

**Rethinking Fables in the Age of the Environmental Crisis**  
**May 22-24, 2025**

\*All scheduled times are in UK time.\*

**May 22**

9:00-9:45 Registration (tea/coffee Woolf College Lower Foyer)

**9:45-11:20 Welcome and first panel** (Woolf Lecture Theatre/online: Chair, Kaori Nagai)

- \*Sakti Sekhar Dash, Lessons from the Animal Kingdom: Anthropomorphism and Ethical Stewardship in The Panchatantra
- \*Insha Qayoom Shah and Izhar ul Haq Wani, Re-evaluating Human-Nonhuman Interaction in Kashmiri Fables: A Psychological Analysis of Gagur Te Gager
- \*Nishat Zaidi, From Fiction to Fabulation: Towards Decolonial Narrative Frames

11:30-13:00 Art / Fables (Woolf Lecture Theatre/online: Chair, Lavinia Brydon)

- Naho Matsuda, Tracing the Ocean with your Hands
- \*Kaisu Koski and Nick Dunn, Fabular Music for Rodent Rights: Pied Piper Goes Wonderland
- Maisie Tomlinson, What a Mouse Knows: walking the line between fact and fiction in a stage play inspired by research

13:00-13:45 Lunch

13:45-15:15

**Science & Species** (Woolf Lecture Theatre/online: Chair, Garry Marvin)

- \*Özgün Emre Can and Şeyda Fikirdeşici Ergen, Wolves: Beast or an Evil Species?
- Ellie Dobbs and Jessica Fisher, Malagasy Fables: Spatial variation in attitudes, beliefs and customary institutions relating to the aye-aye (*Daubentonia madagascariensis*) across Madagascar
- Candice Allmark-Kent, Of Facts and Fabular Wolves: Looking for the Real Lobo Within the Legend

15:15-15:45 Tea/coffee

15:45-16:45 Keynote speech (Woolf Lecture Theatre/online: Chair: Robert McKay)

**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?

17:00-18:30 **Animal Languages** (Woolf Lecture Theatre/online: Chair, Laura Brown)

- \*Valeria Picazo Zamarripa, Animal Voices: A Legal and Ethical Exploration of Intuitive Communication
- \*Hector Tapia III, 'Moo'-ving Our Moral Compass: Using 'Animal Language' to Rethink Animal Sentience and Suffering in Neo-Classical Aesop's Fables
- \*Mickey Vallee, When Meanings Break: A Biosemiotic Fable of Trauma and Understanding

**May 23**

9:00-10:30

**Decolonisation** (Woolf Lecture Theatre/online; chair Ben Grant)

- \*Remeen Firoz, Beauty and the Beast: Fabulist Bengal Tiger
- \*Jamie Ashworth, 'Of Universal Application': Fables and Environmental Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century Aotearoa
- \*John Bessai, Digital Fables and the Canadian Aporia: The NFBC's Role in Mediating Human-Nature Relations

**Panchatantra** (Woolf Seminar Room 5: Chair, Sarah Henstra)

- Rosina Pastore, Rethinking non-human animal agency in the Pañcatantra by Viṣṇuśarma (300 CE)
- Rohit Kumar Rajak, Animal fables, caste and the mediations of friendship
- Wendell P. Smith, Predation and Mutualism in the Poetics of the Beast Fable

10:30-10:45 Break

**11:00- 12:30**

**Religion & Ethics** (Woolf Lecture Theatre/online: Chair, Vedran Obućina)

- \*Nükhet Okutan Davletov and Timur Davletov, A Shamanistic Interpretation on Human-Animal Relations in Khakas Fables
- \*Anchit Jain, From Fables to Praxis: Reflections on Animal Agency, Ethical Concerns, and Pragmatism in Jainism

**Animal Lessons** (Woolf Seminar Room 5: Chair, Boria Sax)

- Sarah Henstra, Animal Castaways: Elegy and Counterhuman Subjectivity in Flow
- Terefe Mitiku, An Ecocritical Analysis of Oromo Oral Fable: Lesson for Animal Study and Global Environmental Crisis
- Eri Kato, Sacred Wolves of Bushu Mitake Shrine: Nature Worship in Japan and Its Modern Relevance

12:30-13:15 Lunch

**13:15-14:15 Creating Fables** (Woolf Lecture Theatre/online)

- \*Cass Lynch, Nathan Morehouse, Josie Turnbull, Kaori Nagai, 'How to read a poem to a spider'
- \*Sarah Westcott, Poetry and the fable: exploring inter-species transformations and the non-human as fabulist

14:30-16:00

**Animal Afterlives** (Woolf Lecture Theatre/online)

- Isaac Waanzi Hillary and Cherry Leonardi, 'Elephants are stories now': the significance of fables amid the loss of elephants in South Sudan
- Ashley Coutu, Elephant Biomolecules as Fables
- \*Jeanne Dubino, Virginia Woolf's Fabulous Taxidermic Fiction

**Animal Fabulists** (Woolf Seminar Room 5: Chair, Chris Danta)

- Ayşe Ece Cavcav, The Lion, the Ass and the Dove: Relative Anthropocentrism and the Fabular in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*
- Jessica Ullrich, Strategic Anthropomorphism and Storytelling Animals
- Hani Min, The Fabulous Mole

16:00 -16:20 Tea /Coffee

**16:20- 17:20 Fables in performance** (Woolf Lecture Theatre/online: Chair, Derek Ryan)

- Robert McKay, Animals, Fables and Political Aesthetics under the Blacklist: The Case of The Brave One (1956)
- \*Sam Collier, 'The Fable': Multispecies Dance for Choreographing New Stories

**17:30-18:30 Keynote speech** (Chair: Matthew Chrulew)

**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'.

Conference Dinner (in town, optional)

**May 24**

9:15-10:45

**Water fables** (Woolf Lecture Theatre/online)

- \*Jirajade Wisetdonwail, Phaya Khan Khak's Quest for Water Security: A Fable Against the Mekong Dam Construction Crisis
- Senjo Nakai, Reimagining Human-Nature Relationships Through the Lens of the Januke Fable in Kiso Valley, Japan
- \*Debanjali Biswas, Loktak Ethnographies: Water Worlds through Multimodal Perspectives

**Fabulation** (Woolf Seminar Room 5: Chair, Chris Danta)

- Laura Del Vecchio, Buzzing Against Collapse: Response-able Storytelling to Care for a Precarious World
- Gray Black, Untangling Fur-tures: Alter-Human Imprints on Queer Eco-Politics
- Pablo Alonso García, What would octopuses say if we asked them the right questions?

10:45-11:15 Break

11:15-12:45 (in-person) Workshop with Vinciane Despret: Changing Fables

12:45 -13:30 Lunch

**13:30 -15:00**

**Speculative fables** (Woolf Lecture Theatre/online; chair Susan McHugh)

- \*Saikat Pradhan, Companion Animal or Monstrous Critter? : Questioning Fable/Fabulation, Non-Human Agency and Environmental Crisis in Anish Deb's "Pashobik"
- Paul March Russell, A Fable for the World That Has Ended: Laura Jean McKay's *The Animals in That Country*
- Chris Danta, Fabulous Devourment in Philip K. Dick

**Sensing the World** (Woolf Seminar Room 5: Chair, Maisie Tomlinson)

- Sebastian Seidl, Awakening the Silent Fable: A Phenomenological Approach to Human-Nonhuman Engagement in an Age of Ecological Crisis
- Sarah Allen, Clever Beasts: The Horse and the Human at the End of the World
- Matthew Chrulow, Refabulating the Animal Sciences

**15:15-16:45 Final Panel and discussion** (Woolf Lecture Theatre/online: Chair, Kaori Nagai)

- \*Büşranur Üzal, Ant Narratives in the Torah and the Qur'an: A Comparative Evaluation in the Context of Ecological and Moral Reflections
- Boria Sax, The Man Who Dreamed He Was a Butterfly: How Events become Stories
- Erica Fudge, A Fable Without Nature: Twelfth Night for example
- \*Susan Richardson, The Sack and the Selkie

**18:00-20:00 Storytelling event**

(at the Gulbenkian Theatre, University of Kent), in person,  
featuring Suniti Namjoshi, Terefe Mitiku, Matilda Leyser, Kathryn Kirkpatrick, Cass Lynch, Chris Danta, Jeremy Scott, Lesley Harrison/Alex South/Emily Doolittle