

ILLICIT ECOLOGIES: QUEER ANIMACY AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL ERASURE IN *HISTORY OF WOLVES*

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Figure 1: *Untitled Number 8* (Shen Wei).

“I started naming things off for him as we went. Trailing arbutus. Chickadees. When we came across some beer cans under a greenstone ledge, Paul pointed and I said ‘rust’” —Emily Fridlund, *History of Wolves*

Introduction: Site of Infection

When Linda, Paul’s babysitter, identifies rust as a living thing on the littered beer cans, she ruptures a crucial divide: that of the living and the dead. In Emily Fridlund’s 2017 horror novel *History of Wolves*, rust is not relegated to the inert and insensate order. Instead, Linda invests it with animacy and sentience. By granting rust presence, Linda expands what entities are perceivable. In perceiving the nonhuman world as animate, Linda forges illicit intimacies with that world. In response, Linda’s overbrimming world is carefully policed through epistemic violence. From scientific curricula to Christian Science, totalizing structures of knowledge limit what can be perceived and suppress the vibrancy of the nonhuman world. By exploring the transgressive qualities of Linda’s nonhuman relationships in opposition to the disciplining narratives of both science and Christian Science, we can unearth the ecocritical appeal within *History of Wolves* to see beyond epistemological divisions nonhuman life forms and, perhaps, through this expanded vitality, form living connections. Through these tangled dynamics, Linda is our guide on the venture to expand the *realm of the intelligible*.

I offer the term *realm of the intelligible* as a nod to both Michel Foucault's work on discourse and Karen Barad's *apparatus*. Foucault theorizes a relational ontology wherein an individual is constituted by structures of knowledge called a discourse. These structures forge epistemological limits on the perceivable. In any language, we can only utter that which we have words to say. In just the same way, a discursively formed subject is limited to their epistemological dialect. For Foucault, discourse is primarily a form of biopolitical governance, a far-reaching control over not only one's political sphere, but one's entire life (including their bodily health, reproduction, and death). Significantly, it conditions *human* subjects to perceive the world in line with the ruling epistemology. But biopolitics does not begin and end with the human.

Karen Barad expands biopolitics to include the nonhuman. She argues that, by limiting the discursive framework to the anthropocentric, we ignore the ways in which our world "leaks" out of the binary of life and death so that even the inanimate is governed by the biopolitical (Chen 217). To counter this, Barad introduces the *apparatus*, the discursive framework that includes the nonhuman. She writes that "apparatuses are dynamic (re)configurings of the world, specific agential practices/intra-actions/performances through which specific exclusionary boundaries are enacted" (Chen 134). From both Barad's apparatus and Foucault's discourse, I tease out the *realm of the intelligible*. This term describes a reality contrived by power that allows certain entities to be perceived and others to be deemed irrelevant. "Realm" connotes the geographical control inherent in the particularly ecological epistemology addressed in this essay. "Intelligible" points to the Enlightenment ideals of intellect and rationality that overpower the sensible or palpable. The realm of the intelligible is what we are allowed and conditioned to see. *History of Wolves* follows Linda as she attempts to build her own reanimated realm of the intelligible.

History of Wolves tells the story of teenage Linda's budding relationship to her new neighbors Leo and Patra and their four-year-old son Paul. The only other family on a remote lake in northern Minnesota, they become Linda's companions. As she begins to babysit for Paul, Linda grows more and more enmeshed in their family. As the novel goes on, Linda is beset by enigmatic signs that something is amiss. Paul grows ill, Patra's actions grow stilted, and Leo's character grows ever more suspect. Ultimately, Paul dies of untreated diabetes while Patra and Leo are tried in court for child neglect. It is only in the retrospective sections, where Linda is an adult, that the reader discovers that Paul and Patra were Christian Scientists, a doctrine that claims that the mind can control the physical world, including an ailing body. This revelation recolors the eerie scenes of Linda's adolescence and makes legible the prickles of discomfort that Leo and Patra induce.

Coiled around these plot points lies a larger tension between the conflicting realms of intelligibility. In Linda's realm of intelligibility, she perceives and cares for a nonhuman world that spills over the bounds of what is conventionally acknowledged. In Part One, working through the conceptual framework of New Materialism, I mark the instances when Linda re-imbues the nonhuman material world with animacy. Just as with rust, Linda allows the

nonhuman world to take up space in her realm of intelligibility. We shall see how her attention, in turn, opens up opportunities for unexpected connection with the nonhuman world.

But Linda's struggle to maintain her realm of intelligibility is no easy task. Everything from Linda's formal education to her casual conversations urge her to narrow her scope of what she considers living or perceivable. In *History of Wolves*, it is Linda who is the conflict zone between discordant realms of the intelligible, one of normative science or Christian Science and one of nonhuman relationality. In Part Two, we shall probe the assumptions that scaffold the two anthropocentric realms of the intelligible: normative science and Christian Science. In contrast to Linda, a scientific realm intelligibly forces the nonhuman world into a mold of biological distinctions. These distinctions bring with them methodological drawbacks and social determinants that prescribe reality instead of describing it, limiting what can be considered living. By situating ostensibly objective scientific theories within their social context, we can interrogate the key assumptions that render certain nonhuman entities, such as rust, and their relationship to the social world invisible.

It should be noted that I use the term science in its most general sense, as an umbrella term for the authority that stems from a Western, societally accepted scientific system of knowledge. Taken to its logical extreme, science's assumption of what is perceivable manifest in Christian Science. Christian Science eschews the material world altogether, trusting instead in the human mind. As we shall see, both science and Christian Science construct an exclusionary realm of intelligibility that only grants life and attention to that which is intelligible in its respective realms of intelligibility.

Denial reverberates through *History of Wolves*. In the last section, we will take on the psychological state of denial as a necessary condition to create the realm of the intelligible. Christian Science denies materiality while normative science denies or stifles the animacy of the nonhuman. This denial is projected onto a geological scale in climate change. Climate change denial sounds awfully similar to the binary assumptions of mind and matter that subtend normative science or Christian Science. It disavows both the vitality of the nonhuman world and humans' social responsibility to it. Instead, we allow human destruction and domination to continue unacknowledged. The characters in *History of Wolves* make these ecological shifts illegible through socially constructing that which is perceivable.

At this time, when the nonhuman world erupts into the social one on a climatological scale, we are forced to reckon with our static disciplinary divisions. The scientific narrative of the nonhuman world forecloses certain forms of being, knowing, and relating. In contrast, Linda's alternative ontology relies on sensuality, not intelligibility; vibrant matter, not the stagnant mind; an ontology that makes licit the intimacies between humans and nonhumans. These intimacies trouble the epistemological strictures present in scientific discourse. Countering denial with animacy and intimacy, Linda revitalizes the world and, in so doing, tracks an alternate trajectory for multi-species ecojustice.

I. Illicit Ecologies

Linda's world is teeming with life. Living in the rural Great Lakes region of the U.S., she spends much of her days outdoors. The nonhuman world overwhelms her, speaks to her, and surprises her. Her acute sensitivity to the nonhuman world allows her to cultivate affinity and intimacy with the natural world. We see this when spring arrives, and Linda is attuned to the shifting topographies of melting snow: "In the afternoons you could hear the whole lake pop and zing. Cracks appeared...Early Spring brought more icicles. They oozed blue-black water from the school roof. They dripped away the afternoons, synched to the ticking clock, then going as fast as my heart, which I could feel when I pressed my fingers to my clavicle" (Fridlund 24-5)¹. In these lines, the nonhuman world exceeds its stable bounds. The otherwise inert lake communicates to Linda in a symphony of musical outbursts. Onomatopoeic words like "zing" and "pop" evoke a spirited effervescence. The icicle droplets keep time and match the measure of the clock as well as the rhythm of Linda's heartbeat. Like a human face, the ice has cracks and crevices. Just as the lake grows ever more porous as its ice melts to water, the line between living and dead, human and nonhuman, becomes permeable. Ironically, the immobilizing name for this body of water, "Still Lake," contrasts with Linda's revitalization of its ice. As these otherwise lithic entities come to life, they disrupt the stable division between the animate and inanimate.

This agitation of the human/nonhuman split is taken up in Mel Y. Chen's work *Animacies: Biopolitics, Queer Affect, and Racial Mattering* in which they ask us to reconsider the ways in which matter that is deemed "insensate, immobile, deathly, or otherwise 'wrong' animates cultural life in important ways" (Chen 2). Animacy connotes qualities such as "agency, awareness, mobility, and liveness" (Chen 2). Chen is working off the groundwork set by New Materialism, a school of thought developed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guatarri in the 1980s that conceives of matter as agentival, active and plural (Lemke 4), or in scholar Jane Bennet's words, "vital, energetic, lively, quivering, vibratory, evanescent, and effluents" (Bennet 112). Through this lens, all matter is mutable and conditional, vexing a stable realm of the intelligible. Ice cannot be consigned to the nonliving when it morphs, moves, and interacts. Nevertheless, the tenuous partition between the living and the dead is "relentlessly produced" within the other more static realms of the intelligible (Chen 2). With this in mind, let us turn to another depiction of ice in Linda's school, this time de-animated.

As Linda sits in class, she describes the hockey players dozing off with their:

dreams of Empire. What else would hockey players dream about? It was their world we lived in. When I was fifteen, I figured this out. They dreamed it into fact. They got teachers to forgive their blank worksheets, they got cheerleaders to scream out their names at pep rallies, they got

¹Henceforth, if no author is given for an internal citation, the citation is from Emily Fridlund's novel, *History of Wolves*, edition stated in this paper's "Works Cited."

Zambonis to stripe the world as far as you could see—ceaselessly—in perfect swaths of freezing water. (20)

At the end of Linda's dry appraisal of the hockey players' Empire, she points to the Zamboni's imperial conquest of ice. Just as an imperial realm extends as far "as you could see," the Zamboni's jurisdiction reaches beyond what is visible. As the Zamboni scrapes the ice's surface, it transforms the cracked and pulsating ice into "perfect swaths." With this phrase, through Linda's eyes, the Zamboni becomes a plow cutting the ice into cultivated swaths of land. The Zamboni is the instrument of power, domesticating and deadening the ice from an assemblage to a monolithic veneer. Not only does the Zamboni "stripe the world," like striations upon skin, it does so "ceaselessly." By interjecting this word, Linda underscores the violence of the Zamboni. Unlike the synchronized drops of the lively icicle, this ice sheet is perpetually glazed. Only when the ice is smooth and dumb can it be incorporated into the hockey players' imperial realm of intelligibility. Imperial realms of intelligibility in *History of Wolves* regulate what is deserving of life and attention on both the human and nonhuman scale. They glaze over an otherwise "glistening, glittering, melting world" (26).

The nonhuman world surprises Linda at every turn. Just as Linda recovered ice from the morgue of inanimate objects, she also revitalizes the surrounding woods. In the unpredictable woods of her childhood, "year by year, the woods just kept unfurling and blooming and drying up, and its constant flux implied meanings half revealed, half withheld—mysteries, yes, but mysteries made rote by change itself, the woods covering and recovering its own tracks" (58). Through Linda's eyes, the woods is both magical, and familiarly cyclical, both animate and intimate. The "constant flux" bespeaks an inherent unpredictability of the unruly nonhuman world, full of "implied meanings, half revealed, half withheld" (58). She beautifully captures the woods' unintelligibility by describing it "covering and recovering its own tracks" (58). Like a stealthy trespasser, the woods erases its own perceivable presence. "Tracks" metonymically stand for not only the paws of creatures such as wolves, but also the dirt itself upon which the tracks are impressed. The woods is a combination of actors, seen and unseen.

Yet, through Linda's sustained effort of attention, she forges intimacies with forces "half withheld" from her. Her ties to rust, ice, and sap make them familiar to the point of being "rote." Though her nonhuman intimacies, the woods is both a recognizable and inscrutable place. Not only is Linda perceptive of animate assemblages made up of ice, tar, and forest tracks, but, through her awareness, she opens up the possibility of intimacy with those entities.

In the summer, Linda marvels at how "the mucousy thickness of the water slid beneath me—how many years of summers had I lain on this lake? I felt the exact indentation in the water my body made" (110). As with the woods, Linda is both familiar with and unnerved by the haptic consistency and contours of the lake of her childhood. But in this instance, Linda is not only conscious of the water; she also interacts with it. Her body's "exact indentation" on the water's surface spotlights the site where these two entities somatically comingle. As Linda grants

the nonhuman animacy, she renders these entities worthy of care and intimacy. Intimacy is a provocative lens through which to view Linda's relationship to the nonhuman. After all, the sexual connotations of the word "intimacy" leads us down the path of objectophilia. Yet, if we conceive of intimacy as entanglement, "co-constitution," and vulnerable interdependence, then the term offers new ways of relating to the nonhuman world (Weston 33). As Linda's body rests on the surface of the lake or synchronizes with the dripping of icicles, the nonhuman and human become intimate: they comingle.

Linda's affinity to the nonhuman world can be seen through Chen's lens of "queer" intimacy. Chen defines queer intimacy "in terms of the social and cultural formations of 'improper affiliation,' so that queerness might well describe an array of subjectivities, intimacies, beings, and spaces located outside of the heteronormative" (Chen 104-5). These improper relationships, like that between her body and the lake or between her heartbeat and the dripping icicles, stretch the boundaries of acceptable affiliations. When Linda notices the texture of the lake on her skin, the rhythm of icicle droplets, and the rust on the beer can, she deems these nonhuman entities worthy of life, attention, and even intimacy.

Linda's memory of the woods goes on to recount an ethical lesson Linda learned from this ecology. She remembers:

When I was eight or nine, I used to go down to the shore and fill coffee cans with toads the size of dimes. I called these Zoos... I worried about what I was keeping [the toads] from. After a few nights of swelling guilt, I would empty out the coffee cans in a speckled alder bush, and as the toads popped away on their tiny legs, I felt the power of the woods very keenly. I felt the way it chastised me and corrected me, the way it always seemed to say: *See?* (258)

Linda's interaction between herself and the woods possesses a queer intimacy. The woods, almost like a parent, rebukes Linda and her control of other life-forms. Because she feels "the power of the woods very keenly," she registers its reproval. Further, this intimacy imparts a sense of responsibility. The woods' censure draws a clear parallel between "these Zoos" and the capture of the nonhuman world into the world of "coffee" and "dimes." Linda knows this and fears that she is "keeping" the toads from the vibrant and interconnected nonhuman world. The woods calls out to her with a single word, part challenge and part appeal, "*See?*". This word beckons Linda to pay attention, reinvest animacy, and, significantly, to care about the nonhuman world. Linda's smaller interactions are a signpost for a larger theoretical question.

The problem of animacy hinges on a single question: what is worthy of life? Too often, the rhetoric of dehumanization mirrors the discourse around the nonhuman. The notion of animacy provides a fertile ground upon which to probe the parallels and slippages within the spectrum of the human, subhuman, and nonhuman statuses. Chen reminds us what is at stake when we consider the racialized, gendered, and ableist inflections of what is considered worthy of life. Consider that Aimé Césaire refers to the process of colonization as “thingification” (Chen 49). Slaves were considered property in the United States until 1865. As Chen points out, the discourse of dehumanization around “alien” immigrants, enemy terrorists, or disabled folks all echo the liminal status (subhuman yet animate) of a toxin, virus, or an oil spill. This spectrum of animacy is based on what Ronald Langacker calls an “empathy hierarchy” (Chen 7). The empathy hierarchy dictates what we view as sensate and what is deathly in relation to humans. He argues, “we are necessarily oriented to other entities in the very terms implicit in our orientation to our own selves” (Chen 7). An entity is considered animate by dint of its resemblance to a particular image of the human. But not for Linda.



Figure 2: Depiction of an animate toxin (Variant Comics).

Linda’s bonds with water, ice, and the woods do not rest on their anthropomorphism. Instead, she is readily surprised, unsettled, and drawn to these other forms of being that do not resemble her own. Linda offers an alternative and expanded hierarchy of empathy, one that allows materials like ice and rust to have sensation and expression. This alternative network forges intimate bonds between Linda and the natural world, bonds that are not granted in other realms of intelligibility. In the next section, we will see how scientific realms of intelligibility prescribe reality instead of describing it, delimiting what can be considered living.

II. Realms of Intelligibility

Linda’s queer animacies unleash a world that is pullulating with life, but this animate nonhuman world clashes with dominant discourse. The scientific realm of intelligibility seeks to efface Linda’s world, smoothing the surface of the ice. In this section, we will take a closer look at the coercive forces that seek to constrict Linda’s perceivable world through seemingly objective truths. From the biology classroom to the doctrine of Christian Science, Linda is asked to exist within a confining realm of intelligibility. Ultimately, we shall see how what appears to be objective is, in fact, part of a socially constructed epistemology.

In *History of Wolves*, Linda represents a conflict zone in which scientific and animate realms of intelligibility clash; in doing so, she ruptures the facade of

objectivity propped up by normative science. Science is often considered impervious to social or political influences, producing an inviolable realm of intelligibility. Nevertheless, Linda sees beyond her scientific education in her high school biology class. The course's title "Life Science" (21) announces its biopolitical paradigm: the animacies allowed and denied by the curriculum. Listening to her teacher lecture on evolution, Linda she concludes that it is "like hearing some obscure rumor that, due to over-telling, no longer held any relevance we could make out" (21). This observation is cutting. It points to the gap between scientific paradigm and Linda's lived experience of the animate nonhuman world. The discipline of biology assumes a clear division between what is living and what is what is non-life, a division that Linda does not perceive in materials like rust and ice. The hackneyed scientific terms floating around the classroom used to describe the living and the dead do not correlate to Linda's intimate affiliations; these theories create reality instead of explaining it. Therefore, they hold no "relevance we could make out" (21). This prepositional verb, "make out," points to the students' need to decipher and decode an abstruse description of the living world. While these putatively objective scientific truths generally dictate what is perceivable, for Linda, they place irrelevant limits on an animate world.

This instance of an enigmatic scientific narrative directly contrasts with Linda's undeniable sensitivity to the nonhuman world. While sitting in Life Science class, she observes:

From every window, you could see snow blow away iron gusts, then drift back the next day in piles as high as houses. One day near the end of Evolution, a late-season storm brought a huge poplar branch down in a *numff* of ice. Through the window, I watched it cascade to the ground and narrowly miss a small blue car pulling out from the grocery store across from school. At the board, Mrs. Lundgren was chalking out the pros and cons of natural selection in squeaky cursive. The window fogged as I leaned toward it. I leaned back. (21)

As her teacher, Mrs. Lundgren, orders the natural world into neat lists, outside, the unruly animate world meddles in human affairs. Snow blows by and piles high. Their onomatopoeic motility seems to sound in the reader's ear, reverberating off the page. Not only do branches fall, they "cascade" down and nearly crush cars. This verb, "cascade," associates the trees with rushing water, dynamic and viscous. More importantly, a "cascade" is rapid, unruly, and dangerous for humans. These nonhuman entities are powerful and recalcitrant. They defy easy biological categorization. Nevertheless, the realm of intelligibility produced by Life Science attempts to relegate trees and snow into the sphere of the nonliving and present this divide as objective. Mrs. Lundgren's "squeaky" cursive gives voice to not only the literal friction of the chalk hitting the blackboard, but also to the conceptual friction as normative scientific structures rub up against the wayward nonhuman world. As she explains natural selection, Ms. Lundgren reinforces another form of selection that undergirds normative science itself, bifurcating animal and nature, human and nonhuman, living and inert. Linda's

indifference to her teacher's words can be seen by her roving eye, more interested in the fog on the window or snow on the street than the course's content. Linda's Life Science curriculum constructs its own realm of intelligibility, one that clashes with Linda's animate world.

The knowledge-making process of scientific curricula is explored in depth by American philosopher of science Thomas Samuel Kuhn in his influential work *The Structures of Scientific Revolutions*. Here, Kuhn identifies normative science as cemented in what he terms "paradigms," or methodological rules and assumptions. Kuhn's notion of the paradigm fills out the picture of a specifically scientific realm of intelligibility. This narrow scientific model produces a self-enclosed logic in which terms like natural selection make sense within our science-based culture.

The totalizing drive of normative science is best seen in scientific curricula. Kuhn disparages the doctrinal bent of these pedagogical systems. Because they present only the prevailing paradigm, much like national histories, they are rewritten after each scientific revolution or paradigm shift. Once rewritten, Kuhn contends, these narratives occlude, "partly by selection and partly by distortion," bygone scientific paradigms by presenting past scientists as operating under the same set of assumptions that the most recent scientific theory has introduced (Kuhn 138). Once inscribed into a textbook, theory becomes the accepted truth, erasing or reframing all that does not integrate. These scientific theories strike Linda as stale terms, obscure and overtold.

Building off Kuhn, one could interpret Linda's dispassionate encounter with natural selection through the lens of Technofeminism. Technofeminism interrogates the role of gender in technology. Scholars in the field, such as physicist and philosopher of science Evelyn Fox Keller, expose the white, western, and masculine frameworks that subtend evolutionary theory. Keller writes of how scientists tend to equate Darwin's natural selection with competitive interactions and neglect the "cooperative (or mutualist) interactions" in evolution (Keller 159). Keller's specific critique of the warped narrative of evolution weaves together Kuhn's theory of paradigms and the Life Science class in *History of Wolves*. For Linda, perhaps the competitive depiction of evolution is what becomes some "obscure rumor" that does not match her more "mutualist" interactions. This mutualism between species opens up space for Linda's intimacy with the nonhuman world in contrast to Mrs. Lundgren's removed appraisal.

As Linda reanimates the world around her, she disrupts the dominant scientific paradigm. These observations are what Kuhn might call "anomalies" (210). He explains that it takes a noteworthy anomaly to spark revolutionary moments in science. Such epistemological disruptions result in Kuhn's neologism: a "paradigm shift." Linda makes possible just such a shift for the reader of *History of Wolves*, opening our eyes to animate interactions hitherto unnoticed. While her perceptions are not registered under a normative scientific lens, they track noteworthy changes in the world around her like the cascading fall of a branch, the *wumff* of ice, and the "iron gusts" of snow. Kuhn's statement that "when paradigms change, the world itself changes with them" rings true (129). With this in mind, Linda and Ms. Lundgren bypass each other, moving on separate planes of

perception. The scientific paradigm forecloses the enigmatic, ambiguous, and unruly. Far from paving the way to a more accurate conception of reality, science clings to its established assumptions. Rejecting this approach, Linda seeks interconnectivity, an intimacy sustained through sensitivities so often dulled. If, as Kuhn notes, “Discovery commences only with the awareness of anomaly,” then Linda is all ears (Kuhn, 51-3).

It must be made plain that I am not drafting a polemic that divests science of its intellectual offerings. The socially inflected nature of scientific principles does not invalidate them. It simply places scientific facts under their theoretical umbrella and, as such, makes them “subjects to the same scrutiny regularly applied to theories in other fields” (Kuhn, 9). I argue, following feminist scholar Donna Haraway, that there is room to both critique normative science and appeal to its disciplinary insights (Haraway 7). Once science is brought back into the realm of critique, those who exist in the scientific paradigm can be self-reflexive, evaluating its premises as they practice. Yet, when Linda manumits the nonhuman world from the deadening tyranny of scientific realms of intelligibility, she ushers in the potential of intimacy and unpredictability that subscribers to the scientific paradigm would do well to consider.

Unnatural History

To further interrogate the authority of scientific claims, *History of Wolves* blurs the distinctions between history and science, critiquing both. After all, biology was only a few short years ago termed natural history. The human narratives that create a realm of intelligibility are just as present in the disciplines of history as science. Yet another teacher of Linda’s, Mr. Greirson, reveals how just how political the production of history really is. He declares, “No one cared about the czars before Stalin and the bomb. They were puppets on a faraway stage, utterly insignificant” (8). In his lecture, Mr. Greirson highlights the way that histories are catered to the present tastes. Past Russian governance is included in U.S. textbooks only once the two nations became politically relevant to one another. Just as czars were “utterly insignificant” in much of the U.S. historical account, Linda’s animate world is routinely erased by normative science. Linda addresses this parallel directly in her own version of history: the history of wolves.

When Linda is asked to serve as the school representative for the “History Odyssey,” a history competition for her school, she decides to present on the history of wolves (9). While Linda’s narrative about wolves seems simple at first glance, it makes significant pivots away from her experience in Life Science class. Her first reframing gesture comes from her explicit label: a history. With this tag, Linda acknowledges her own human vantage point as she approaches the study of wolves. She brings biology down a notch by redubbing it “history,” thereby making it vulnerable to social critique. She revokes the rights of biology to have the last word on wolves.

Provocatively, Linda presents her history of wolves at a tournament of *human* history. When the judges ask Linda what wolves have to do with human

history, she responds “Wolves have nothing at all to do with humans actually. If they can help it, they avoid them” (14). With this contemptuous jab, Linda bucks against the anthropocentric realm of intelligibility that considers the nonhuman only through the lens of human history, or worse, biology. Linda’s history of wolves is an attempt to disrupt, or “avoid,” the dominant history to include an animate world that exists beyond the human gaze. Just as Russian history was selectively recounted in the U.S. and is in need of a corrective, Linda’s history of wolves provides an alternate story of the species away from the biological narrative. If, as Kuhn writes, science textbooks are like national histories, rewritten with each regime, Linda’s version, the history of wolves, presents a buried archive.

Linda’s next intervention in her history of wolves comes from the intimacy underlying her presentation. Like many nonhuman agents in her world, Linda has an affinity for wolves. When she considers the potential names, she could have been given as a baby, she includes a parenthetical aside, “(*Canidae*, I thought with longing . . .)” (240). This startling digression gets to the heart of Linda’s intimacy with the nonhuman world. Linda aspires to be named after the biological family of dog-like animals that includes wolves. She wants her name to reflect her closeness to these creatures. Linda’s feeling of “longing” and that wishful ellipsis point to her embodied, intimate attachment with wolves. It blurs the lines between nonhuman and human networks of connection. Once Linda grants an entity a life, a history, a subjecthood, it becomes worthy of desire.

These intimacies are not without impediment. When Linda expresses her love of wolves to her history teacher, Mr. Greirson, he chalks it up to an adolescent fetish. He jeers, “‘Right, you’re a fourteen-year-old girl.’ The skin bunched up around his eyes. ‘You all have a thing for horses and wolves. I love that. I love that. That’s so weird. What is that *about?*’” (9). By portraying Linda’s lupine fascination as a “thing for” wolves, Mr. Grierson imposes a perverse sexuality onto Linda’s longing for intimacy with wolves. This elision reveals the connection between animacy and intimacy. As Linda’s longs for connection, her forms of intimacy trespass beyond the accepted networks of connection. Linda’s improper affiliations with the nonhuman emerge in the suggestive italics of Mr. Grierson’s one ribald quandary: “what is that *about?*” (9).

Significantly, when Linda commences research on her history of wolves presentation, she only manages to find a taxidermized version in a museum. In her research for the presentation, Linda is only able to learn how to stuff and literally and figuratively flatten a wolf, not relate to it. Fridlund satirizes this fact when the museum curator repeats her taxidermy advice urgently: “Iron the skin, iron the skin” (13). This taxidermized wolf recalls the czars Mr. Greirson spoke of, “puppets on a faraway stage” (8) as both are stuffed and subject to narrative manipulation. Though Linda sees wolves as part of her kin, wanting to share their name, the scientific realms of intelligibility do not allow space for this interspecies intimacy.

In her presentation, Linda argues that scientific narratives of wolves are not only reductive, but inaccurate. She points out that “the term Alpha—evolved to describe captive animals—is still misleading. An alpha animal may be alpha only

at certain times for a specific reason” (14). In this direct quote from Barry Lopez’s *Of Wolves and Men*, Linda notably asserts that terms applied to animals only correspond to the animals within the human world, in captivity. The biology categorization of wolves’ social patterns is based only on animals situated in the human realm of intelligibility. Even more striking, the title of “Alpha” is, in fact, inaccurate. An alpha role is provisional and temporary, not static. Though biological paradigms place animals within hierarchies of power, the social lives of nonhumans are far more dynamic and mystifying than this simple paradigm can hold. Linda’s history of wolves challenges the limits of the scientific paradigm and reveals how the nonhuman world can be both unpredictable and an object of affection for Linda.

Despite Linda’s carefully crafted realm of intelligibility, when she relays her interests to her neighbor Leo, he warps her ideas to fit within the dominant realm of intelligibility. While Linda is close to Leo’s wife, Patra, and his son, Paul, she has deep misgivings about Leo himself for reasons she cannot quite articulate. After Linda divulges that her favorite subject is history, Leo responds “‘American or European? What historical period do you like?’ ‘The history of *wolves*,’ I said, but the minute the answer was out, it sounded foolish. I sipped the tiniest bit of broth from my spoon. ‘You mean natural history?’ ‘Yep.’ ‘So biology actually?’ ‘Biology, I guess’” (125). This interchange perfectly captures the epistemological blacksmithery at play: Leo heats, manipulates, and hammers out Linda’s worldview until it fits within accepted logic. While the term “history” acknowledges the social factors that construct the narrative (as seen with Mr. Greirson’s comment on the czars), a term like biology obfuscates that social fabrication and, instead, claims objectivity. Linda is well aware that her animate intimacies are considered “foolish” to most others. She walks back her history of wolves until it is reduced to biology. As demonstrated in Leo’s coercive categorization, the dominant scientific discourse does not license alternate histories in its realm of intelligibility.

Yet Leo is far more subversive than he appears at first blush. As he and Linda continue the conversation, he gives voice to Linda’s interrogation of the scientific realm of intelligibility. As a Christian Scientist, a religion we will explore in detail in Part Three, Leo espouses his own realm of intelligibility that clashes with normative science. In his conversation with Linda, Leo bemoans the narrow scientific definition of animacy. He complains, “In my line of work, [astronomy], everyone is always looking for extraterrestrials, as if the universe matters only when endowed with a narrowly carbon-based definition of life” (126). Here, Leo nods to the many unseen forms of life that Linda experiences on a daily basis. A far cry from his previous insistence on the term biology, now Leo is opening the floodgates for other forms of life and their accompanying narratives. He asks us to think capaciously around the limits of life.

Elizabeth Povinelli does just this in *Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism*. She dubs Leo’s complaint of science the “Carbon Imaginary,” or the unspoken set of assumptions about what constitutes life. The standards of life are bound by concepts such as metabolism, birth, reproduction, growth, and death. These concepts are, Povinelli argues, as much biological as they are ontological; they have

to do as much with how we classify life as how we live and experience it (Povinelli 33-34). Further, scholar Michele Foucault contends that the concept of “life” itself did not exist in natural history and was only introduced in the shift to biology. Furthermore, it was not until the late 18th century that the distinction between organic and inorganic became a fundamental divide (Foucault 139, 252). In Linda’s reanimated world, Leo’s questions come as a breath of fresh air. Finally, someone names the elephant in the room, the rust on the beer can, and the alpha wrongly named.

But Leo does not stop there. He asks Linda to do a “thought experiment” like a real scientist noting that all scientists start with premises, “but so often they start with unsound premises and go awry, like the world is flat, or the human body is made up of four basic humors” (126). From the start, Leo succinctly diagnoses the issue. As we saw with the term “alpha,” science is rooted in socially constructed knowledge that is artificially hypostatized. By introducing debunked scientific theories, Leo acknowledges Linda’s sense that science is built on socially conditioned premises. Leo is not content to accept these scientific premises that have ironed flat the world in which we inhabit.

Instead, Leo urges Linda to question her assumptions. He inquires, “What is it you believe—that is, assume—to be true about your existence? That is the question to start with, of course. What are your premises of self?” (133). Leo asks Linda to plumb the depths of her epistemological structures, to find a bedrock premise. Leo’s stutter, swapping “believe” with “assume,” captures the central thrust of a “premise.” The assumptions within a realm of intelligibility function almost like a faith; we believe in scientific claims so firmly that they are insulated from scrutiny, constructing a realm of intelligibility that is total and absolute. Further, the discipline of biology’s metaphysical distinctions between life and nonlife circumscribes our imaginations, observations, and lived experiences. In other words, our premises of self not only inform the way we see the world, but also the way we act in it.

At the close of his sermon, Leo leaves Linda with a final question about her premises of self. In response, Linda’s mind seems to instinctively jump to her answer. Leo asks and Linda responds, ““what do you *think* you know?” the twenty acres of land on the east side of Still Lake. That’s what I knew. That’s the one thing I’d always assumed I’d understand” (127). Startlingly, Linda’s mental answer rushes after Leo’s question, occupying the same sentence in the text. The answer seems to break the floodgates of accepted syntactical pauses. It is instinctual. Linda’s intimacy of knowledge emerges from her affiliation with the animate world of her home on Still Lake. Her premises of both knowledge and self are produced by the ice, rusts, and stone of those twenty acres. Linda’s improper affiliations with the nonhuman world guide her premises of self and offer up an alternate realm of intelligibility.

In Part Two we looked at how the orthodox paradigms of science mold a totalizing and exclusionary realm of intelligibility. Nevertheless, Linda challenges these assumptions with her history of wolves and sensitivity to vibrant nonhuman dynamics. Finally, we saw how Leo, pushing back at first, begins to provide

language for Linda's criticisms. If Part One revealed how Linda's queer animacy radically destabilizes preexisting epistemology, Part Two lays bare how sedimented this preexisting epistemology is. In Part Three, I take up the psychological state of denial as an essential agent in constructing a realm of intelligibility.

III. Access Denied

Denial is the refusal to acknowledge presence. In *History of Wolves*, there exists a gap between what is present and what is acknowledged. Linda feels this dissonance acutely. She senses the presence of the nonhuman world whose presence is so often denied by normative science. Further, as tension grows between Linda and Leo, the dangers of Christian Science are present but never spoken. In this section, we will examine the role that denial plays in forming a realm of intelligibility and descend deeper into the depths of denial in its most insidious form in *History of Wolves*. First, we will consider Christian Science and its inflated sense of denial, which serves as a hyperbolic case-study for the denial inherent to scientific forms of knowledge when taken too far. Though Christian Science appears at odds with normative science, both privilege their preconceived principles of the physical world over the unruly nonhuman world. Next, we will look at the larger ramifications of denial on a climatological and societal level as they appear in Linda's life. Ultimately, once we identify and peel back the denial of the animate nonhuman world, we allow that world to be worthy of presence, perhaps, intimacy.

In *History of Wolves*, Christian Science serves as a foil for Linda's animate world. Founded on an alternate metaphysics, Christian Science claims that the mind can control the physical world. This theology not only places the mind over matter, it denies matter. The epigraph of *History of Wolves* is excerpted from Christian Science's founder Mary Baker Eddy: "Become conscious for a single moment that Life and intelligence are purely spiritual, —neither in nor of matter, —and the body will then utter no complaints" (Eddy 3). The capital L in "Life" echoes Linda's Life Science class. Both accounts make claims about what counts as living. In the past section, we saw how strict biological categories devitalize Linda's animate nonhuman relations. In this section, Christian Science takes center stage to take this scientific method to the extreme. Just as ice, rust, and wolves are miscast or deadened in Life Science, so human bodies are denied in Christian Science.

Paul is four years old and suffering from untreated diabetes. Because his parents, Leo and Patra, are Christian Scientists, they do not seek medical care for their child; they believe that disease is a mere mental miscalculation. As the novel progresses, Paul's condition becomes increasingly unstable, and Linda is unaware of the cause. Here, denial is employed as an avoidant and deliberate erasure of material phenomena. On the climactic night of Paul's death, Leo, Patra, and Linda are in a deep state of denial. Though Paul suffers from untreated diabetes, the family plays the board game Candyland, make sugary pancakes and, though it is the dead of night, decide to "start tomorrow early. It's not written anywhere that

we can't do that" (177). In this fateful scene, Leo and Patra deny the material world in its entirety. They deny that it is night, they deny that their sickly son is dying of diabetes, and they deny their own responsibility to support him. Leo rationalizes his choice to declare the day over by claiming that there is no law against it, foreshadowing the legal trials which will investigate Leo and Patra's roles in Paul's death. The innocuous denial of the time of day is mirrored in a more nefarious denial: that of Paul's physical body.

The binary between the intellectual mind and the material brain implodes in Paul's body. Ironically, Paul dies because the material of his mind overwhelmed him: he died of a cerebral edema, a condition in which the "brain swells and presses outward against the skull, and the optic nerves are under so much pressure they smash into the back of the eye. The brain literally gets too big for the head, crowds the plates in the skull, rearranges the grey matter" (142). The intellectual and physical dimensions of the mind collide when the brain distends against the skull. In the same way, Leo's rational machinations face the physical reality with the death of Paul. Leo denies materiality until it is under "so much pressure" that it ruptures. Linda alludes to this parallel between the physical and metaphysical with her emphasis, "literally." This death occurs not only intellectually, but actually. The pretense of what is visible or invisible, material or immaterial, is punctured when the real and tangible optic nerve is smashed and grey matter is rearranged. Once again, the animate world ruptures its constraints.

While Christian Science is contrasted with normative science within traditional binaries of religion and science, perhaps there exist shared assumptions between the two systems of knowledge. After all, both Christian Science and mainstream science thrusts theories upon the universe to make it intelligible. In the context of *History of Wolves*, I contend that Christian Science expresses the exaggerated doctrines of normative science taken to their logical conclusion. Both systems privilege their own stalwart paradigm of the world, over what the world itself has to say. Just as biology denies life to rust or ice, Christian Science denies the vital reality of physical disease. As we saw in Chen's *Animacies*, to attribute animacy to something also makes it worthy of care. Yet, time and again, in both science and Christian Science, unacknowledged actors infiltrate the static realms of intelligibility. Just as Paul's brain swells and crowds his skull, Linda's animate ice and trees overstep their scientific bounds. Seen through this lens, Paul's death becomes an allegory for the stifling of the nonhuman world.

In this last upcoming section, we will take the lessons garnered from the denial of science and Christian Science to look at denial of climate change as it surfaces in *History of Wolves*. If Christian Science and normative science have revealed how realms of intelligibility are self-enclosed, internally coherent, and resting on rules that determine irrelevance, how can these patterns extend to denial of climate change? How can Linda's animate world reorient the narratives of climate change denial?

Forging a Quasi-Climate

The last and most imperceptible form of denial in *History of Wolves* manifests on a climatological scale. Both Linda and the members of her town deny or refuse to acknowledge the changing weather patterns and environmental changes. Instead, climate change is only ever addressed obliquely. By inspecting the moments of climate change denial in *History of Wolves*, we can comprehend the sense of horror that fills the novel. After taking up denial in science and Christian Science, let us turn to a denial both incomprehensibly large and inconspicuously small: denial of climate change.

At the close of the novel, Linda is surprised by how the townspeople deny the harsh weather conditions. She notes:

For weeks that heat had been oppressive, but now that summer was ending, now that September was on the horizon and the first geese were in flight, everyone was going on about how perfect the season had been, how lucky we'd been all along, how blessed to live in the north, in the woods, which was God's own country (228).

In the aftermath of summer, the scorching hot days are all but forgotten. The sinister heat is dismissed within a larger narrative of seasonal change. When the townspeople use the phrase “all along” to describe their fortune with the weather, they place the recent past in a larger timeframe to propose a broader story. In doing so, they foreclose the possibility of an even larger narrative: the pattern of environmental warming in the Great Lakes. When they praise their region as a “perfect,” isolated, divinely protected woods, they ignore the hardship they just experienced. They deem the “oppressive” dangers of climate change irrelevant and exclude it from their realm of intelligibility.

This climatological denial is just one in a series of rejected realities. Denial rests on rules of irrelevance that sort out sound from noise, the notable from the trivial (Zerubavel 24). In Part Two, we encountered this denial in biological curricula's strict definition of life. Normative science denies the animacy of the nonhuman world because it is not compatible with its systems of knowledge. Furthermore, Christian Scientists Leo and Patra deny Paul's illness because their realm of intelligibility does not include matter at all. Now, we encounter denial of the changing climate. If the town narrative is that of “perfect” climate in a God-given land, then unruly and capricious environmental forces are excluded from their realm of intelligibility. If the nonhuman world is set in a mold, it cannot change its shape. If the Great Lakes are “God's own country,” then they cannot be inhospitably hot.

Denial of environmental change recalls Kuhn's work on scientific paradigms: just as scientific paradigms limit what phenomena are worthy of note, narratives of pollution and climate change circumscribe what is considered a salient event or agent. In *Inventing Pollution: Coal, Smoke, and Culture in Britain Since 1800*, Peter Thorsheim reveals that air pollution was not recognized as a danger in Great

Britain until the late 19th century (Thorsheim 17). In fact, coal smoke was praised for diffusing miasma in the city streets. The townspeople in *History of Wolves*, much like Londoners in 1850, do not link the localized event with the larger dangerous consequences. Rules of irrelevance inherent in the act of denial tune out all that might jeopardize a realm of intelligibility. Linda satirizes the power of the present to erase the past by repeating the phrase, “now that.” It is only “now that” the climate conforms to the townspeople’s conception of it that they praise the months when the environment was disobedient.

But perhaps denial runs deeper than discordant realms of intelligibility. Climate denial draws on the denial we saw in scientific curricula and Christian Science, but its unpredictability and recalcitrance make it both impossible to deny and coherently define. Timothy Morton’s notion of the hyperobject in relation to climate change is useful in diagnosing the townspeople’s trenchant denial. A hyperobject is a “geographically and historically distributed object that is tricky to think [of], by virtue of its distributed effects...Embodied knowledge of a hyperobject can only ever be partial” (Weston 130). Morton contends that a phenomenon as diffuse, diversiform, and slow as climate change is difficult to conceptualize. It exceeds the bounds of objectification. To counteract this, we are asked to compare our embodied and unique present to our collective and intellectual future. How can we imagine a force that is at once warming and cooling, at once rapid and gradual, at once current and imminent? Linda gestures to this cognitive dissonance of the townspeople in her refrain “now that.” Encapsulated in this phrase “now that” is the totalizing grip of the present moment. Our embodied experience, much like scientific paradigms or realms of intelligibility, completely informs our understanding of the future.

Though Linda senses that the environment has undergone slow change since her childhood, she only explicitly acknowledges it at the close of the novel:

Let me be clear about something. The woods of my childhood are not the same woods I see today. When I was small, another name for Still Lake was Swamp Lake, because during dry years cattails ate up the shore and the lily pads were so thick they looked like solid ground. In wet years, the lake flooded its banks and we could almost dock the canoes at the cabin steps. Now, the association of homeowners has widened the channel between Still and Mill lakes, ensuring unvarying water levels year in, year out. There are twelve summer homes around the perimeter . . . In summer, it’s a suburb. (257)

Linda’s intention to “be clear” about the state of the woods contrasts with her silence on the subject in the first 250 pages of the novel. Only now do we discover that the woods of Linda’s childhood have transformed into a “suburb.” While Still Lake was once motile and mutable, it is now deadened, constant and “unvarying.” The two names attributed to the body of water, both “Swamp” and “Still” Lake, emphasize its recalcitrant nature. Both “solid ground” and mucous water, depending on the season, the animate lake once defied easy categorization. It was a Baradian “assemblage” of cattails, lily pads, soil, and water. But now, we

discover, the lake is immobilized and does not change “year in, year out.” This constancy harkens back to the “ceaseless” quality of the Zamboni, glazing the dynamic ice into a laminated arena. As the book nears the end, we are faced with a changing woods, lake, and climate that have been hitherto unmentioned. Because this process of change is a hyperobject, it cannot be articulated in simple terms. Even if Linda can sense change, she cannot put it into words and “be clear” until the story’s end. This arresting omission echoes a larger trend of denial as Fridlund’s characters wrestle with the aporia of climate change.

In many ways, *History of Wolves* is a horror novel. Alternating between Linda’s experiences with Patra, Leo, and Paul and the proleptic child neglect trial, the reader is aware of the characters’ fates in advance. Linda describes her sense of dread at the dynamic between Leo, Patra and Paul as a “feeling of woe, some feeling of desolation I hadn’t known I’d felt. A capsized feeling, a sense of the next thing already coming” (130). The moment of capsizing is one in which calamity is inevitable but has not yet occurred. It is both the acknowledgement and denial of catastrophe. Though Linda senses something is awry between Leo, Patra, and Paul, she refuses to admit its reality. Herein lies the power of a horror story: the banal present in the face of impending doom. But, like all horror stories, the precariousness of the present is denied. Paul was dying, nonhuman life forms are being effaced, and the woods are being destroyed. Yet these processes are akin to hyperobjects. They evade our imaginative grasp. Their complexity relegates them to nonexistence. As we saw with scientific paradigms, questions outside the pale of experimentation are consigned to metaphysics. So too, hyperobjects such as slow disease, climate change, or nonhuman erasure are all excluded from what can be noticed. They cannot be conceived of.

When we reflect on narratives around climate change, the feeling of crisis feeds on its own inconceivability. Kath Weston contends, “apocalypse derives pleasure from its own inevitability, from the magnitude and impact of the disaster” (Weston 181). From Paul’s death, to the “suburban” woods, to Linda’s “capsized feeling,” little apocalypses litter the book. These events seem inevitable and unspeakable. When a process does not fit into the realm of intelligibility, whether that is the illness of a child or the changing climate, this hyperobject is denied completely. Because an apocalypse is vast and inexorable, it is unimaginable.

Apocalypse draws us in like a fatal attraction. In a normative scientific paradigm, theory is conceived of unilaterally. Therefore, the only upheaval takes the shape of Kuhn’s scientific revolutions. This stative approach does not have room for fluid, provisional, or dynamic assemblages. Instead, it presents a fixed present that can only be toppled by an inevitable apocalyptic future. Consider the U.S. narrative of history from 9/11 to toxic oil spills. When we perceive these phenomena as circumscribed “events” we ignore the slow violences that build up and derive from these occurrences. Instead of slow suffering, these narratives only acknowledge shock and awe.

Povinelli writes on this exact phenomenon. In *Geontologies*, she speaks of:

The new, the extraordinary [event], that which clearly breaks time and space, creating a Here and Now, There and Then—[these categories] deflect liberal ethics and politics away from forms of harm more grudging and corrosive. In other words, I have been interested in the quasievent, a form of occurring that never punctures the horizon of the here and now and there and then and yet forms the basis of forms of existence to stay in place or alter their place. The quasi-event is only ever hereish and nowish and thus asks us to focus our attention on forces of condensation, manifestation, and endurance rather than on the borders of objects (Povinelli 40-41).

Povinelli asks us to move away from sharp edges of time and space and look instead to the fringes, decays, and “condensations” between these edges. The “quasievent” is an alternative mode of history, perhaps one that Linda was attempting to capture with her more dynamic history of wolves. The quasi-event deflates the distended and apocalyptic pressure of a static realm of intelligibility. It allows our world to be seen as unstable and provisional. The Alpha wolf is but a brief title. Through the “quasievent,” climate change, slow death, and deforestation can be recognized as gradual depletions in both our continuous past, present, and future. Povinelli prompts us to make the “epidermal boundaries” of objects and events porous by looking at relationality instead of definitive histories (82). Apocalypse is only the underside of utopia. But when utopia ruptures, we can see those around the world that cope with climate change as a series of daily crises. Disaster is not a single event, but a creeping erosion and condensation.

Horror reaches a fever pitch in *History of Wolves*. It starts slow, with a lurking sense of unease, and ramps up to a bellowing register. But horror depends on a steady diet of denial. Those who deny illness, climate change, and changing landscapes ignores a multiform process of subtle alterations. This mosaic of change is hard to acknowledge within a static realm of intelligibility. Yet if we pick away at hyperobjects and reimagine them as localized quasi-events, we can sidestep narratives of apocalyptic disaster. Perhaps we can unearth our heads from the sand and begin to recognize the slow death that is occurring in the “hereish” and “nowish.”

Conclusion: Debunking Immunity

As Linda concludes her desolate narrative, she sows the seeds of an alternative mode of relationality, one in which the human and nonhuman are interconnected and interdependent. As discussed, Linda forms “improper affiliations” when she grants animacy to nonhuman entities and when she entertains human relationships that are beyond the pale of what is socially acceptable. These intimacies rely on Linda’s ability to sense the world around her, and this shift from comprehending to sensing is key to her resistance. She forms a social history about a life-form that would rather avoid humans. She forms connections with ice, rust, and wolves. In these ways, Linda resists totalizing realms of intelligibility and offers up an alternative.

Linda's resistance exemplifies Donna Haraway's notion of "Oddkin." In her work *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chtulucene*, Haraway builds on Povinelli's alternate narrative of history to center degrees of life, suffering, and change. She argues that we need to "stay with the trouble" instead of denying it or warping it into apocalypse. Achieving this feat, Haraway argues:

Requires making oddkin; that is, we require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles. We become-with each other or not at all. That kind of material semiotics is always situated, someplace and not noplac, entangled and worldly. Alone, in our separate kinds of expertise and experience, we know both too much and too little, and so we succumb to despair or to hope, and neither is a sensible attitude. Neither despair nor hope is tuned to the senses, to mindful matter, to material semiotics, to mortal earthlings in thick copresence. (Haraway 4)

Haraway urges for a "thick copresence" of species, animate materials, and humans. Together, they form oddkin, unlikely ties that draw us out from our siloed experience. Instead of approaching a hyperobject about which we know both "too much and too little," "staying with the trouble" involves quasievents and sustained attention to fluid relationships. Linda's queer animacies and "improper affiliations" directly demonstrate Haraway's "oddkin" and usher in an alternate mode of relating to the nonhuman world. So, what are the stakes of relating to the nonhuman? How does it inform our ethics?

If we revisit to the notion of intimacy explored in Part One, we remember that intimacy is more than just proximity. It is entanglement, "co-constitution," and "infiltration" (Weston 33). Most importantly, as we saw with Linda's "Zoos," intimacy is an ethical imperative to responsibility. If two entities are intimate, they are vulnerable to one another and therefore, interdependent and accountable to each other. Therefore, "oddkin" does not simply foster closeness between the human and the nonhuman, but care. Haraway writes, "making kin as oddkin rather than, or at least in addition to, godkin and genealogical and biogenetic family troubles important matters, like to whom one is actually responsible. Who lives and who dies, and how, in this kinship rather than that one?" (Haraway 2). When Life Science denies certain nonhuman entities animacy, it also denies attention and the possibility of connection to those entities. But when the woods or wolves become kin, they can be noticed and cared for.

To put it simply, "becoming-with, not becoming, is the name of the game; . . . Natures, cultures, subjects, and objects do not preexist their intertwined worldings" (Haraway 12-13). Realms of intelligibility pigeonhole our world into categories of life and nonlife, human and subhuman, animate and inert. But these divisions rest on premises that are not universal. They fashion a static and unmoving world that can only be altered by apocalyptic upheaval. Instead, *History of Wolves* asks us to look beyond totalizing forms of knowing and notice the gradations of change, the imperceptible suffering therein. The novel asks us to turn away from enticing narratives of success or demise and look instead to the ever-blooming, ever-wilting nonhuman world and see what it has to offer.

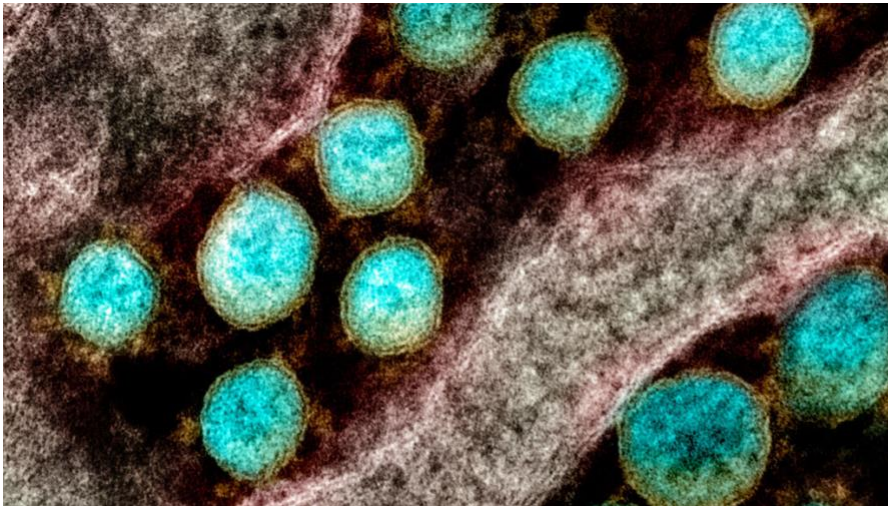


Figure 3: Covid-19 cells under the microscope (ScienceNews).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we are forced to reckon with the interconnectivity of our bodies. The very particles that we emit are lethal to those around us. The virus poses the question: where does my body end and yours begin? COVID-19 is not the first time we blurred the lines between human and nonhuman actors. Think of radioactivity in Japan (Weston), Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, or the Deepwater Horizon oil spill (Chen). All these tragedies painted nonhuman actors as animate and intending to harm. More importantly, these nonhuman agents infiltrated the seemingly immune and isolated human body. In this vein, Chen introduces Nancy Tuana's words on New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, "There is a viscous porosity of flesh—my flesh and the flesh of the world. This porosity is a hinge through which we are of and in the world" (Chen 210). The delusory distinction between the immune human body and the malignant nonhuman world must be reconsidered. Instead, Chen asks "How can we think more broadly about synthesis and symbiosis, including toxic vapors, interspersals, intrinsic mixings, and alterations, favoring interabsorption over corporeal exceptionalism?" (Chen 197). Instead of seeing our skin as corporeal armor, we need to recognize its vulnerability.

In *History of Wolves*, Paul's death is the central calamity. His death was not immediate and remarkable, but creeping and muted. It summons us to reimagine history as a process of constant change, not a cycle of highs and lows. This allows us to see beyond the apocalyptic and utopic to acknowledge the silences and unspoken suffering that are quotidian and banal. Now, as spring arrives and both pollen and virus particles waft through the air, we are charged to move beyond life and death to notice the slow accretions and decays of our world and, perhaps, be struck by wonder at what abounds.

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