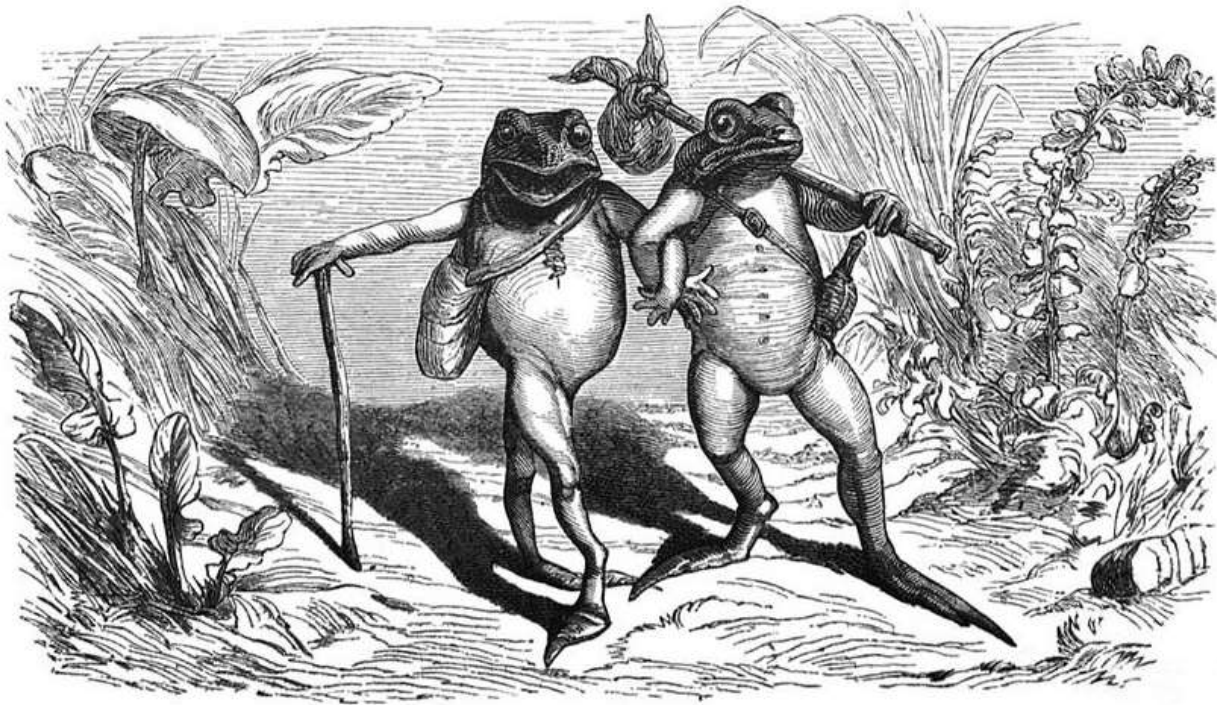


Interspecies Friendship



Ernest Henry Griset, "The two on a stroll," from *Aesop's Fables*, 1884

Course Overview

Humans and killer whales, gorillas and cats, pigs and spiders, and even a lion, meerkat, and warthog: stories of interspecies relationships abound. What can we learn from literature about friendships that cross species boundaries? What insights are to be found in considering how other species experience the world, and how might friendship traverse such differences? This course will consider examples of interspecies friendships in works ranging from *Aesop's Fables* and *Charlotte's Web* to scientific and philosophical texts by Aristotle, von Uexküll, and Donna Haraway. We will consider a wide range of works, including poems, nonfiction essays, short stories, children's tales, films, video games, and your own experiences.

Central to our readings and conversations will be the questions of what motivates literary representations of interspecies friendship—what benefits do we as readers and viewers gain? While thinking about and constructing this course, two major forms of presenting interspecies friendship became apparent to me: one mode is allegorical and the other is representational. Allegorical depictions of interspecies friendship are often about moral instruction, generally for the youth. Here, friendship between different creatures provide readers with some moral insight, often emphasizing or essentializing certain species traits in ways that guide the reader toward new insights about how best to act in the world. As we will learn in this class, friendship also has the ability to cultivate such insights, and thus pairing animals and friendship can offer particularly strong moral instruction. On the other hand, representational depictions of interspecies friendship often seem motivated by a desire to better understand the different worlds that animals inhabit. Rather than essentializing

animals to particular traits, representational depictions often explore the experience of animals as a way of offering us new insights into how other living things experience reality. Both motivations are pedagogical, in that they teach us something new, and indeed works often exhibit varying degrees of both approaches. Many of our readings, and the ways that these readings are paired, consider these two approaches as a means of opening up our conversation about what we can learn from interspecies friendship.

In this course, we will also broaden our understanding of what interspecies friendship might look like. We will consider works that consider both domesticated and wild animals (and the complicated boundaries such distinctions entail), as well as plants. We will also explore video games with the motivating question of whether digitally experiencing an animal's "umwelt," or the perceptual world schema in which an organism exists (to use a term from Jakob von Uexküll, who we will read in this class), might change our own understandings of the experiences of other creatures, and thus what being friends with other species might look like. This course also includes a Final Salon presentation in which you will be asked to consider and share one of your own experiences of interspecies friendship that occurred over the semester. As is appropriate for a course that considers the experiences of other creatures, you will ultimately be asked to consider relationships of your own that cross species boundaries and what we might learn from such relationships.

Required Texts

E. B. White, *Charlotte's Web*

Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*

Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*

Witi Ihimaera, *The Whale Rider*

Films We Will Watch

Gunda

Victor Kossakovsky

<https://smile.amazon.com/Gunda-Victor-Kossakovsky/dp/B09978MXKV>

Babe

Chris Noonan

<https://smile.amazon.com/Babe-James-Cromwell/dp/B0026IPAJA>

Zootopia

Byron Howard, Rich Moore

<https://smile.amazon.com/Zootopia-Theatrical-Ginnifer-Goodwin/dp/B01CIV49KA/>

Project Nim

James Marsh

<https://smile.amazon.com/Project-Nim-Chimpsky/dp/B006WWG0AO/>

Tuktu and his Eskimo Dogs

Laurence Hyde

<https://www.nfb.ca/playlists/unikkausivut-sharing-our-stories/playback/#60>

Old Yeller

Robert Stevenson

<https://www.amazon.com/Old-Yeller-Dorothy-McGuire/dp/B003QSKB2U>

Kedi

Ceyda Torun

<https://smile.amazon.com/Kedi-Ceyda-Torun/dp/B0714FJ4RZ>

Free Willy

Simon Wincer

<https://smile.amazon.com/Free-Willy-Jason-James-Richter/dp/B000HL27N0/>

Black Fish

Gabriela Cowperthwaite

<https://www.amazon.com/Blackfish-Kim-Ashdown/dp/B00G4I0DNG>

Grizzly Man

Werner Herzog

<https://www.amazon.com/Grizzly-Man-Werner-Herzog/dp/B007K8BBHQ/>

My Octopus Teacher

Pippa Ehrlich; James Reed

<https://www.netflix.com/title/81045007>

The Lion King (new version, 2019)

Jon Favreau

<https://smile.amazon.com/Lion-King-Donald-Glover/dp/B07V8FBXX9/>

Interspecies Friendship Presentations

In the French intellectual tradition, a salon is a cultural event where artists and intellectuals gather to discuss literature, philosophy, and art, to circulate their work, and to find inspiration in each other's conversation. In the spirit of this tradition, two class meetings will be given over to presentations that may take a wide range of formats. Here are the basics:

Each student will create something to share with the class. Your salon contribution should engage with a significant moment of an interspecies encounter or relationship that occurred to you over the course of the semester, or in other words, while we have been reading and thinking about interspecies friendship. The goal here is not to supply a memory from your childhood, or present a story told second-hand to you, but to rather present to the class an interspecies encounter that *you* had that was meaningful or instructive. Friendship is not a necessary trait to present on here, but considering how pedagogical many of our readings are, perhaps an occasion in which you learned something important, or came to a significant realization, could function as fecund source material.

The format of your presentation is completely up to you. It should not be you simply talking to us. Indeed, I invite you to be *inventive* in your presentation. Examples of formats that a presentation might take could include a drawing or painting, a short video that you made, a song that you wrote, a poem, a selection of journal entries, a presentation and discussion of some important artifact that relates to your experience, etc. I really do invite you to translate your interspecies experience into a medium that you find interesting or exciting.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Day 1

Syllabus

Mammal biomass today

Mary Oliver- “Among Trees”

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### **Day 2 – Animals, Friendship**

Aristotle on Friendship

Thomas Aquinas on Animals

Aristotle on the Vegetative, Appetitive, and Rational Soul

Rudyard Kipling, “Rikki-tikki-tavi”

### **Day 3 – Animal Minds**

Jacob Von Uexküll, *A Stroll Through the Worlds of Animals and Men*

Stacy Alaimo, “Animal”

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Day 4 – Farm Stories

E.B. White, *Charlotte’s Web*

Day 5 – More Farm Stories, More Pigs!

Victor Kossakovsky, *Gunda* [movie]

Chris Noonan, *Babe* [movie]

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### **Day 6 – Animal Friendship in Children’s Stories**

*Aesop’s Fables*

Byron Howard, Rich Moore, *Zootopia* [movie]

Jennifer Sandlin and Nathan Snaza, “‘It’s Called a Hustle, Sweetheart’: Black Lives Matter, the Police State, and the Politics of Colonizing Anger in *Zootopia*”

### **Day 7 – Interspecies Communication**

Albert Braz, “Beaver Voices: Grey Owl and Interspecies Communication”

Philip Ball, “The Challenges of Animal Translation”

Cynthia Willett, “Can the Subaltern Laugh?” [Excerpt]

James Marsh, *Project Nim* [movie]



### **Day 8 – Dogs and Humans**

Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*

John Muir, “Stickeen”

Laurence Hyde, *Tuktu and his Eskimo Dogs* [short video]

Robert Stevenson, *Old Yeller* [movie]

### **Day 9 – Cats and Humans**

Anonymous, “Pangur Bán”

Charles Baudelaire, “The Cat” and “Cats”

Ceyda Torun, *Kedi* [movie]



### **Day 10 – Plants and Humans**

Michael Pollan, “Introduction: The Human Bumblebee,” from *The Botany of Desire*

Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*

Preface

Planting Sweetgrass

“Skywoman Falling”

“The Council of Pecans”

“The Gift of Strawberries”

“Asters and Golden Rod”

“Learning the Grammar of Animacy”

Picking Sweetgrass

“Epiphany in the Beans”

“The Three Sisters”

“The Honorable Harvest”

### **Day 11 – Plants and Life**

Herman Hesse, “Tree on Cycle Path at Kijkduin Dunes, The Hague, always worth a stop for a chat”

Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*

Braiding Sweetgrass

“Sitting in a Circle”

“*Umbilicaria*: The Belly Button of the World”

“Old-Growth Children”

Burning Sweetgrass

“Windigo Footprints”

“People of Corn, People of Light”

“Collateral Damage”

“Defeating Windigo”

Epilogue: Returning the Gift



**Day 12 - Inhabiting Animal Minds Through Video Games – Collection 1 Presentations**

*Shelter 1*

*WolfQuest: Anniversary Edition*

*Metamorphosis*

*Untitled Goose Game*

**Day 13 - Inhabiting Animal Minds Through Video Games – Collection 2 Presentations**

*Shelter 2*

*Lost Ember*

*Catlateral Damage*

*Wasp Game*

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Day 14 – Whales and Humans

Witi Ihimaera, *The Whale Rider*

Day 15 – Whales and Humans

Simon Wincer, *Free Willy* [movie]

Gabriela Cowperthwaite, *Blackfish* [movie]

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**Day 16 – Interspecies Friendship Gone Wrong- Bears and Human**

Werner Herzog, *Grizzly Man* [movie]

John Berger, “Why Look at Animals?”

**Day 17 – Octopus and Human**

Pippa Ehrlich, James Reed, *My Octopus Teacher* [movie]

Sophie Lewis, “My Octopus Girlfriend”

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Day 18 – Savannah Friendship, Savannah Violence

Charles Siebert, “An Elephant Crackup?”

Jon Favreau, *The Lion King* [movie]

Day 19 and 20 – Interspecies Friendship Final Salon Presentations