

To weather the storm

Han Solo sabered open a tauntaun so he and Luke Skywalker could survive the snowy plains of Hoth within its belly in *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980). Likewise, Hugh Glass gutted his dead horse to climb inside in *The Revenant* (2015) and endure a frosty night in the Dakotas. Although this masculine survivalist grit is impressive storytelling, realistically a carcass would only stay warm for a few hours, and they might have better regulated their heat by keeping these animals alive. When a cold-blooded snake curls up in a bird's nest or a termite mound to raise its body temperature, or your bedfellow crawls into bed with ice cold feet, warmth is shared. This type of thermoregulation is called kleptothermy, literally meaning "heat stealing". In its most sinister manifestation it is vampiric, but its most romantic expression is the cold comfort of "huddling".

On a bleak winter's night hedgehogs cannot huddle together too closely for warmth, lest their quills pierce the other's flesh and force them to move apart again. To tolerate the sharp protective spikes of the other and avoid being frozen to death, they must find the optimal distance at which they may generate reciprocal heat without doing substantial mutual harm. This is Schopenhauer's "Hedgehog's dilemma" whereby the emptiness of solitary life drives us together, but our insufferable qualities drive us apart again. Even at the equilibrium point, these opposing forces produce mixed emotions.

Hesiod's Echidna (where the Australian native mammal gets its name) was half beautiful maiden, half fearsome snake and mother to many of Greek mythology's most powerful monsters. She was at once an isolated cave-dweller and irresistible she-viper, covertly desired but untouchable as death itself. The Greek femme fatale might be more readily labelled vampire than huddler, but love has always had its calculations and reasons practised to avoid certain injuries or to obtain certain satisfactions. Even she had the likewise serpentine giant Typhon to curl up with, just as their descendents – rattlesnakes and garter snakes – are known to do.

It is Schopenhauer's argument that politeness and good manners (or Kant's "moral society") allow us to find the mean distance at which we can endure being together. Anyone who cannot adhere to this social contract will be ostracised – unable to satisfy mutual warmth but spared living in fear of impalement. To find warmth in love's exile, we might find an alternative solution such as a companion species. A VR film by Oculus Story Studio, *Henry* (2015), tells the story of the eponymous hedgehog who loves hugs but has no friends because of his spiked armour. The solution to his quandary arrives when he meets a turtle whose outer shell protects him from Henry's thorns and allows them to embrace. Likewise, my beloved dog is not repelled by the proverbial echinate mass on my back. It seems apt that Donna Haraway followed up *The Cyborg Manifesto* with *The Companion Species Manifesto* to trouble naturecultures and imagine multi-species futures through (canine) "significant otherness".

An alternative epic survival narrative could emerge from this line of thinking. One where a lonesome cowboy from the future makes it through the wintry night in a huge sentient data centre of servers. Computers are not warm-blooded endotherms nor traditional cold-blooded ectotherms. They run hot but rely on resource-sucking cooling systems. It follows that there is no telling how welcoming this torrid future intelligence bank would be for a hot-blooded buckaroo with no reciprocal cooling system to offer.

Whatever interspecies survival solution is found to weather the void of solitude, even the most solitary enjoyment presupposes the structure of the Other (or so Lacan might quip). We desire the prick of the quills as much as the warmth of the flesh or circuitry beneath them, endlessly repeating this state of tension and avoiding final relief. Satisfaction is not the goal of the drive, but its means. It may be a dilemma, but this is simply to say that the hedgehogs are *really living*.