is vernacular philosophical literature, which she investigates through primary sources in Classical and Modern Hindi, Rajasthani, and Sanskrit. As research and teaching assistant in Lausanne she has acquired an interest in animal narratives in South Asia and, as postdoc in Gent, she is lecturer-in-charge of the MA class “Animals, Humans and the Environment in Asian Studies”, a field she aims to develop as second axis of research.

Saikat Pradhan, Companion Animal or Monstrous Critter? : Questioning Fable/Fabulation, Non-Human Agency and Environmental Crisis in Anish Deb’s “Pashobik”

Fables, in the geological epoch of the Anthropocene, suggest newer forms of engagement with the world while encouraging a total reorientation of culture, one which does, and perhaps should, go

beyond an understanding of animals as mere anthropomorphic representations. In fact, rethinking multispecies encounters in aesthetic productions like fables can be said to help construct the category of "culture" better (Hartigan 2014, 2). This paper draws on Donna Haraway's concept of "speculative fabulation" in order to grapple with the problematic of non-human alterity in "Pashobik" ("Beastly"), a short story by Bengali sci-fi writer Anish Deb, especially by taking into account the possibility of entangled experiences and a practice of "worlding" (2016, 213). It particularly considers the figure of the dog (*Canis lupus familiaris*), and interrogates the critter's agency, its multifaceted forms and manifestations in Deb's modern-day sci-fi fable. Lacking proper archives and suffering from our "confused and conflicted understanding" (McHugh 2004, 9), dogs face constant danger either as unwanted pets or research subjects. Here, an attempt is made to investigate how animal metamorphosis in the narrative complicates the discourse on animals and animality, primarily by blurring the lines that separate companionship and animosity, domestication and monstrosity. This paper also explores, albeit briefly, the environmental forces of water, wind, and earth as well as folklore, local superstition and shamanism as potent tools for theoretical engagement. Finally, it critically reads Deb's commitment to the animal question in conjunction with planetary climate crisis as induced by, among other things, the overconsumption of fossil-fuel energy (indicated by open-cast mining and the black-marketing of coals in the text), hoping to reveal their connections with capitalist modernity and colonial legacy in India.

Saikat Pradhan is a PhD student and UGC Junior Research Fellow in English Studies at the University of North Bengal, India. He obtained his M.A. in 2022 and B.A. in 2020 from the University of Calcutta, India. Some of his research interests include posthumanism, environmental humanities, architecture and urban planning, cultural geography and anthrozoology. His ongoing doctoral research focuses on the more-than-human worlds of biotechnology and natureculture, while foregrounding a critique of capitalism and articulating architecture's need to incorporate the non-human in the age of the Anthropocene. He recently presented at AIP 2024, organized by Exeter University, UK.

Rohit Kumar Rajak, Animal fables, caste and the mediations of friendship

Animal fables have been a source of entertainment in many premodern story-telling traditions. Folklorists and historians concur that such animal stories were not mere sources of entertainment but also depicted the society of their time and region. In the case of South Asia, animal fables were mostly part of the oral tradition, so it is hard to assign authorship or chronology to them. Since those stories were already very much part of society, it has been speculated that animal stories would be more effective tools of social control and instruction than learned discourses and *śāstric* writings. Consequently, stories got incorporated into texts belonging to Buddhist, Jaina and Brahmanical traditions. In this paper, we compare Brahmanical normative texts, such as *Manusmṛti*, and a Brahmanical narrative text, *Pañcatantra.* A comparative study of these texts can help us to understand at which point such ideologically driven narratives of *Pañcatantra* failed to demonstrate the agenda of its parent tradition (majorly when the stories depict the bond of friendship among animal characters), highlight tensions between ideological agendas and social realities. The Brahmanical normative texts had set the many norms to be followed in society which helped the society to be segregated into *varṇa* and *jāti*, similarly made many rules and regulations to regulate this bond of friendship, such as who could be your friend and not, what are the duties of the friend, etc. However, my analysis of *Pañcatantra*'s animal stories shows a different image of friendship than defined in those Brahmanical normative texts, which may project a truer image of how the bonds of friendship were mediated and negotiated in society.

Rohit Kumar Rajak is a fourth-year, PhD scholar at the Department of History and Archaeology at Shiv Nadar University, Delhi NCR, India. He holds a Master of Arts in History from Jawaharlal Nehru University. His research interests include the socio-political histories of ancient South Asia and histories of friendship through literary sources like *Manusmṛti*, *Kāmasūtra*, *Arthaśāstra*, and *Pañcatantra*.

Mustafa Sarı, Classic Turkish Poetry as Fables: Symbolic Teachings for Addressing Environmental Crises

Classic Turkish poetry includes works that can be categorized as fables in structure, such as *Mantıku't-Tayr*, *Bülbül-nâme*, *Bülbüliyye*, and *Gül ü Bülbül*. These mesnevis employ symbolic language to express Sufi teachings and divine love. This study explores how the teachings embedded in such works can contribute to addressing contemporary environmental crises.

The Sufi philosophy of *wahdat al-wujud* (unity of existence), as represented in *Mantıku't-Tayr*, portrays all beings in the cosmos as reflections of the ultimate reality, the Creator. This perspective encourages a heightened awareness of the interconnectedness between humans and their environment. Similarly, in works like *Bülbül-nâme*, the nightingale, symbolizing the lover, sacrifices its blood to the beloved rose, highlighting themes of love, sacrifice, and environmental sensitivity. These poems not only emphasize the relationship between humans and nature but also personify various birds and plants, integrating them into moral and spiritual narratives.

This paper investigates the concepts conveyed in these fable-like literary works and assesses how their symbolic teachings can inspire contemporary efforts to navigate global environmental challenges. By analyzing the environmental and ethical dimensions of these texts, the study aims to shed light on their enduring relevance in fostering ecological awareness and responsibility.

Mustafa Sarı is a doctoral student in the Department of Turkish-Islamic Literature at the Faculty of Theology, İstanbul University. He completed his undergraduate studies at the Faculty of Theology, Marmara University, and earned his master's degree in Turkish-Islamic Literature from the same institution. His research focuses on the representation of non-human entities, mythological elements, and environmental sensitivity in classical Turkish poetry. He is also interested in comparative literature, philology, and the history of religions.

Boria Sax, The Man Who Dreamed He Was a Butterfly

In the third century BCE, the Chinese sage Zhuang Zhou wrote that he had dreamed himself a butterfly, fluttering over a field. Suddenly, he woke up. Was he, Zhuang Zhou asked, really a man who dreamt he was a butterfly? Was he a butterfly dreaming itself a man? The anecdote is the best known among hundreds in the book *Zuangzi*, which is both a scripture of Daoism and a foundational work of Chinese literature. Many of the parables are about transformations of identity, both natural and supernatural. To illustrate how this parable addresses the philosophical foundations of human culture, the audience is asked to imagine an academic conference, made possible by the newly discovered art of time travel, in which scholars from many different eras and cultures gather to address Zhuang Zhou's question. While a modern westerner insists that Zhuang Zhou is a man, an Australian totemist argues that he is a butterfly. A South American animist says that he is both, and a hermetic philosopher of the Renaissance maintains that butterfly and man are passing stages in his journey to perfection. This conference is an extended metaphor for humankind, and the question, phrased a bit differently, comes down to, "Where does humanity begin and end?"

Boria Sax has been involved in Animal Studies since its inception in the latter twentieth century, and he has, since then, always argued strongly for the incorporation of storytelling into scholarship. He is

the founder of Nature in Legend and Story, an organization dedicated to the idea "that storytelling is a subtle and powerful means of inquiry, with which one may set goals, mediate oppositions, investigate ideas, establish relationships, and construct identity, in a manner that is unobtrusive yet engaging." He has published 20 books, mostly on human-animal relations, which have been translated into ten languages, into many of them multiple times, and has won awards for scholarship. He is a Senior Lecturer at Mercy University and also teaches at Sing Sing Correctional Facility. His most recent book is *Avian Illuminations: A Cultural History of Birds* (2023).

Sebastian Seidl, Awakening the Silent Fable: A Phenomenological Approach to Human-Nonhuman Engagement in an Age of Ecological Crisis

The planned paper joins the call to "Rethink Fables in the Age of the Environmental Crisis" by examining how fables invite us into a renewed, more profound engagement with nonhuman life. Through the lens of Giorgio Agamben's *Infancy and History*, fables are explored as phenomenological spaces where mythical enchantment yields to historical awareness, catalyzing a perceptual shift essential to ecological thought. Agamben's *fabula mut*a – creatures suspended in the spellbound silence of myth – becomes, in this analysis, a moment where humans encounter nature's quiet but insistent presence, encouraging an ethical connection to the world beyond us. The paper discusses:

- **The crib as a threshold**: Agamben's "historical image" of the crib – avoiding any theological interpretation – captures the transition of the fable from mythical enchantment to active historical presence, forming a perceptual threshold where nonhuman agency emerges.
- **Silent fables as experiential spaces**: Through Merleau-Ponty's concept of embodied perception, fables are reinterpreted as relational spaces that immerse human consciousness in nonhuman forms of life.
- **Toward ecological empathy**: By transforming enchantment into historical awareness, fables shift from passive tales to active experiences, fostering an ethical reorientation that aligns with Despret's and Bennett's calls for ecological mindfulness.

Fables, when viewed through a phenomenological lens, become powerful tools for reimagining our relationship with the nonhuman, urging us toward a new ethical engagement with nature's silent yet profound agency.

Sebastian Seidl is an interdisciplinary author and scholar specializing in biology, philosophy, ethics, and theology. After earning a Magister Theologiae and master's degrees in biology and interdisciplinary ethics, he is currently completing the postgraduate program in Philosophical Practice (2024). His research bridges natural sciences, ethics, and theology, with a particular focus on reductive naturalism and biological metaphors. His dissertation explores the psychophysical problem in Leibniz, Nagel, and Jackson. Collaborating with the University of Vienna and LMU Munich, he brings his expertise to a wide range of academic and research projects.

Insha Qayoom Shah and Izhar ul Haq Wani, Re-evaluating Human-Nonhuman Interaction in Kashmiri Fables: A Psychological Analysis of *Gagur Te Gager*

Interacting with traditional fables offers an alternative framework to tackle environmental and cultural alienation in the contemporary times of ecological crises. They reposition human activity within a multispecies continuum, highlighting a profound ecological morality grounded in

relationality, humility, and reciprocity. The paper examines the Kashmiri fable *Gagur Te Gager*, which narrates the tale of a married mouse couple through psychological and ecological perspectives, emphasizing its significance in re-evaluating human-nonhuman relationships in contemporary times. The symbolic sequence of the story, where the *Gager*, (female mouse) embarks on a quest to mend her ear, underscores the intrinsic interdependence of nature's components—cotton, earth, fire, and wood—all of which must collaborate to accomplish even the most trivial tasks. This connection, frequently obscured by contemporary digital perspectives, is crucial for cultivating ecological awareness. The demise of the *Gager*, caused by the collapse of the earth mound, exemplifies a moral and psychological lesson. It represents life's challenges, imparting resilience in facing an unpredictable environment; meanwhile, it provides a cathartic recognition of nature's fragility and the necessity to appreciate the frequently disregarded 'ordinary' connections and resources surrounding us. *Gagur Te Gager* surpasses simplistic interpretations, providing complex insights into the interdependence of existence, the relationships among entities, and the ethical awareness they cultivate. The paper draws upon Joseph Campbell's concept of the "journey" as a universal archetype to analyse how *Gagur Te Gager* exemplifies the transformational influence of fables on consciousness and ethical conduct. By offering a cultural commentary on the oral traditions in Kashmiri households, the tale further becomes a site for rethinking human-animal and human-environment relations. The paper advocates for the preservation and reinterpretation of traditional Kashmiri fables like *Gagur Te Gager* as essential resources for envisioning sustainable futures.

Dr. Insha Qayoom Shah has completed her Ph.D. in English Literature from the University of Kashmir. She currently serves as a guest faculty member at Punjab Engineering College, Chandigarh. Her areas of interest include feminism, gender studies, mythology, folklore, and revisionary writing.

Izhar ul Haq Wani serves as an assistant professor in Kashmiri literature at Government Degree College, Sopore. He has authored four books in the Kashmiri language and has translated five plays from English to Kashmiri. His areas of interest include Kashmir history, poetry, and drama.

Wendell P. Smith, Predation and Mutualism in the Poetics of the Beast Fable

This presentation will focus on two texts: the Panchatantra (and in particular the experience of teaching the Ramsey Wood version of it to undergraduates), and Kipling's Jungle Book. Its premise is that there is a superficial version of the poetics of the Beast Fable found in these texts, one in which the animal society created in the text breaks down, and the relations of the members of that society revert to those of predator and prey. The text seems to present a "naturalization of discourse" in which the mythology built upon "natural law" as the Law of the Jungle is always a dog-eat-dog competition for survival of the fittest, and the breakdown of the kingdom of the lion, in the end, confirms the Great Chain of Being. This presentation concentrates upon an alternate reading, present both in the Panchatantra and Kipling, in which Mutualism, or cross-species assistance, is the answer to predation, a reading in which the collective protagonism of the Panchatantra's "The Winning of Friends" responds to its earlier "The Loss of Friends," in which the "good hunting" of the earlier Jungle Book stories gives way in Kipling to the mutual-aid-sparked-by-environmental-crisis of "When Fear Came." From this comparison we can ask: how much of this inter-species assistance is related to environmental crisis? And if Kipling was aware of it, were the authors and compilers of his conscious model, the Panchatantra, aware of it, too? If we view the misanthropy of a story like Kipling's "Letting in the Jungle" as an early intimation of culture's response to the anthropocene, is there an equivalent response in the poetics of the Beast Fable in the Panchatantra?

Dr. Wendell P. Smith is Professor of Spanish at Wilson College in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. His area of research specialization is Medieval Iberian books of chivalry and their continuators, such as Don Quijote. He has published in such journals as Cervantes, La corónica, and Revista de Estudios Hispánicos. Inspired by Calila y Dimna, (the medieval Spanish version of the Panchatantra), and by Miguel de Cervantes's exemplary novella "The Dogs' Colloquy", he teaches an undergraduate-level English course on Beast Fables.

Hector Tapia III, Moo'-ving Our Moral Compass: Using 'Animal Language' to Rethink Animal Sentience and Suffering in Neo-Classical Aesop's Fables

This study analyzes several Aesopic fables from the Neo-Classical poet François-Joseph Terrasse Desbillons that deal explicitly with animal pain and suffering. My study draws from Critical Animal Studies, in particular rethinking how anthropodenial and anthropomorphism can combat anthropocentrism. Derrida suggests that we, should we want to truly consider the animal, ought to avoid fables because they "remain an anthropomorphic taming, a moralizing subjection…always a discourse of man." While it is true that fables present readers with a bare scenario in the (highly anthropomorphic) animal world, it does not mean they are void of the animal experience, even if it is through empathetic imagination – more specifically the shared, enigmatic entity of pain. The intersecting pitfall of anthropomorphism and anthropodenial is that they "other" the non-human animal subject, widening the human and nonhuman animal divide. However, in amplifying the fantastic, nonhuman animal monologues/dialogues within these selected fables, I hope to shift our perspective on how animals perceive and feel pain and are therefore capable of consciousness on both an imaginative and literal level, which then forces us to not only recognize the narcissism woven into human vitality but also call into question animal liberation.

Héctor Tapía III is pursuing his Ph.D. in Comparative Literature, with a designated emphasis in Classics, at UC Davis. His research interests include the various incarnations of "beast literature" of ancient Greece, Rome, and medieval Europe, proverbs, and folktales; in particular, he is a scholar of the Aesopic fable tradition. His scholarship examines the human-animal divide and questions the ways in which authors have (ab)used non-human animals, as well as what it means to "voice" an animal.

Maisie Tomlinson, What a Mouse Knows: walking the line between fact and fiction in a stage play inspired by research

"Fiction is the lie through which we tell the truth", declared the novelist Albert Camus. Representations of animal laboratories are rarely "kitchen sink" dramas. From *The Island of Dr Moreau* to *Guardians of the Galaxy 3,* these are more often experiments in wild, exaggerated monstrosity, complete with mad professors and raging human-animal hybrids. It is argued that animal rights protestors, too, draw on dramatic, misleading fictions to demonise researchers. What responsibility, therefore, do academic artist-researchers have towards accuracy, realism and "truth" in fabular representations of laboratory life?

In my doctoral research on mouse welfare science in the laboratory, interview encounters were never straightforward accounts of the "facts", but haunted by interpersonal difficulties, frustrations, regrets, ethical anxieties, and care. This was a far cry not only from the demonic scientists of Hollywood fiction, but also from the highly managed "windows" into animal research offered as part of the *Concordat on Openness in Animal Research*. But my interviews with animal welfare professionals, I found, often went beyond debates of objective measurements and professional responsibilities, carrying resonances of dreams, remarkable inventions, guilty secrets, ethical misgivings, Greek myths, and musical interludes. The mice too, had agency in these accounts. And

yet it is also true that the framing of my work, both reportage and fictional, was dependent on its origins in rigorous sociological research in everyday contexts.

In this presentation, I take up the question of the researcher's responsibility to 'truth' from my perspective as a sociologist and sometime theatre-maker, whose play *What a Mouse Knows*, inspired by research with laboratory animal welfare professionals, was written and produced in 2022 (Tomlinson, 2024).

Maisie Tomlinson is a Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Manchester, where she teaches environmental sociology, critical sustainability studies, and creative methods. Her research explores, through ethnographic engagement, the epistemologies and ontologies of professional animal behaviour experts, and the implications of that knowledge for animal agency, subjectivity, and the human-animal relationship. Intrigued by the idea of "critical anthropomorphism", her field sites have included the teaching of horse behaviour and communication in an equine-assisted personal development site, and the development of a Qualitative Behaviour Assessment tool for the welfare assessment of laboratory mice at a UK university. Fascinated by the possibilities of, and problems with, multi-species ethnography, Maisie also runs workshops in how the experience of nonhuman animals might be more closely attended to. She has a background in theatre and uses dramaturgical thinking and practice in much of her thinking, research and teaching.

Jessica Ullrich, Strategic Anthropomorphism and Storytelling Animals

In the history of Western thought the difference between humans and other animals has been primarily determined by the alleged absence of logos, language and rationality in nonhuman animals. Contrary to this postulate, many artists in the past and present have given nonhuman animals a human voice, especially in fables, children's book or cartoons. In my talk I want to introduce contemporary video works and performances that construct for example corals, wolves, and birds as speaking beings meeting Donna Haraway's demand to tell other stories, stories that are directed against hegemonic human-animal relations. In these works, the artists use animal storytelling as a tool for advocacy, to make animal alterity tangible, to raise empathy and to address the dangers of detrimental binary thinking and false hierarchies between humanity and 'the rest'. They give animals a human voice as a tool to suggest ways out of anthropocentrism. In the works it becomes clear that ascribing language, thoughts and emotions to other animals is far less problematic than denying animals such capacities. What all artworks have in common is that they insist on the fact that other animals have their own worldview and that their perspectives are valuable and worth listening to. I want to show that strategic anthropomorphism in contemporary artworks can raise awareness for the plight of other animals in an age of environmental emergency, challenge human exceptionalism, and help us see animals differently.

Jessica Ullrich is professor for aesthetics and art history at the University of Fine Arts Münster, Germany. Before that she has taught art history at universities in Berlin, Frankfurt, Erlangen, Nürnberg, Flensburg, and São Paulo. She publishes widely on human-animal relations in contemporary art and curated art exhibitions and video screenings on the same topic in Berlin, Utrecht, and São Paulo. Jessica has been the representative of Minding Animals Germany from 2011 to 2020. Since 2012 is editor of *Tierstudien,* the German academic journal for animal studies.

Büşranur Üzal, Ant Narratives in the Torah and the Qur'an: A Comparative Evaluation in the Context of Ecological and Moral Reflections

This paper aims to compare the ant narratives in the Torah's Proverbs (Proverbs 6:6-8) and the Qur'an's Surah al-Naml, verses 18-19, from ecological and moral perspectives. The role of the ant in both religious texts is analyzed through the elements of fable-like narrative and the human responsibility towards nature and the sense of compassion. In the Qur'an, Solomon's listening to the ants reflects communication between living creatures and human humility towards nature, while in Proverbs, the ants are presented as an example of industriousness and foresight, which is important in terms of responsible behavior and sustainability. Although the ant figure is described in different ways in both divine books, it comes to the fore as a living form that "should be taken as an example".

In this context, the study will address the following questions: How does the presentation of the ant as a "communicable creature" instead of a "passive resource" in nature contribute to human redefinition of nature? What data do these parables provide for questioning the role of humans in the ecological crisis and strengthening their sense of responsibility? To what extent do the ants' virtues of diligence and solidarity overlap with the environmental awareness suggested by religious texts? The study aims to contribute to holistic solutions to today's ecological problems by reading the teachings of both Islamic and Jewish traditions with an interdisciplinary approach.

Büşranur Üzal is a Ph.D. student in the Department of Islamic History and Arts at Istanbul University's Faculty of Theology. She completed her undergraduate studies at Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University, Faculty of Islamic Sciences, and earned her Master's degree in Islamic History and Arts from the same institution. Her doctoral research focuses on the relations between Al-Andalus and the Ottoman Empire. Her research interests span a variety of fields, including history, astronomy, 19th-century architecture, history of religions, sectarian history and North African and Andalusian cultural studies.

Mickey Vallee, When Meanings Break: A Biosemiotic Fable of Trauma and Understanding

This paper reimagines the fable genre through a narrative exploration of human-animal understanding in shelter environments. Told through the perspective of a traumatized shelter dog gradually discovering her own cognitive processes, the work weaves together Merleau-Ponty's concepts of "postural impregnation" and "spatial syncretism" with contemporary biosemiotic theory. Drawing on Hoffmeyer's code-duality, Uexküll's theory of meaning, and recent developments in econarratology, the dog's narrative reveals how meaning-making occurs through Merleau-Ponty's view of mimesis as a bodily awareness that arrives before intellectual comprehension.

As our canine narrator struggles to interpret play signals from other dogs (ultimately with tragic consequences), her growing self-awareness illuminates how trauma disrupts both the "state of neutrality" that Merleau-Ponty identifies as crucial for cross-species understanding and what Uexküll terms the "contrapuntal" relationships between organism and environment. Through econarratological strategies that foreground embodied experience and environmental embeddedness, the narrative structure allows us to explore how meanings emerge, break, and potentially heal through what Merleau-Ponty terms "syncretic sociability" (the fluid boundaries between self and other, past and present).

This experimental approach to theoretical writing serves multiple functions: as contemporary fable, as phenomenological analysis, and as meditation on the limits of interspecies understanding. By allowing our nonhuman narrator to discover and articulate complex theoretical concepts through immediate bodily experience, the presentation demonstrates how fables might evolve to address

contemporary questions of human-animal relationships and environmental crisis. The narrative form itself enacts what Sebeok identifies as the fundamentally storytelling nature of biosemiotic processes.

The piece concludes with our narrator's tragic inability to overcome her trauma responses despite her growing understanding - suggesting that meaningful relationships between species might depend not on achieving perfect understanding, but on maintaining productive tensions between different ways of being in the world. This tension between knowledge and embodied response illuminates key questions in both biosemiotic theory and econarratology about how stories emerge from and shape multispecies relationships.

Dr. Mickey Vallee is the Canada Research Chair in Sound Studies and an Associate Professor at Athabasca University. His research explores how sound technologies influence connections between humans, animals, and the environment. He is an interdisciplinary scholar with extensive work in sound studies, posthumanism, and postqualitative methods, focusing on innovative approaches to social challenges.

Sarah Westcott, Creative showcase: Poetry and the fable: exploring inter-species transformations and the non-human as fabulist

A poetry reading which considers how we might explore relations with the more-than-human through poetic interpretations of fables and what the animal might "carry on its back" . Working with Ted Hughes' notion that poems are living and questioning entities in themselves: "… a sort of animal, with a life of [its] own" I will share poems and discuss how they might be informed directly and indirectly by the animal as fabulist.

Fables, as short narratives in prose or verse, are open to innovative and experimental transformation through poetry. They might grant agency or voice to nonhumans, subverting power relations, questioning boundaries and anthropocentric positions. They are also a form through which to explore multi-species relations through reconstruction or deconstruction of a narrative and personification, voicing the 'voiceless'.

The poet Helen Ivory argues that the fable works, in part, as a metaphor: "…a 'Fable' is both: 'a story or statement that is not true' – and also: 'a narration intended to enforce a useful truth'. …They are containers for extraordinary events … tall tales but not smoke and mirrors because they never mislead, only illustrate in a slanted manner. Exactly like a metaphor."

The poem-fable can thus become a original way of thinking through species relation and the innovative formal potential of poetry is ideally suited to explore this.

I will give a short presentation on poem-fables and we will consider one form a non-textual fable might take, moving beyond language into the visual realm and drawing on work by artist Ernest Thompson Seton, author of Animal Tracks and Hunter Signs (1958). The reading will include poems in which the more-than-human is voiced, and a hybrid story of interspecies transformation.

Sarah Westcott has published two collections with Pavilion Poetry (Liverpool University Press) - *Slant Light*, highly commended in the Forward Prizes, and *Bloom*, shortlisted for the Ledbury Hellens Prize for best second collections in 2023 and longlisted in the Laurel Prize for ecopoetry. Her second pamphlet, Pond, a hybrid piece, was published by The Braag in 2024 and a new chapbook, Almanac, is forthcoming in 2025. She is a recipient of a Midlands4Cities scholarship and researching an AHRC-funded PhD on the poem as multi-species event at the Universities of Birmingham and Warwick.

Jirajade Wisetdonwail, Phaya Khan Khak's Quest for Water Security: A Fable Against the Mekong Dam Construction Crisis

This presentation, Phaya Khan Khak's Quest for Water Security: A Fable Against the Mekong Dam Construction Crisis, examines the ancient fable of Phaya Khan Khak—a myth dating back approximately 1,500 years from the Mekong region—as both a cultural artifact and a critique of political power that threatens ecological balance. Found across Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam, the story imparts values of respect for water and nature. At its heart, the tale of Phaya Khan Khak, a toad king who challenges a powerful rain god to ensure that water resources are protected and shared equitably. This narrative reflects the longstanding philosophies of Mekong communities, who have lived harmoniously with the river for centuries, relying on its natural water flows to sustain agriculture, livelihoods, and cultural practices.

These indigenous philosophies, which regard water as a communal and sacred resource, contrast sharply with modern hydropower policies that disrupt the river's natural rhythms, impacting local ecosystems and displacing communities. By analyzing the fable as a form of political resistance, this presentation highlights how traditional narratives can challenge the power imbalances introduced by dam construction and international policies that often overlook local voices.

Through this exploration, I will demonstrate how Phaya Khan Khak's Quest for Water Security can serve as a tool for educators and environmental activists to advocate for sustainable water practices and encourage discussions on water security and environmental justice. This session aims to present the fable as a culturally resonant framework for examining political issues surrounding water rights and ecological preservation, underscoring the importance of indigenous wisdom in the age of environmental crisis. By rethinking fables as sources of cultural resilience and critique, we gain valuable insights into protecting both nature and the communities that depend on it.

Jirajade Wisetdonwail: I am a third-generation resident of the Mekong region affected by the far-reaching impacts of hydropower dam policies, and a graduate of Khon Kaen University with a degree in Education, specializing in Thai Language. Currently, I work as a policy reform researcher at TDRI and an independent journalist focusing on ecological imperialism and queer ecological studies. Through my work, I draw on both my academic background and my family's lived experiences to examine how environmental policies shape not only ecosystems but also cultural heritage and community resilience.

Nishat Zaidi, From Fiction to Fabulation: Towards Decolonial Narrative Frames

Amitav Ghosh's recent fiction is interspersed with fables and as though this was not enough in two of his recent works, *Jungle Nama* and *The Living Mountain: A Fable for Our Times*, he turned exclusively to the fabulation. Intizar Husain, the renowned Urdu writer and chronicler of the Partition of the Indian subcontinent, recurrently returns to fables to understand the chaotic events of Partition. This paper proposes to examine Amitav Ghosh's recent fiction practices and his articulations on fiction in *The Great Derangement* alongside Intizar Husain's fiction practices and his views on fiction to argue that both offer fables as an alternative to the universe of fiction overdetermined by modes of thinking of western modernity. In the manner in which fables privilege an ethical universe of alterity, both these writers turn to it in moments of deep human crisis, in the case of Intizar Husain crisis caused by the partition of the subcontinent which was the result of nation-centric imaginaries and in case of Amitav Ghosh, a larger crisis of climate change and the environment caused by colonial and imperial legacies. In doing so, they work towards decolonizing the fiction form which privileges a modernist view of the world.

Nishat Zaidi is Professor of English and former Head at the Department of English, and the Director of Sarojini Naidu Centre for Women's Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, India. She works in the area of Indian Literature, Translation Studies, Women's Writings and Decolonial/ Postcolonial Studies. She has authored/translated/edited 20 books and special issues of journals like *The Book Review* and *Manoa*. published articles in national and international journals. She is the co-author of *The Vernacular: Three Essays on an Ambiguous Concept and its Uses in South Asia*, published by Routledge in September 2023. Her most recent publication is her edited volume *Indian Modernities: Literary Cultures from the 18th to the 20th Century (Routledge August, 2023.)* Some of her other books include *Ocean as Method: Thinking with the Maritime* (with Dilip Menon et al. 2022); *Literary Cultures and Digital Humanities in India* (with A. Sean Pue 2022); *Makers of Indian Literature: Agha Shahid Ali* (Sahitya Akademi, 2016). Her translations include *Karbala: A Historical Play* (translation of Premchand's play *Karbala* with a critical introduction and notes) (OUP, 2022);*Day and Dastan* (translation of Intizar Husain's *Din Aur Dastan* with Alok Bhalla, Niyogi, 2018); *Between Worlds: The Travels of Yusuf Khan Kambalposh* (translation of the first Urdu travelogue *Ajaibat-i-Farang* with Mushirul Hasan, OUP 2014) and *A Voyage to Modernism* (translation of Sir Syed Ahmed's travlogue *Musafiran-i-Landan* Primus, 2011). She is currently working on her English translation of Jayant Parmar's Dalit Poetry in Urdu. She is also the editor of the journal *Women's Link.*

Valeria Picazo Zamarripa, Animal Voices: A Legal and Ethical Exploration of Intuitive Communication

This paper offers a window into our relationships with nonhuman animals (subsequently referred to as animals) through the lens of telepathic, or *intuitive*, communication, and how this paradigm might be placed into conversation with animal protection strategies in the legal context. In doing so, this paper approaches telepathy, often dismissed as anecdotal or unscientific, as a compelling opportunity for understanding animals beyond the constraints of spoken language.

Part I starts by defining telepathy and its implications both for the human and the nonhuman animal community. Additionally, it touches on the role that animal communicators play and some of the challenges that the field faces. Part II explores the prospective 'right' of animals to be heard and understood by humans. Building upon this prospect, Part III interrogates if humans should bear a legal duty to develop this innate intuitive ability. Part IV discusses how animal voices could be brought into the legal system vis-à-vis the mechanisms currently available for humans who are not able to represent themselves. It also covers the nuances that may unfold upon accepting this type of communication and the ethical dilemmas that could emerge, particularly for the animal advocacy

movement. Finally, Part V reflects on the transformative potential that interspecies intuitive communication offers—particularly how engaging in these diverse and meaningful connections allows us to look deep inside—to our core—and gain perspective on who we are as individuals and what it is that makes us human.

Valeria Picazo Zamarripa, originally from Mexico City, believes animals are our greatest teachers, guiding us to live in the moment, embrace neutrality, and exist in harmony with nature. Her work in veterinary medicine and animal welfare is driven by her compassion and commitment to environmental sustainability. Passionate about advancing animal rights, she advocates for inclusivity in both professional and personal spaces, ensuring that underserved communities have better access to veterinary care.

Currently an Animal Law MSL (Master of Studies in Law) student at Lewis & Clark Law School, Valeria is dedicated to bridging the gap between science, policy, and ethics to effect meaningful change for all beings. She envisions a world of deep interconnectedness, where humans recognize themselves as part of nature's wisdom — something animals have long known.

Conference organiser: Dr. Kaori Nagai, Senior Lecturer, School of Humanities, University of Kent,

Email: K.Nagai@kent.ac.uk

Conference webpage: https://www.rethinking-fables.org.uk/

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