

## Which Life Lives? Man, Hunting, and the Disconnection of Life

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“I believe people fear their own deaths, so they must belittle it.  
There are lessons to be learned in our behavior.”  
– Linda Hogan, *Dwellings: A Spiritual History of the Natural World*.

What is it about death that intimidates humans so much? What causes a fear of death so deeply embedded that man must take the lives of the ones deemed inferior to him--lives that cannot speak nor protect themselves from humanity's creation of weaponry and cruelty? Linda Hogan, a Chickasaw poet and novelist, mentions in the quote above that people belittle death in an attempt to suppress their own fear. By belittling the death of an animal, we magnify our own lives, but we do so in a way that takes the lives of those who cannot guard themselves. Both Linda Hogan and Barry Lopez, authors specializing in the relationship between the physical world and human culture, address the hunting of wolves within their writings. Why wolves? According to Linda Hogan, wolves contain the traits of humans that we try to suppress; we deny the existence of these traits within us because we associate them with evil. Barry Lopez writes that wolves have traits that humanity yearns to possess: the will to survive and protect their families and power.

Hunting used to be regarded as a means for survival, rather than as sport. In Barry Lopez's book *Of Wolves and Men* he states, “As man has matured, the traditional reason for hunting—to obtain food—has disappeared, along with the sacred relationship with the hunted” (166). Native American culture regards animals in the same stature and importance as humans. It is said that when Native Americans partook in hunting, they would first ask the animals' spirits for permission, thus thanking them for sacrificing their lives in order to sustain human survival. Wolves, as well as other animals, were viewed as sacred spirits. Specific Native American tribes

also believe that the human race stemmed from wolves. So why has humanity transformed this belief and deemed it necessary to eliminate them? Over the years, humans have morphed the importance of wolf life from sacred to threatening. We have categorized them as intimidating menaces to human life; they are no longer necessary to us, therefore making them useless to the rest of the world.

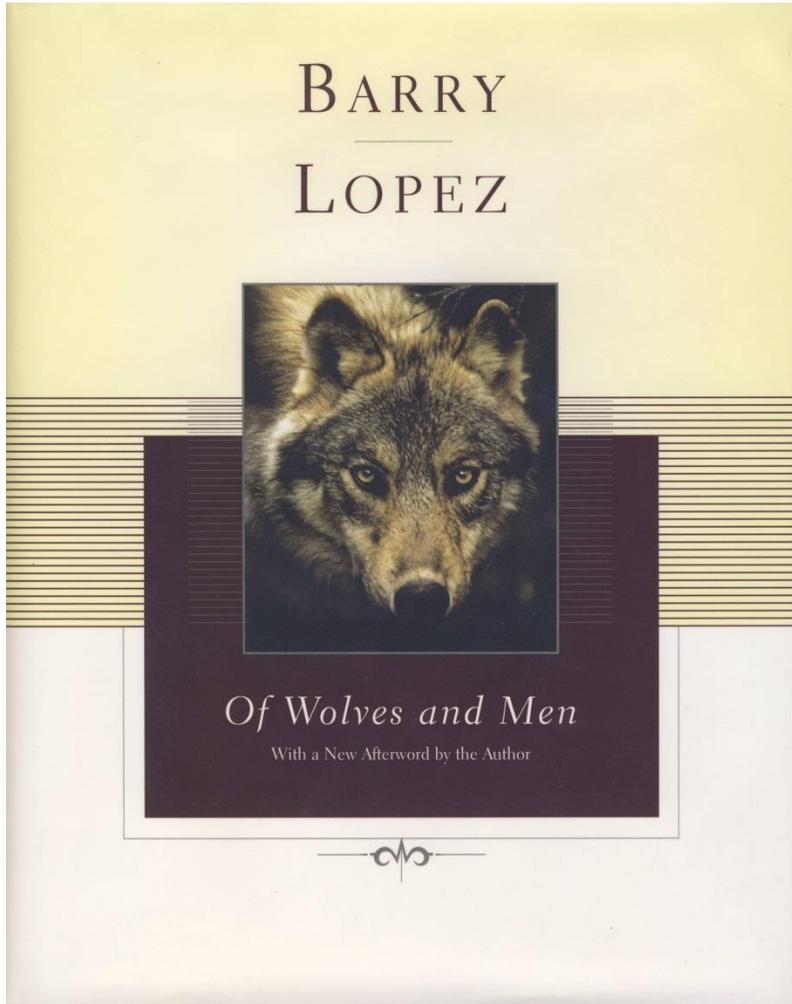
Man is blind to the part that wolves play in the world. In *Dwellings* Linda Hogan tells of the relationship between wolves and birds: “The birds are companions of the wolves. It is thought that they direct the wolves to their prey, then stand by until the carcass is relinquished to them for their own earned share in the feast” (65). The link between wolf and bird is one example of how wildlife is dependent on one another. When one species disappears then a domino effect can occur and other species may suffer as a result of its elimination. It is naïve to believe that because man has deemed wolves as unnecessary to us, they are unnecessary to others. The nonprofit organization, Living with Wolves, states that wolves play a vital role in the restoration of environments and ecosystems. Wolves target sick and old elk and deer, which provides the opportunity for only the healthiest animals to breed. Wolves also provide nourishment for animals by leaving behind carcasses for others to eat. Wolves have helped with the ecosystem by redistributing elk herds which allows vegetation to recover along rivers and streams, which over time is better for many species of fish, mammals, and plant life.

In the article “In Danger” F. Fox makes an interesting argument. He says, "Real hunters feed their families, they don't kill wolves" (23). This reflects back on Native American culture with regards to hunting. It is used only for survival, not for pleasure. Fox’s article, which was published in 2013, focuses on the state of Minnesota and states that there is no biological or scientific reason to kill the wolves. Fox writes that wolf numbers "have been stable for the past

ten years, estimated at around 3,000 without human intervention" (24). He also writes that they assist with the dispersing of other animal populations. So in theory, there is no environmental reason to hunt wolves. In this case, the argument that hunters pose that hunting is a way to control the animal population is false: "It is obvious that the wolf hunt is not designed to help the wolves, nor curb problematic wolf/human interactions; it is to satisfy sports killers and trophy hunters" (24). Man has tried to hide his true intention behind hunting, which is to satisfy his own selfish desires for power, and has classified hunting as a positive situation, when in reality it is extremely negative. For states that depend heavily on the revenue brought in from hunting, the excuse to classify hunting as something that is vital to the scientific study of the environment is merely a cover up for the truth. In Fox's article, he looks at the use of a scientific study to justify wolf hunting as a way to control the deer population. The study was conducted decades ago, but despite so much time passing, remained in place as the supporting reason behind wolf hunting. However, Fox writes, "The conclusion of this scientific approach was abundantly obvious: wolves, not hunters, play the dominant role in maintaining a viable, healthier, deer herd. Statistics verified that the predators claimed a far larger percentage of older, sick, malnourished animals. Disproportionately, the younger, healthier ones were killed by hunters." (25). This study finds that human interaction in the cycle of the natural world is the cause for problems, not wolves. It is our need for control that causes an imbalance in animal life. We wish for wolves to stay out of our way, surely they wish the same from us.

The relationship between Native Americans and the natural world is the type of relationship that ecologists have been trying to introduce to the modern world in an attempt to save it. Nathan Sherrer writes in his article "Probing the Relationship Between Native Americans and Ecology" that the purpose is to "not see humans as rulers of the earth, but as fellow citizens

with all life forms and to see the biosphere as a continually conserved natural order of nutrients



cycling through both living and non-living parts of the environment” (16). He proposes to re-introduce this perspective by the use of research and providing the public with information. This way humanity can once again begin to understand what role each animal, or living being, plays in the sustenance of the world and our own habitats. Sherrer also writes that in Native American culture “central to the idea that

hunting is a sacred occupation is the idea that animals, like human beings, are conscious, social, powerful, spiritual beings who must be approached in respectful ways. Disrespecting these animals results in an unsuccessful hunt as well as poor rapport with the sacred” (16). It has been a long while since humanity has respected animals to this sort of standard. We have removed the animal from being a living, breathing being and morphed it into a commodity available at our own discretion. In doing this we are unaware of or unbothered by possible consequences.

It is that same attitude that has put humanity in a dangerous position. We have forgotten that, in the eyes of predators, we are prey ourselves. In Brett L. Walker’s article “Animals and

the Intimacy of History” he reflects on some of Barry Lopez’s writings: “Barry Lopez writes that both wolves and humans are social hunters, often seeking the same prey in the same general locations. In such an environment, [Lopez] concludes, confrontations were probably inevitable” (46). Walker then further explains that it is both the similarities between man and wolf, and man’s desire to search the unfamiliar, that puts us in positions of danger and ultimately leads to the animal attacking the human. As humans, we overlook that in the eyes of animals, specifically predators, we are nothing more than another meal. To some animals we are dangerous, but to wolves, although we are threatening, we are also seen as the next opportunity for nourishment. Of course it is this same concept that outrages many. Wolves are supposed to eat only other animals such as moose or caribou, not humans. We tend to forget that we are also mammals made up with a similar genetic structure, and just like we can find it within ourselves to kill an animal to survive, wolves will hunt humans to sustain themselves.

So what is the conflict between man and wolf? What was it that shifted our perspectives of wolves from sacred to pests? What is it about their existence that threatens and inclines us to such violence? Lopez states that a defense given by hunters was that it was once considered “good sport to hunt wolves” (153). But by doing so man belittles the lives of wolves as nothing more than entertainment--their beating hearts mere rewards in the game of death we call hunting. Animals that were once considered sacred by some are now being hunted in the name of sport. *Of Wolves and Men* discusses how some of the methods used for hunting portrayed it as something far worse than just sport. Lopez tells of the events when hunters like Theodore Roosevelt would take large groups of dogs trained to kill wolves along with him on hunting trips, sometimes killing over 200 wolves in a hunt. “Of course there was no pretense of giving them fair play. The wolves were killed for vermin, not sport” (154). Extreme actions were taken in

order to kill wolves, actions that regarded the animals as verminous and threatening to the well-being of society. It surpassed the concept of hunting for sport, because there was no option of the wolf surviving. To hunt with dogs held one rule: kill or trap any wolf in sight. No mercy.

Perhaps hunting for sport was created in order to hide the real motive behind hunting which was to kill what was once acknowledged as equal to humans, but were now seen as threats because of that same reason. We humans are intimidated by the wolf, intimidated by its power and determination to survive: "Freedom and life mean something to them, something important, as it does to us" (Hogan 69). In this way we are one and the same; our unwavering resolution to protect the human race is much the same as wolves' perseverance to survive. Is this why we justify such cruelty as sport?

Barry Lopez writes in *Of Wolves and Men* about a particular hunting style that illustrated the total disregard that humans have towards animal life, the technique that used other animals such as butchered calves or pigs tied behind a sled to lure wolves in to be shot (155). Lopez explains that often the wolves would be too fast, or the horses pulling the sled would tire out and the hunters would have to spend hours hiding underneath their sled until the wolves finally left them alone. "Commonly the hunters lose their driver and horses to the wolves and spend a harrowing night under the upturned sled, holding the wolves off in the manner of a wagon train surrounded by Indians until morning" (155). Mother Earth has a tendency of showing her wrath. Torturing and killing animals such as pigs and calves in order to lure in their hunters is cruel, inhumane, and insensitive. But in such a case, nature fought back; the wolves surrounding their killers is ironic. The hunted now hunts the hunter.

In a newspaper article "Crying Wolf" Brian McCombie discusses a hunting crisis that surfaced in 2011 around Idaho and Montana. The two states were facing large blows to their

economy because of wolves being placed on the endangered species list. Because they were placed on this list, both states lost hundreds of thousands of dollars in unsold hunts and hunting licenses. The article states, "The blockage to public wolf hunting is a shame. IDFG (Idaho Department of Fish and Game) sold more than 30,000 wolf hunting licenses for its very first hunt, generating nearly a half million dollars in revenue . . . In all, 188 wolves were taken" (10). The article briefly mentions that the wolf is placed on the endangered species list, but does little to provide information as to why. The main focus centers on the loss of business that the two states endured. Man once again belittles the life of an animal and morphs it into a commodity available at our disposal. The newspaper article is concerned about the loss of money, rather than the loss of animal life. The two states depended heavily on wolf hunting and viewed the prevention as a blow to the economy instead of considering just what caused the animal to be placed on such a list. McCombie writes, "More wolf hunts? Not impossible. Montana is petitioning the feds for greater wolf management authority, while western legislators have promised to find a way to give wolf control to the states" (11). If wolf authority were to be given to the states, then states like Idaho and Montana, who depend heavily on wolf hunting, will continue to belittle and disregard the survival of this species. This article is another example of the blatant disregard that humans have towards animal life. We have commodified the life of the wolf and given it a monetary value.

In *Dwellings* Linda Hogan poses her understanding of the conflict between men and wolf: "It is based on beliefs that wolves and humans, both predators, are in competition with one another for food and territory" (67). This statement supports my claim that humans hunt for power. Not for food or sport. Our desire for dominance is far more important than the lives of anything that attempts to interfere. In Minnesota, Hogan explains, the local sentiment is "there is

no wolf like a dead wolf” and does not seem likely to change, despite evidence of declining wolf populations. “The leading cause of death for wolves is contact with the human world. Our presence means tragedy to them” (67) Wolves are threats to our survival, as we are to theirs, which could perhaps be why humanity deems it acceptable to hunt them in such extremities. We set aside the idea that we could one day eliminate this animal’s existence completely, and doing so would completely disrupt the wildlife ecosystem, but this we do not care about. What may harm others, even if it is the cause of our own actions, is of no importance to us as long as humanity remains dominant and unscathed.

Hogan also writes of a time not long ago in South Dakota when trappers used strychnine in the carcasses of animals in the hopes of killing wolves. As a result they killed not only wolves and other animals, but also a group of starving Nakota Indians. “The land there, once Indian land, grazed by cattle ranchers, was no longer productive for wildlife or food. The people, hungry, were forced to eat meat that had been set out for wolves, and they met with the same miserable fate” (68). The Indians in that land had been promised rations from the government that never arrived which caused them to scavenge the land and eat the meat that was intended for the wolves. Native Americans, too, suffered a long history of inferiority, similar to that of wolves, simply because of the imperialistic tendencies of the United States. The lives of these Native Americans, like wolves, were not important to those in positions of power, but were instead treated in tandem with one another and as a result both species, man and animal, suffered great losses. In an attempt to sustain human existence and maintain superiority, we eliminated one of our own. Was it worth the sacrifice?

In *Of Wolves and Men*, I undoubtedly believe that Lopez is proposing the argument that humanity no longer hunts for food as we used to. Instead, man has tried to conceal his actions for

hunting as a sport, but his techniques and extravagance give him away. The concept of doing something for sport means that all players have an equal chance at winning, but wolves in the sport of hunting have no chance of being victorious. If they survive an attack it is by luck, not because they were given the fair chance. Man has also declared wolves as menaces to humanity and our resources such as livestock and crops which challenges our survival. But we do not see what killing wolves does to the survival of other species. Humans have tunnel vision, only seeing life for the ones deemed worthy, but who are we to decide who does and does not live? Humans do not view the consequences of our actions as damaging because the consequences do not affect us directly. Instead they affect those who did not meet the standards of our expectations and keeps those in positions of authority right where they are.

To answer the earlier question of what is the conflict between man and wolf, Barry Lopez writes, “Here is an animal capable of killing a man, an animal of legendary endurance and spirit, an animal that embodies marvelous integration with its environment. This is exactly what the frustrated modern hunter would like: the noble qualities imagined; a sense of fitting into the world. The hunter wants to be the wolf” (166). The wolf is everything that man sets out to be, but can never fully reach. The desire to remain superior is consuming. The wolf symbolizes what man wants so badly. So we kill, with the purpose to become. We belittle what is threatening. Lopez writes that by killing wolves, we belittle our own desires and kill what we can never truly become.

Native American culture plays a large part in Linda Hogan’s spirituality towards nature and its inhabitants. Her book *Dwellings* reveals a deep relationship between humanity and the living world. Because of her Native American background, she respects animal life as equal to that of humans. In “Deify the Wolf” she discusses this disconnection between humanity and

animals: “They contain for us many of our own traits, ones we repress within ourselves. More than any other animal, they mirror back to us the predators we pretend not to be. In that way, we have assigned them to a special association with evil” (71). Like Lopez, Hogan writes that because the wolf and human are so similar, the characteristics of wolves intimidates us humans, producing the basis that makes it justifiable to kill them. We call them evil killers, but kill them for the reflection of ourselves that we see within them. Lopez claims that the wolf is what we want to be, but Hogan says we already are.

Both *Of Wolves and Men* and *Dwellings* present vivid examples of the disconnection between human life and animals. Lopez interprets the hunting of wolves as an action that seeks power over animals that contain all the characteristics we wish we held, while Hogan interprets wolf hunting as a reflection of the characteristics we already possess, but despise. Hogan and Lopez argue that by categorizing wolves as inferior to our own existence we demean their worthiness of life. But who are we to determine which life is worth living? By killing them we ensure our own survival and purposely remain blind to the consequences. What may affect others, does not pertain to us, unless we become impacted as well. Humanity is a selfish species, a species focused on survival and sustainability, a species that could care less about the consequences of our actions, as long as we are alive and remain in power.

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