

From Microbes to Metaphors: Exploring the Hopeful Writing of Women of Science

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"In nature nothing exists alone," Rachel Carson writes in *Silent Spring*—a feeling that guides my research. As a doctoral student of the environmental humanities, I explore the works of female scientist-writers who have followed in Carson's footsteps, weaving together narratives, metaphors, and scientific facts to reveal the intricate, often overlooked interconnectedness in nature. Their hybrid writing style personalizes the subjects of study, from microbes to plants and animals, encouraging us to view other living beings as partners. This hopeful perspective was reinforced by my own transformative encounter with the natural world, which began fourteen years ago with a tick bite.

This event reframed my understanding of the complexities of ecological relationships. As I navigated the challenges of chronic Lyme disease and the often helpless feeling of being lost in a medical maze, I searched for treatments beyond conventional medicine. I turned to plants for relief, and these botanical allies not only supported my recovery but also deepened my sense of belonging to the living Earth. My healing journey sparked a true curiosity about ecological relationships, and as I began to articulate this process, I realized the power of storytelling to communicate scientific ideas and ignite conversations about our interconnectedness with nature. Just as Carson foresaw the threat of a silenced spring and was determined to share her message, I believe personal stories like my "tick-borne transformation" are key to an open dialogue about our kinship with the ecosystems we inhabit.

The potential of narrative-driven science communication also translates to my work as an environmental mentor to high school students in Montreal. By engaging students with the worldview of visionary thinkers such as Lynn Margulis (1998), who challenged traditional views of evolution and competition, I have witnessed a newfound appreciation for the remarkable climate we inherit from the creativity of ancient bacteria. Margulis's endosymbiotic theory, which proposes that collaboration between species drives evolution, offers a compelling example of how a scientific idea, when embedded in a larger story, can shift our perspective and foster climate action.

In this presentation, I will examine the communicational potential of works by contemporary female scientist-writers, such as Jane Goodall, Sylvia Earle or Robin Wall Kimmerer. Building upon Carson's (1965) insight that emotions are the fertile ground in which scientific understanding takes root, I will argue that these scientist-writers' engaging narratives evoke a sense of belonging to the living world that is vital for cultivating the hope and resilience needed to address the climate crisis. By inviting us to acknowledge our interconnections with non-human lives, from the microbial to the arboreal, they show us that, as essayist Rebecca Solnit (2016) writes in *Hope in the Dark*, "what we dream of is already present in the world." Through an exploration of the evocative potential of their work, I aim to show how the synergy of science, metaphor and storytelling can contribute to a more inclusive approach to climate communication.

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