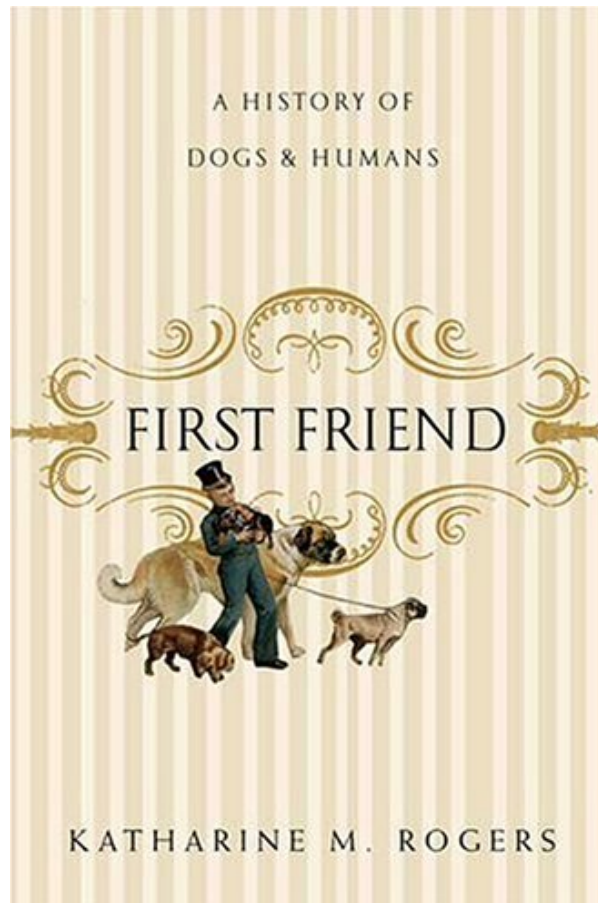


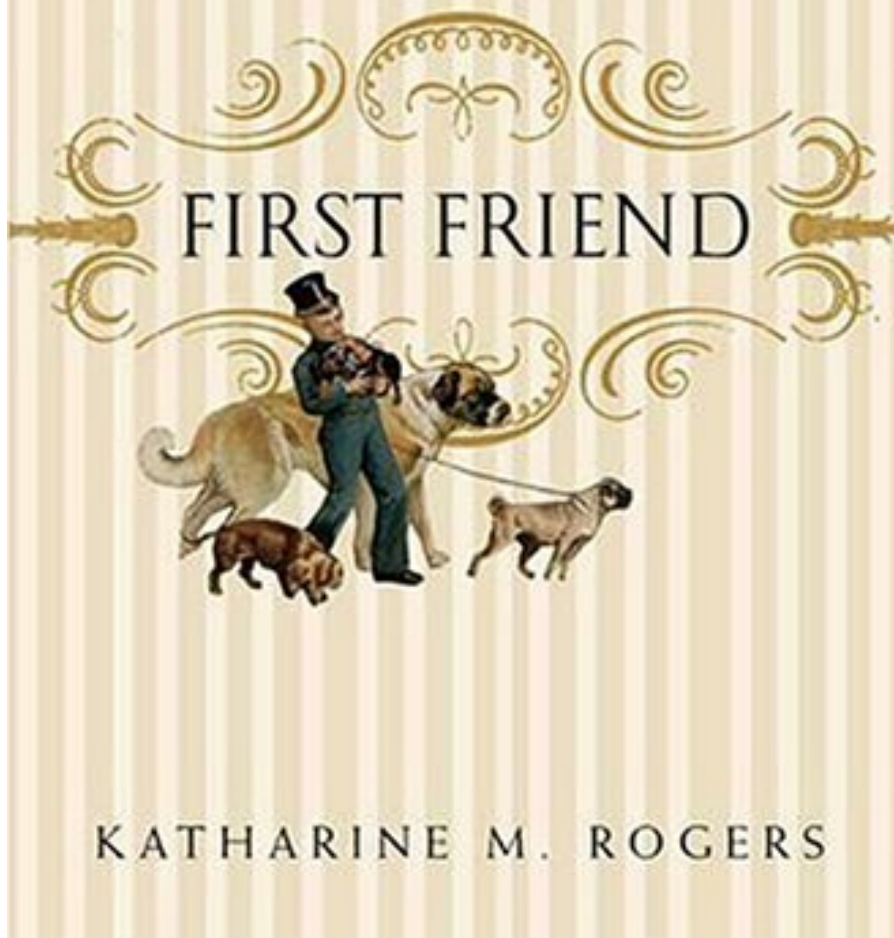
# **FIRST FRIEND: A HISTORY OF DOGS AND HUMANS BY KATHARINE M. ROGERS**



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About the Author

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From the beginning of human memory, dogs have been living with virtually every human society on earth. Of all the animals, the dog has long maintained the closest relationship with man. In *First Friend*, Katharine M. Rogers explores the history of that relationship - from what is known about how it first came about - and how it developed through the centuries. From work-mate to beloved pet, from the ancient world to modern times, *First Friend* is a charming, compelling work exploring that closest of interspecies bonds.

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#### Most helpful customer reviews

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

A Celebration of Our Closest Animal Friend

By Doctor Jean

"First Friend" offers a mine of information about the history of dogs and the humans who have loved them -- and a few who emphatically did not.

Humans were buried with their pet dogs in ancient Jericho, Homer's tough warrior Odysseus wept at the death of his devoted old hound Argus, and greyhounds were valued companions to Roman and medieval aristocrats. The Stuart kings loved their toy spaniels, and the poet Pope (who preferred Great Danes) doubted the goodness of a man who experimented on dogs. In the nineteenth century, Scott created a gallery of engaging canine characters, Byron praised his Newfoundland for having "all the Virtues of Man/ Without his Vices," Dickens regularly enhanced his characters by giving them appropriate dogs (Dora's Jip, Bill Sikes's Bull's-eye), and acerbic Jane Carlyle eulogized her Maltese mix Nero as "my inseparable companion during eleven years, ever doing his little best to keep me from feeling sad and lonely.'

The love continues today, of course, with the difference that we are more apt to recognize dogs as equal members of the family. People are no longer comfortable calling themselves the owners of their dogs; humane societies are promoting the term guardian instead.

3 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

Commemorating a Great Partnership

By Rob Hardy

One of our dogs, Sammy, the fox terrier, has a behavior I find lovable. When I move in my library to my recliner to read, Sammy will get up from wherever he is to jump on the recliner's footstool and nap. He does not do so to get attention, for I don't thank him or pet him for doing so, and he has not gained in comfort, for he has usually abandoned a comfortable place on the sofa in order to walk over and jump on the footstool which has no more cushioning. He simply finds it more comfortable to be next to his human; I am complimented by this opinion, and I like him all the more for it, every time he joins me in this fashion. Sammy's behavior in this instance, and his behavior and that of my other dogs in many other instances, were on my mind as I read *\_First Friend: A History of Dogs and Humans\_* (St. Martin's Press) by Katherine M. Rogers. Rogers does not include her own anecdotes with the book, but obviously loves dogs (her book is dedicated to her shepherd / retriever mix). This does not keep her from seeing them clearly; she disdains those who see dogs as equals, though she gives many examples of the impulse. Eugene O'Neill, for instance, wrote an epitaph for the family Dalmatian which praised "the only one of our children who has not disillusioned us." Without regarding dogs as furry, four-legged humans, however, there is much to admire in them, and much to admire about the mutually satisfying relationship between the two species.

Dogs and humans have been closely associated for millennia; the earliest dog fossil dates from 12000 BCE, and there is a grave from 10000 BCE in Israel that contains the skeleton of an elderly woman buried with a pup. It is clear that humans first found early wolfish dogs helpful, in scavenging and hunting, and humans selected dogs that were obedient and easy to be around. Samuel Johnson was behind his mid-eighteenth century times when he included only two roles for dogs in his *Dictionary*: "The larger sort are used as a guard; the less for sports." There was disapproval that dogs should take any other role. The work ethic came partially from Christianity. St. Thomas Aquinas indicated that since God gave man dominion over animals, man could do what he wanted with them, especially since we could not have true fellowship with creatures that could not reason or attain eternal life. As late as the mid-nineteenth century, Pope Pius IX would not permit in Rome a society against cruelty to animals because such an organization might suggest that humans had duties toward animals. Descartes systematized Aquinas to teach that soulless animals were mere machines, and didn't really feel anything; this did nothing for the hapless dogs taken up by the vivisectionists or the bull- or bear-baiters. Samuel Johnson denounced such treatment, but it took the secular utilitarian Jeremy Bentham to destroy the religious foundations upon which the treatment was founded; a dog is more rational and more able to communicate than a newborn baby, he reasoned, and even if not, "the question is not, Can they *reason*? nor, Can they *talk*? but Can they *suffer*?"

Humans cannot do anything perfectly, and mistreatment of dogs in history, and currently through puppy mills, is a theme here, but not a large one, because their partnership with us has been generally happy. Rogers gives scores of examples of famous people, especially literary ones, who loved their dogs. For example, Byron ended an epitaph on the marble monument of his dog Boatswain, "To mark a friend's remains these stones arise; / I never knew but one, - and here he lies." She gives many examples of dogs in literature, sometimes used mawkishly, but often with great subtlety. A classic example is Odysseus returning home to find that only his aging hound Argus remembers him. Jane Austen didn't concentrate on her characters' dogs, but made them revealing. Sleek sporting dogs are owned by shallow gentlemen, and the pug of the mindless Lady Bertram in *Mansfield Park* gets more attention from her mistress than do any of her family members. There are pictures reproduced here of dogs in painting and sculpture, behaving through the centuries as dogs always have, looking pert, pretty, and friendly. Toward the end of the book is a section on dogs as equals, emphasizing that people have come to recognize explicitly that dogs do have rights; the famous trainer Barbara Woodhouse maintained that dogs were fully family members and "should have the same consideration as any other family member... within reason." But realistically, Rogers writes that we have a partnership between significantly different species, based partly on dependency and self interest on both sides, and no less loving or meaningful for that. Anyone who loves dogs will find much to enjoy here, and if you are one of the unfortunates that do not love dogs, no book will reform you.

9 of 11 people found the following review helpful.

Warning! Dog lovers, beware!

By Charismatic Creature

An interesting, if a bit dry and academic look at dogs throughout history. Ms. Rogers is an college professor and this has the feeling of a dissertation or thesis, rather than a "user friendly" book. She relies mostly on dogs as portrayed through paintings and novels, rather than social history or anthropology for her conclusions.

That being said, there are some interesting facts and interesting commentary from various sources. My main problem is the latter half of the book, which is mostly devoted to 19th century fictional literature on dogs. Much of this, as the author acknowledges (without ever really explaining "why"), are cautionary tales about the abuse and even torture of loving canine companions. It was bad enough that in centuries past, things are dog fights were common. But it appears that almost every novel (including many long out of print) about a dog is in some fashion about that dog being beaten, neglected, starved, tortured and in the very worst



examples, vivisected (exploratory surgery done on live animals without anesthesia).

It appears that many of these novels were written with basically good intentions -- the desire of reformers to touch the hearts of decent people and dog-lovers, in the hopes that their outrage would end these barbaric practices, and at least partly that has happened over the decades. However, the sheer number of these books, the unremitting torture and bleakness, is staggering. I haven't even read the originals, and yet just Ms. Roger's description of books about vivisection will undoubtedly cause me nightmares for years to come.

But this begs the question of exactly how common these practices were, and why writers felt compelled to create these books about the misery and torture inflicted on helpless, loyal and affectionate animal companions. Were they exaggerating, in order to achieve their goal of banning or eliminating animal abuse? What kind of madness affected physicians and scientists of that era that they could debase themselves by these disgusting and scientifically worthless acts of torture? Did one single piece of medical knowledge worth obtaining ever come from the sadistic abuse of a living creature?

Those are questions worth exploring, but are not delved into in this particular book. In fairness, given the title, I was expecting a more mellow and even light-hearted look at companion animals over the years. Certainly the paintings pictures alone suggest that despite the abuses, many dogs were greatly loved and well-cared for, and have been the closest companion animals to humankind for over 20,000 years. A little lightness to balance the dark might have been somewhat welcome here.

While not impugning Ms. Roger's formidable scholarship, I feel the need to warn anyone buying this for a dog-loving child or great-aunt, that the unrelenting darkness of the literary examples here, many of them deeply distressing and even stomach-turning, would make this book highly unsuitable for most of the readers who would normally enjoy this subject matter. Please be warned, before reading and especially before giving this as a gift!!!!

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