

2006

Silence, Absence, And Mystery In Linda Hogan's Mean Spirit, Solar Storms, And Power

Kathryn Erickson

University of Central Florida, ksnow17777@gmail.com



Part of the [American Literature Commons](#)

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/etd>

University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Masters Thesis (Open Access) is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of STARS. For more information, please contact STARS@ucf.edu.

STARS Citation

Erickson, Kathryn, "Silence, Absence, And Mystery In Linda Hogan's Mean Spirit, Solar Storms, And Power" (2006). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 893.

<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/etd/893>



University of
Central
Florida

Showcase of Text, Archives, Research & Scholarship

STARS

SILENCE, ABSENCE, AND MYSTERY IN LINDA HOGAN'S *MEAN SPIRIT*, *SOLAR STORMS*, AND *POWER*

by

KATHRYN E. ERICKSON
B.A. Rollins College, 2003

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of English
in the College of Arts and Humanities
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Spring Term
2006

© 2006 Kathryn E. Erickson

ABSTRACT

In *Mean Spirit*, *Solar Storms*, and *Power*, Linda Hogan uses the devices of silence, absence, and mystery to articulate the oppression and marginalization of Native Americans. Specifically, because of the environmental crises that produce conflict in each novel, the project benefits from ecocriticism, ecofeminism, and ecopsychology. Also, because of various interpretations that open up when silence is examined, theories of deconstruction strengthen the thesis. Ultimately, Hogan's characters move from silence as a form of tyranny to silence as a form of reconnection with tribal ways. As the characters discover pathways to native traditions, they also discover spiritual connections with the biosphere. The movement from silence as a form of tyranny to silence as healing to silence as a means of reconnection with tribal traditions and kinship with the environment ensures the natives' healing and survival.

The Introduction discusses the overview of the project, illustrates my thesis regarding Hogan's use of silence, absence, and mystery, and outlines my critical methodology. In the methodology chapter, I detail specific references to ecocritical, ecofeminist, ecopsychological, and deconstructive texts that I use to analyze Hogan's novels. Beginning with Chapter Two, I discuss *Mean Spirit*, which is based on a true story involving the murders of Osage people during the 1920s in Oklahoma. In Chapter Three, I examine *Solar Storms* and track Hogan's use of silence, absence, and mystery in the story of a teenage girl who returns to her birthplace and reconnects with her tribe and the wild lands surrounding her home. Chapter Four features my close reading of *Power*, a coming-of-age story blended with ecological and ethical conflicts taking place in rural Florida. Finally, Chapter Five concludes the thesis and reasserts my argument that Hogan's use of silence, absence, and mystery illuminates the conflicts in her characters' lives and ultimately serves to clear a space for healing and survival.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I want to thank my husband Todd for his patience and understanding throughout this project. Also, I wish to acknowledge Jen Snow, Carol Michaelson, Kate Kimbro, and Linda Hargreaves for their support and encouragement. Finally, I am grateful to my thesis advisor Dr. Murphy for his guidance and patience throughout the entire process and Dr. Rodríguez Milanés and Dr. Meehan for their encouragement and wisdom.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY	10
CHAPTER THREE: THE SILENCE OF MEAN SPIRIT	17
CHAPTER FOUR: A JOURNEY INTO <i>SOLAR STORMS</i>	33
CHAPTER FIVE: LINDA HOGAN'S <i>POWER</i> AND THE MAKAH WHALE HUNT CRISIS	49
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION	64
LIST OF REFERENCES	70

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Linda Hogan, a poet, novelist, and environmental activist, is also a border-crosser. As Greta Gaard contends, “ecofeminist scholars will need to confront the problem of cross-cultural ecofeminist ethics and develop a process for determining the applications and limitations of ecofeminist analyses across the boundaries of culture” (“Strategies for a Cross-Cultural Ecofeminist Ethics” 93). Hogan's texts cross borders, not only between cultures, but between non-humans and humans. Boundaries are no obstacle for Hogan. In her novels *Mean Spirit*, *Solar Storms*, and *Power*, Hogan creates worlds of open dialogue between the non-fictional and fictional, Native Americans and those of the dominant white culture, and non-humans and humans. Because I use a variety of ecocritical approaches in analyzing her novels, I seek to add depth and dimension to the available scholarship on Hogan's writings. Specifically, I address silence, absence, and mystery in Hogan's novels, and I open up discourse regarding the multiple ways in which she reveals hidden worlds.

Within her stories, Hogan expresses the pain caused by the oppression of Native Americans as well as of non-human species. By poetically rendering silence, absence, and mystery in her prose, Hogan illuminates whole spheres of being that cannot be revealed by words alone. Between the lines and in the margins of her work lie the unarticulated expressions of characters who have been silenced by the dominant culture. In addition, these characters silence themselves, as in the case of the Osage tribe in *Mean Spirit*. Knowing that white people are killing members of their tribe, the Osage keep quiet in order to survive, which adds to the realization of how far into the human psyche self-censorship can reach.

From my readings of *Mean Spirit*, *Solar Storms*, and *Power*, I observe that Hogan uses silence, absence, and mystery in multiple ways. These ways, when viewed through ecocritical, ecofeminist, and ecopsychological lenses, create varying reflections of interpretation. Different reflections of interpretation result from different objects of study within ecocritical theories. For example, while ecocritical studies focus on the relationship of humans and their environment, ecofeminist studies focus on women, their experiences of oppression, and their interactions with the environment. In ecopsychological theories, different interpretations arise due to the focus on the thoughts and behaviors of individuals from an environmental perspective.

Profound changes in the environment and their effects on Hogan's characters drive the action in her novels. Hogan uses silence in order to articulate the movement of oppression, resistance, and healing in her texts. Because of my focus on silence and its effects, I use Jacques Derrida's theory of deconstruction to further articulate the connection between the words themselves and what they may signify. For example, the word "silence," in its most basic meaning, denotes a lack of sound. Yet, the lack of sound does not begin to scratch the surface of the power silence can wield. In Hogan's novels, silence as repression by white power changes into silence as self-censorship, silence as survival through evasion, and silence as therapeutic healing and growth. Hogan's use of silence creates a web of referents, forming connections within and outside of each novel. In turn, the connections create multiple referents, adding to the complexity of Hogan's work.

In addition to opening possibilities of meaning when confronting silence, I also use Derrida's inversion of hierarchies to assist in my reading of Hogan's novels. The importance of the power of silence in Native American culture as well as in the survival of non-humans bears examination. In a world order that seems bent on oppressing and demonizing the Other, the use

of silence in Hogan's work as a means of communication can provide insight into many areas of thought. For example, from the outside looking in, the silence of the Osage in *Mean Spirit* may seem like the defeated response of a vanquished people. Yet, no one can view Belle Graycloud or Michael Horse as defeated. In Hogan's novel, silence plays a powerful role in the survival of Native Americans. The untold story, the story of oppressed peoples, finds a voice in *Mean Spirit*, *Solar Storms*, and *Power*; additionally, the story finds a voice through Hogan's poetically skillful use of silence.

Because of the ecocritical and ecofeminist approaches in my thesis, Chapter Two is devoted to methodology. I discuss relevant passages from the works of Patrick D. Murphy. Specifically, Murphy's contention that "multivocality, a pluralistic model for analyzing or attacking the problem of environmental crisis in the world" ("Ecofeminism in Literary Studies" 39) fits nicely with my observation that Hogan includes voices that have been silenced historically. Additionally, Lawrence Buell, who claims "aestheticism produces environmental bonding" ("Representing the Environment" 180), further illuminates my project. Hogan's luminous prose presents the concerns of the environment as indelibly bonded with human concerns.

In addition to ecocritical theory, I discuss ecofeminist approaches to Hogan's text. Greta Gaard's assertion that Hogan is truly a border-crosser in ecofeminist terms becomes evident when we follow Hogan's involvement during the Makah whale hunt crisis in 1996. The tribe's petition to resume the traditional whale hunt started a firestorm of protest from animal rights groups, environmental groups, and antiracist whites. The disturbing silence from feminist groups during the controversy created a space that needed to be filled. Into the silence walked Linda

Hogan, “translating the ethical voices and beliefs of each so that they can be heard by the other” (Gaard, “Tools” 16).

In my paper, I feature prominent ecofeminists such as Joni Adamson, whose theories prove helpful in the discussion of Hogan’s non-dogmatic method of presenting the sometimes problematic intersection of nature and culture. Hogan focuses on a holistic knowledge of cultural and environmental conflicts rather than a judgmental mindset. As Adamson states in *American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice, and Ecocriticism: The Middle Place*, there is a “middle place that encompasses both nature and culture” (88). The middle place, therefore, stresses knowledge and understanding rather than a right/wrong dichotomy. In Hogan’s writing, because she refuses “to grant the reader a simple dichotomy of innocent and good versus evil and corrupt,” she opens up a space for diversity “of forms of resistance” (Murphy 184).

Additionally, I include observations from the writings of Andy Fisher, who is the author of *Radical Ecopsychology: Psychology in the Service of Life*. He provides insights regarding the connection between ecological crises and the human psyche. Also, excerpts from Eugene Victor Walter’s work serve to articulate my observation regarding the effects of the environment on Hogan’s characters. In *Placeways: A Theory of the Human Environment*, Walter asserts that “[a]ncient people responded to the feeling and meaning of rocks, trees, and contours of the ground. They used natural features of the landscape to cultivate the experience of an independent spiritual energy acting on human feelings” (70). Expressing the power of the landscape on spiritual energy, Hogan’s characters in *Mean Spirit*, *Solar Storms*, and *Power* return to traditional tribal ways in order to reconnect with their spiritual lives.

Finally, because of my close reading of silence, absence, and mystery, I feature excerpts from Derrida’s *Of Grammatology* to further discern Hogan’s use of silence and its effects,

especially in the depictions of Native American mythologies. Because Derrida questions the superiority of one term over another in philosophical oppositions, I follow his theory of deconstruction in order to question sound/silence, presence/absence, and truth/non-truth hierarchies. Because of the space opened up by deconstruction, I reveal different dimensions in Hogan's characters in relation to native mythologies.

Beginning with Chapter Three, the focus shifts to the text of *Mean Spirit*. Using an ecocritical methodology, I examine the use of silence as a weapon against the Oklahoma Osage Indians, who have been victimized by the deadly business practices of local land owners and city officials. The federal government has also victimized the Osage, and the resulting oppressive silence takes on huge implications. Silence as a form of oppression manifests itself in fear; the Osage fear for their lives, so they initially remain silent and withhold their knowledge of the murders in order to survive.

Not only the Native Americans, but the land itself bears the scars of oil barons who put profits ahead of lives. In order to heal and bring a sense of justice and identity to the Osage, the characters in *Mean Spirit* return to the ways of their ancestors. The ancestors' ways center on a strong connection with the biosphere. In addition, many of the connections to the Osage traditions involve silence as a healing force. For example, in *Mean Spirit*, the Hill People act as silent, powerful sentries, protecting Osage landowners and bringing them back into the fold. The Hill People act as catalysts for the Osage characters' reconnection with ancient traditions. Reconnection with ancient traditions in Hogan's novels necessarily involves reconnection with the environment. As Murphy contends, "[f]rom the lessons of the Hill people, from the knowledge of the keepers of the fire, from the shamans, and from their own family histories, the

survivors regain their sense of right relationship to the land, which is the basis for their identity as a people” (*Farther Afield* 183).

Belle Graycloud, the matriarch of the family, Grace Blanket, Michael Horse, and their extended families bear the brunt of despicable and corrupt business practices perpetrated by a murderous group of local officials. Because *Mean Spirit* so closely follows the true story of the Osage murders-for-oil in 1920s Oklahoma, I feature the work of journalist Dennis McAuliffe Jr. In addition, passages from *The Dawes Act and the Allotment of Indian Lands*, and *Reconfiguring the Reservation* shed historical light on this shameful part of our nation’s past. In *Mean Spirit*, a novel of fiction, the pages resonate with historical relevance:

The guards knew the situation could explode at any time, but the Indians knew, from history itself, that it was a smart thing to keep silent on the affairs and regulations of Washington, to be still and as invisible as possible. They might be cheated, but they still had life, and until only recently, even that was not guaranteed under the American laws, so they remained trapped, silent, and wary. (63)

From the silence of characters who are able to speak, but cannot or will not, to the absence of evidence regarding additional crimes against the Osage to the mystery of who commits the murders, *Mean Spirit* traces the effects of oppression and marginalization in the characters’ lives. Additionally, because the native survivors eventually oppose local authorities, resistance plays a crucial role in the novel. To strengthen my thesis, I discuss relevant points by Adamson concerning Native American resistance. The effects of silence, both oppressive and liberating, inform the dynamics of Hogan's imagery and illuminate the arc of Native American resistance in *Mean Spirit*.

In Chapter Four, I examine *Solar Storms*. Partially based on the true story involving the massive James Bay Hydroelectric Project, *Solar Storms* features a teenage girl named Angel as narrator. As the construction of the James Bay project got underway in the 1970s, the building of dams affected huge tracts of fragile ecosystems. Additionally, the project negatively affected Native American tribes in the area (Tanner 138). Hogan again connects silence, absence, and mystery with native and environmental concerns. When Angel returns to her birthplace in the fictional community of Adam's Rib, she focuses on the absence of sacred ties to the land and animals, an absence resulting in destruction and desecration of the environment and the spirit of the people who have close ties to the natural world.

Longing to find her place in the world, Angel begins her trek to the land of her ancestors in defensive silence, and when she arrives, she observes her relatives' ways and listens to their stories. Consequently, her silence disperses and blends with the silence of her family, who initially protect Angel from learning about the cause of her scarred face. For Angel and her family, life in the harsh boundary lands between Canada and the United States crystallizes into a tale of mystery, beauty, redemption, and healing. Ultimately, as with the characters in *Mean Spirit* and *Power*, Angel turns toward ancient tribal traditions and away from the modern world. She reflects on the power of silence and ancient ways as she listens to stories told by the elders:

From what little I understood of the language, they talked about the time when everything was still alive. That's what they remembered and missed. It was what all the old people longed for again, the time when people could merge with a cloud and help it rain, could become trees, one with bark, root, and leaf. People were more silent in those days. They listened. They heard. (203)

The above passage illustrates the way in which Hogan features silence as listening. The silence of listening, rather than representing a passive activity, denotes a type of strength that centers on kinship between humans and non-humans. Ultimately, this kinship promotes strength and healing during Angel's reconnection with tribal traditions. Again, the reconnection with tribal traditions involves a reconnection with the biosphere, and silence plays a powerful role in intertribal and interbiospherical relationships.

Moving from the icy landscape of *Solar Storms*, I focus on *Power*, which is set in rural Florida. Chapter Five of my paper centers on the tale of Omishto, a young Native American girl living in Florida. Hogan's novel suggests that a silent power resides in those who have nearly been marginalized out of existence. A young member of a fictional Native American tribe in Florida, Omishto must not only face the problems she encounters as an adolescent but must also face a life-changing conflict of ethics when her mentor, Ama, kills a Florida panther. As a member of the Panther clan of the Taiga tribe, Omishto must cross borders between the tribe and the dominant white culture. As she crosses borders, Omishto lives in a world of thought, using silence as a means of survival and a form of power.

The aura of mystery surrounding the text is directly related to the power of silence in its many manifestations. More than any other Hogan novel, *Power* speaks volumes about what is absent and what is not said, and it allows for the exploration of spaces between worlds. Real power resides in life that has been torn away, pushed back, encroached upon, and marginalized. Hogan's text negotiates a space for dialogue between animal and native worlds and a culture that appears bent on oppressing, demonizing, and marginalizing the Other.

Because Omishto watches Ama defy tradition and go against both her own tribe and the larger culture when she kills the panther, the young girl must occupy the space between two

worlds: the traditional Taiga world and the dominant white culture. In order to shed light on the ethical dilemma Omishto and the tribe face, I draw parallels between Hogan's novel and her real-life involvement in the Makah whale hunt controversy. Critical analyses by Greta Gaard and Brenda Peterson provide insight into the Makah crisis and enrich my examination of Hogan's text. Gaard and Peterson closely follow Hogan's activism during the Makah controversy. They reveal her holistic approach to the ethical problems confronting the tribe and the environmental activists who oppose the hunt. Her remarkable ability to listen to all sides of the conflict without passing judgment on anyone parallels Omishto's contention that "both sides are wrong, but both sides, also, are right" (138).

In Chapter Six, I conclude by reasserting my claim that Hogan uses silence, absence, and mystery to articulate the effects of oppression on Native Americans and non-humans. From the fields of Oklahoma to the icy borders of Canada and the United States to the swamplands of Florida, Hogan uses her rhythmic, poetic prose to illuminate a world that is threatened with destruction. In the places she writes about, the characters' stories work to reveal the ways in which silence conceals and heals at the same time. As Lawrence Buell contends, "Every place signifies; every place, every creature has a story connected with it that forms a web of significance (always in process, not a constant) within which human thought assumes form and meaning" (287). In each of Hogan's novels, the story becomes a conduit through which characters and readers cross boundaries to awareness and understanding of many of the most important issues of our time.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

Because of the various ways in which Hogan uses silence to open up worlds of interpretation in her writing, I apply a four-fold critical method to *Mean Spirit*, *Solar Storms*, and *Power*. These critical approaches will help to shed light on my assertion that Hogan uses silence, absence, and mystery to cross borders between cultures and worlds of meaning. Specifically, because of the environmental crises that produce conflicts in each novel, my project benefits from ecocriticism, ecofeminism, and ecopsychology. Furthermore, the effects of silence, absence, and mystery on the characters, who suffer from the environmental crises upon which the novels are structured, warrant examination through various ecocritical lenses. Additionally, because of the interpretations that open up when silence is examined, the use of deconstruction strengthens my argument.

First of all, I perform ecocritical readings of the novels in order to situate my argument within the issues of cultural and environmental concerns. Hogan's use of landscape and animal imagery, juxtaposed with silence, poetically informs the novels and brings them to the forefront of crucial ecological discourses. Additionally, her interweaving of silence, absence, and mystery within the web of her characters' thoughts and actions illuminates the far-reaching effects of oppression on human and non-humans. The ecocritical approach of my thesis is worthwhile because, as Patrick D. Murphy contends, "cultural identity and environmental identity are one and the same" (*Farther Afield* 183). Paramount, therefore, to an understanding of the effects of cultural and environmental oppression, an ecocritical reading articulates the importance of relationships between humans, non-humans, and their surroundings. Ecocriticism calls for a "dialogical orientation toward the human-nonhuman interanimation of both the human psyche and inhabited space" (Murphy 183).

In applying the ecofeminist approaches of critics such as Greta Gaard and Joni Adamson, it is my aim to examine the relationships between Hogan's female characters and the non-human and human members of the communities in which they live. For Gaard, ethical questions surrounding feminist tenets and Native American cultural concerns are especially compelling. Linking these ethical questions to Hogan's characters as they move through their quests to cross borders between indigenous communities and the larger culture, as well as fostering an understanding of the concerns of each of these often opposing groups, Gaard's balanced evaluation of ethical ecocritical approaches serves to further my discussion.

Throughout Hogan's non-didactic method of presenting possible solutions to conflicts within native, non-native, and non-human worlds, there is a movement toward "a middle place" (Adamson 88). This middle place focuses on knowledge and understanding rather than on a judgmental mindset. Adamson offers insight into the middle place of ecofeminism, especially in Native American literature. In my study of Native American concerns within Hogan's texts, the role and importance of silence, absence, and mystery opens a space for discussions of oppression, discovery, and ultimately, healing. In *Mean Spirit*, for example, the silence imposed on characters who have either witnessed murders or have knowledge of them goes through a metamorphosis. From a destructive force to one that fosters wisdom, the silence Hogan writes about in *Mean Spirit* richly engenders a continuing life for the Osage who pull up stakes and leave the land where so much pain has changed their lives forever. As Adamson notes, "Once indigenous people were removed, governmental and corporate agencies could represent the region as a blank spot on a map, a sacrifice zone, a target" (*American Indian Literature* 16).

In *Mean Spirit*, the sacrifice includes the murders of natives, and the silence imposed on native characters who have either witnessed murders or have knowledge of them changes from

the silence of oppression and self-censorship to the silence born of healing and a return to native traditions. Tracking the metamorphosis includes an ecocritical approach based on historical information taken from texts by Dennis McAuliffe Jr., Emily Greenwald, and D.S. Otis.

For *Mean Spirit*'s matriarchal Belle Graycloud and her family, the experiences they suffer through and survive attest to the strength of a people who listen to the landscape and animals they live amongst. In turn, the non-human members of the community light pathways to ancient beliefs and myths which remain the life blood of the Osage throughout the novel.

For the Osage in *Mean Spirit*, as well as the intertribal people of Adam's Rib in *Solar Storms*, and the fictional Taiga tribe in *Power*, the old ways serve as a conduit of wisdom and healing. When the characters of these novels are prevented from relating with the environment in ways that have served them well in the past, they exhibit varying degrees of distress and conflict. My thesis investigates the characters' psychological state as directly affected by the environmental crises present in the novels. The goal, then, of examining silence, absence, and mystery in the characters' lives as they change and adapt benefits from the ecopsychological theories found in Eugene Victor Walters's and Andy Fisher's work. Examining Walters's theory of human and non-human interactions and the potent spiritual energy that results, I hope to further my contention that Hogan's depiction of silence, absence, and mystery articulates the power of unseen worlds. These unseen worlds connect in a spiritual way with people who use their power and energy to find strength and healing from nature as they follow ancient tribal ways. To further articulate my contention that powerful spiritual energies strengthen human and non-human bonds, I turn to Walter's theory of place energy. Walters explains place energy and hidden meanings in *Placeways: A Theory of the Human Environment*:

The energy of a place is not to be grasped in the same way we understand the mechanical energy of an industrial city. The two energies belong to different orders of intelligibility. Physical energy means the capacity for interaction with features that can be measured and expressed in mathematics. . . . [The poetic] notion of energy is swollen with ambiguity, unlike the scientific concept of physical energy, which is lean and precise. . . . Certain words have hidden meanings that cannot be expressed precisely but only sensed through image and metaphor. (127-28)

The metaphoric imagery to which Walters refers supports my position that Hogan illuminates hidden worlds through her poetic use of silence. Also, Walters's theory of place energy fits nicely with my observations regarding the effects of silence, absence, and mystery on Hogan's characters when approached from an ecopsychological perspective.

In addition, Fisher's ecopsychology provides additional insight into the harmful effects of damaged environments on people who have traditionally lived in harmony with land and animals. For example, the fictional Taiga people, featured in *Power*, live in the silent margins of society, garnering from and giving their strength to the land and animals of rural Florida. Due to the constant development of wild lands, the Taiga tribe is very nearly extinct, and so too, is the Florida panther. The Florida panther's numbers have dwindled to the point that scientists predict the cat will be extinct in the near future (McMullen 380). When a species becomes extinct, a void is created in the ecological balance. Hogan writes of balance, silence, emptiness, and space throughout the novel, and the refrain of absence plays like a silent symphony. She writes that "the cats can hide themselves, but you can feel them there. It's as if space has eyes and ears. It

watches with all its might" (58). An ecopsychological reading of *Power*, therefore, would necessarily investigate the power of silence and absence.

Near the conclusion of *Power*, a passage that makes use of silence, absence, and mystery describes the changes Omishto has gone through. She says "at the end of the road is a different story" (231). Hogan makes a connection between the girl's silence and Panther Woman's withholding of "magic words" (231). Omishto's "end of the road" (231) becomes a new life with the elders of the Taiga tribe, people who "remember the stories that are the force of living" (231). Because of the centrality of native storytelling in the novels, my project benefits from close reading of tribal myths across an ecocritical approach.

That Hogan is truly a border-crosser in ecofeminist concerns becomes evident when we read about her involvement regarding the Makah whale hunt crisis in 1996. The tribe's petition to resume the traditional whale hunt created controversy within and outside of the native community. Animal rights groups, environmental groups, and antiracist whites came to Washington in order to protest the hunt. The conspicuous silence from ecofeminist communities during the controversy created a need for further examination. Patiently listening to all sides of the conflict, Hogan helped the opposing groups find common ground (Gaard, "Tools" 16). Because of the silence from feminist groups during the whale hunt conflict and the poetically rendered silence in *Power*, an examination of the relevance and effectiveness of the use of silence in environmental fiction becomes necessary. In the search for ways to understand cultural and historical differences, Hogan finds a "middle place" in order to hear all sides of the conflict, listening to those who envision a resolution of what Adamson calls "interrelated social and environmental problems" (*American Indian Literature* xvii).

In applying a close reading to Hogan's use of silence in her novels, I turn to Jacques Derrida and his method of deconstruction, particularly his assertion that "logocentrism is an ethnographic metaphysics. It is related to the history of the West" (*Of Grammatology* 79). Derrida's assertion is especially helpful to my project of tying the power of silence to the oppression of Native Americans and non-human species in the geographical areas featured in Hogan's novels. As Derrida contends, "It is less a question of confiding new writings to the envelope of a book than of finally reading what wrote itself between the lines in the volumes" (*Of Grammatology* 86). This "between the lines" to which Derrida refers is echoed in Hogan's observation regarding *Solar Storms*: "'It's a form of truth, not a story. It's in some ways a retelling of history. . . . It's the story that's been repressed'" (qtd. in Tarter 139). The silenced voices to which Hogan refers represent the difference between a logocentric concept of action and the inaction of an oppressed people's defensive withdrawal. In Hogan's texts, the logocentric concept of action is rethought; inaction becomes the moment of most importance. Consequently, Hogan retells history in her novels; she changes the archive and opens the story that Western ethnocentrism has silenced.

The true story of the Osage murders influences the plot of *Mean Spirit* and reflects the devastating result of Eurocentric ideologies at their worst. Additionally, the "massive James Bay hydroelectric project and its influence on the bioregion in *Solar Storms* are important symbols of the destructive force of Euroamerican culture. The project, its effects and the struggle against it drive the plot after the first third of the novel" (Tarter 137). The destructive force of the dominant culture to which Tarter refers tells the story of logocentrism and its silencing effects on native cultures. The repressed stories of native peoples, silenced for so long, are found not only

in Hogan's texts, but in the margins and between the lines. They are found in the poetic silences she so beautifully conveys.

In my thesis, I use at least one of the four critical methods in each of my readings of Hogan's novels. These critical approaches illuminate my project of examining silence, absence, and mystery in Hogan's writings, connecting them to the environmental crises that inform her texts. Contextually, the critical theories strengthen my observations linking the oppression of non-humans and humans with silence and absence. Additionally, the theorists I draw from further my discussion regarding Hogan's border-crossing and her characters' return to ancestral ways--and ultimately--their healing and survival.

CHAPTER THREE: THE SILENCE OF MEAN SPIRIT

Linda Hogan's novels feature silence, absence, and mystery as main components in the narrative. The device of using silence as a means of communication and understanding within the text serves as a motif in her novels. Hogan's *Mean Spirit*, set in Oklahoma in 1922, and based on a true story, tells the tale of a small group of Osage Indians and how they are deceived, swindled, and murdered for their oil-rich lands. Silence born of oppression and self-censorship settles on the landscape and natives like a shroud. Ultimately, however, silence opens up a space for the characters' reconnection with tribal ways and serves as a conduit to healing. Within the space of healing, silence also figures prominently in the kinship between humans and non-humans. Hogan weaves silence with absence and mystery, crafting a work that moves from oppression and genocide to courage, resistance, healing, and survival.

When the rich Indians living in Watona reconnect with the reclusive Hill People--a small group of Osage who have renounced the materialistic ways of their urban counterparts--silence takes on a new dimension. Ultimately, tribal ties between the native groups bring about the silence of strength, self-preservation, and continuance.

Deception by those of the dominant culture permeates the Watona Indians' lives, and due to a handful of greedy businessmen, even the Osage gravesites are robbed. Because of fear of retribution, silence plays a huge role in the Native Americans' characters' lives. Silence begins on the first page of the novel, in the description of a deceptively calm scene:

What a silent bedchamber the world was, just before morning when even the locusts were still. In that darkness, the white beds were ghostly. They rose up from the black rolling hills and farmlands. Here, a lonely bed sat next to a barbed

wire fence, and there, beneath the protection of an oak tree, a man's lantern burned beside his sleeping form. (3)

In the above passage, Hogan sets up an interesting and revealing juxtaposition between landscape, silence, and mystery. The beds are described as “ghostly” (Hogan 3), which gives them an air of existing in a borderland between life and death. Ghosts are often depicted as intruders in the world of the living; they seem to span a time and place that does not belong here on earth, a realm that is out of place with “real time.” Of course, beds are ordinarily associated with rooms inside a house, not outside in meadows and gardens. So, immediately, the words set up a ghostly image of beds that are out of place, and by association, the people who occupy them. The Indians in *Mean Spirit* seem out of place in white society, and they are seen as inferior by the businessmen who use them.

Why the natives should seem out of place in the long-established Osage territories of Oklahoma adds to the injustice of the situation. According to Dennis McAuliffe, author of *Bloodland: A Family Story of Oil, Greed and Murder on the Osage Reservation*, “For centuries, the Osage owned, occupied, and ruled over most of modern Missouri, the southern half of Kansas and the northern halves of Arkansas and Oklahoma” (38). Additionally, for hundreds of years the Osage sustained hunting camps in Oklahoma (Baird 13). Narrating an account of the government's shameful treatment of the Osage, McAuliffe reveals a story of long-standing greed and corruption:

[S]hortly after the 1803 Louisiana Purchase, which included the Osage domain, the Americans forced the Osage to embark on a “Trail of Treaties” that would confine them to a 50-by-100 mile, 12 million-acre reservation in southern Kansas. Over a seventeen-year period, the Osages ceded 98.6 million acres of their

ancestral land for \$166,300, mostly in livestock and merchandise—for one-sixth of a penny per acre. (38-39)

As Murphy points out, “In order to steal a people’s land or overthrow their form of government, it must be established that they are not equally human” (97). Without much difficulty, therefore, we can infer that the murders of the Osage occurred because the perpetrators viewed the Indians as unequal. Furthermore, the use of land as a commodity distanced the Osage from their tribal traditions and caused their urbanized counterparts to get caught up in the dangerous silence of complicity, as depicted in the novel. Psychologically, the Osage in *Mean Spirit* feel the oppression of self-imposed silence; yet they dare not speak:

The guards knew the situation could explode at any time, but the Indians knew, from history itself, that it was a smart thing to keep silent on the affairs and regulations of Washington, to be still and as invisible as possible. They might be cheated, but they still had life, and until only recently, even that was not guaranteed under the American laws, so they remained trapped, and wary.

(Hogan 63)

For the Osage, keeping silent often ensures survival. The withholding of information regarding the murders in *Mean Spirit* temporarily ensures survival for some; but silence also leads to dangerous marginalization. Although they live on lands that belonged to their ancestors for hundreds of years, the people who are out of place in Oklahoma are the Osage, according to those of the dominant white culture. Obviously, the Osage should be right at home on their native lands, but they are not. In a revealing passage, Grace Blanket looks like “an apparition from the past walking through the rooms she’d decorated with heavy, carved furniture and glass chandeliers” (5). An apparition has a ghostly connotation, and like other Native American

characters in the novel, Grace occupies a borderland. Throughout *Mean Spirit*, this borderland proves as uncomfortable as it is ghostly and mysterious, and it thrives on silence. Grace lives in a house full of ornate European furniture, but she is a Hill Indian.

Many of the Hill Indians live in a settlement away from Watona. In the 1860s they had decided to leave Watona and relocate to the hills outside of town in order to ensure continuance of their peaceful way of life. The Hill People have “runners, a mystical group whose peculiar running discipline and austere habits earned them a special place in both the human world and the world of spirits” (Hogan 5). Resolved to live their lives without the dominant white culture’s incursions, the Hill Indians represent traditional tribal ways in the novel. Their peaceful silence, born of self-sufficiency and a firm grasp of their heritage, stands in contrast to the dark silence that descends upon the natives who live in and around Watona. If silence begins the novel rather peacefully, with the image of beds scattered across a ghostly countryside, after Grace Blanket is murdered, the silence grows ominous:

No one felt safe, but there was nothing they could put a finger on, and that state of being in the dark made the situation even worse. The family grew suspicious of everyone. Even at home, there were new silences in the house. Floyd wired outdoor lights at both the front and back doors, and when he sold his mason jars full of Tulsa liquor, he paid keen attention to the careless words of drunks, to see if any of them might let something slip about the murder. (44)

Oppression causes the natives' reluctance to speak. The silence that follows Grace’s murder feeds the oppression of the Osage because they must not divulge their belief that authorities have covered up the truth. For example, when Benoit, a French-Indian, calls for an investigation into Grace’s death, he doesn’t dare bring up the black Buick at the murder scene,

for fear “he’d be in over his own head” (41). Benoit suspects Watona authorities know something about the owner of the Buick, but he says nothing. Witnesses who saw the black Buick at the crime scene area remain silent as well. Benoit wants to see justice come to light, but he also wants to survive. Knowing that he might be killed for speaking out creates an unbearable dilemma for him.

Benoit occupies a borderland between the native and white worlds. He also occupies the potentially dangerous ground of resistance against the Watona authorities. When he eventually confronts Sheriff Gold about Grace’s death, he puts himself in jeopardy: ““What about witnesses?”” Benoit said, trying to remain calm. ‘Did you wonder about that?’ The Sheriff answers: ‘No one’s come forward. If there were witnesses, they haven’t talked as of yet’” (41). Trying and failing to start the wheels of justice spinning regarding Grace’s murder, Benoit walks “away from the jail in frustration. Whoever shot Grace in the heart wanted it to look like a suicide, even though suicide had never been a way out of life for Watona’s Indian people” (41). Due to his outspoken nature, however, Benoit is eventually imprisoned on trumped-up charges. Finally, in order to permanently silence Benoit, the whites murder him.

Silence engenders silence in *Mean Spirit*. When Grace’s corpse is stolen, absence is added to silence and mystery. Ona, an old native woman who serves as a fire-keeper, notices “the casket was upended on the ground where it had been opened and left vacant. . . . Nothing remained, not the body of Grace, not the beads, gold, not even the medicines that had been buried inside the coffin for the woman’s journey to the other world” (43). Because Ona decides to keep quiet about what she sees, “and to put the coffin back in the ground herself, somehow, and cover it up” (43), her silence becomes a conduit of oppression. Fearing the potentially deadly consequences of informing the authorities, Ona retreats into self-imposed silence. Again, the

silence of self-censorship in *Mean Spirit* illustrates the depth of oppression within the characters' lives.

The “ominous silence living in the shadows” of Belle’s house becomes deeper after Grace’s murder. Yet, the silence of the runner standing outside Grace's home is a different kind of silence: the runner “looked rooted to earth, and he stood like one of the Hill Indians, as if he’d never lived among white people or their dry goods, or the cursed blessing of oil. His face was smooth and calm” (30). Within the silence of the runner lies a mysterious strength that generates a positive effect on the Osage. The runner doesn’t need to speak; his silence speaks for him. He has power that doesn’t come from white culture. Now the effect of silence changes to a positive link with tribal ways. Silence, which strongly informs the text, broadens our understanding of the white culture’s oppression of the Osage. The silence that serves to oppress the natives becomes a way to reconnect and strengthen tribal traditions. Even though, at “a distance, it was easy to fall away from the old ways” (50), in *Mean Spirit*, the old ways become ways of survival in a world turned treacherous and deadly.

Louise’s hesitation, when she bites her tongue and says nothing to her mother’s insistence that her children stay under their family’s protection, illustrates yet another type of silence. Louise knows she wants to “take her children and move at the first chance” (36), but she says nothing to Belle. Louise’s fear regarding the law that forces all Hill children to attend a boarding school in Custer adds to the depth of her silence. The forced assimilation of school children fosters another type of silence: the deliberate silencing of a people’s native language. To illustrate the oppression of forced assimilation, in *The Dawes Act and the Allotment of Indian Lands*, by D.S. Otis, the commissioner of a so-called philanthropic group makes these statements:

The Indian child must be taught many things which come to the white child, because of environment, without the school-master's aid. From the day of its birth the child of civilized parents is constantly in contact with civilized modes of life—of action, thought, speech, dress—and is surrounded by a thousand beneficent influences that never operate upon the child of savage parentage, who, in his birth-hour, is encompassed by a degrading atmosphere of superstition and barbarism. Out from the conditions of his birth he must be led in his early years into the environments of civilized domestic life. And he must be thus led by the school teacher. (65)

No wonder Louise fears the school in Custer. Laws like the 1887 Dawes Act, which disguised itself as a law ensuring the welfare of Native Americans, generated interest in “Indian education on the part of philanthropic groups” (Otis 65). Education policies were initiated to supposedly help Indians assimilate into the Euroamerican mainstream, but these policies had the culturally damaging, negative effect of further dispossessing Native Americans (Greenwald 15). The silencing effects of the dominant culture demonized native traditions. For many who had an interest in seeing the assimilation of natives into the dominant culture take place, “this was the most important means of destroying tribalism” (Otis 10).

In *Mean Spirit*, Louise knows that the white schooling of native children and the attempt at full assimilation foster another type of silence; the repression of the natives' cultural and linguistic heritage. According to the law, “if the families resisted, the children would be made wards of the state and removed permanently from their homes” (Hogan 36). In other Native American tribes, “the authorities had hunted down hidden children and taken them, lifted them

up, screaming, from the ground, and carried them away from their families so that they would learn the cultured, civilized ways of the Americans” (Hogan 36).

The wide-ranging effects of the Dawes Act served to further marginalize Native Americans. Parceling out land to the Osage, then swindling them out of it again (which *Mean Spirit* illustrates), can only be described as diabolical. What happened in the early 1920s in Oklahoma comprises a 3,274-page FBI file entitled “Osage Indian Murders” (McAuliffe Jr. 123). According to Dennis McAuliffe Jr., up to sixty wealthy Osages were murdered for money before authorities finally got involved. The names of most of the murder victims do not appear in the files, according to McAuliffe Jr. He cites newspaper reports about an Osage woman who was hacked into small pieces by doctors at her autopsy in order to hide evidence that she was shot to death; another “Osage woman’s grave is blown up” (123); a white rancher takes out an insurance policy on an Osage man and then brags to the insurance company that he intends to have the man killed. When the insurance company refuses to pay, the rancher sues (123). Local journalists were ironically calling the crimes ““The Osage Reign of Terror”” (McAuliffe 124), as if the natives themselves held responsibility for their own murders.

Within Louise’s silent terror regarding the events unfolding in Oklahoma, and within the other natives’ fear and silence, the story that has been relegated to the margins of history comes to light. For example, although Horse wants to “put together the broken edges of things” (39), the ragged pieces of their lives seem beyond repair. Silencing themselves, the Osage want peace and quiet so badly that they turn a blind eye and a deaf ear to the signs of truth that surface. Grace’s murder reveals the end-result of corrupt practices by whites against the Osage. One of the corrupt practices involves arranged marriages between Osage women and white men: a “white man, when asked what he did for a living, said by way of an answer that he’d married an

Osage woman, and everyone who listened understood what that meant, that he didn't work; he lived off her money" (Hogan 34). White husbands inherited their Indian wives' oil-rich lands upon their deaths, and law-enforcement officers would make sure the murders went unsolved. The Osages were so afraid for their lives they burned lights around the perimeters of their homes all night (McAuliffe 124). In *Mean Spirit*, the fear of being killed manifests itself in silence.

At Grace's home, a sense of darkness prevails. Her house feels "heavy and ghostly" (48), and despite the rising temperatures outside, seems "cold as a cave, and silent" (48). Grace's house appears to have a kind of spirit. As ecopsychologist Eugene Victor Walter contends, places have their own, individual dynamics, which grow "out of the biographies and local histories, and the drama of dwelling together" (*Placeways* 9). Geographical and architectural dynamics are, therefore, "intimately connected with the local imagination, with the spirit of the place. I formulate these qualities as *expressive space*" (9). Grace's house contains the sadness and loneliness that she felt in her life. The coldness of atmosphere within the walls and the sterility of the glass ornaments and heaviness of the European furniture attest to the out-of-place feeling that haunts Grace from her existence in the borderland of the Indian and white worlds to her ransacked gravesite. Although she has a smile for everyone, Grace turns away from her tribal past, and tragedy follows her.

Other natives in *Mean Spirit* turn away from their tribal pasts. For example, Michael Horse watches the Indian congregation from the back of a church in Watona: "Some of the younger women had lightened their hair to a brassy orange with hydrogen peroxide. Some of them wore makeup that was paler than their faces, imitating the white women's pictures in magazines, but Michael Horse wasn't fooled; they were Indians" (12). Spending money wildly, driving expensive cars, and filling their houses with ornate European furniture, the oil-rich Osage

turn their backs on their tribal heritage. The silencing of old ways comes back to haunt the natives. One way that past traditions haunt the Osage community in comparison relative to the dominant culture's intrusions involves the natives' reaction to the damage inflicted on the environment.

An example of the hurt connected with the Osage and the land surrounding them is evident near Grace's house. A huge crater, created by a gas blowout, measures fifty by five hundred feet, and it has dried up the water sources in the area and killed the trees and grasses that once grew freely. Another field not far from the crater is pumped for oil night and day, and "the bruised fields" are "noisy and dark" (54). Bleeding oil, the earth is scarred and littered with pumps and drilling machinery. The oil drillers "burn the poor birds right out of the sky" (76), as Belle Graycloud says.

Belle experiences another astonishing incident when she goes to town to run some errands. Something "stopped her in her tracks, Belle stood dead still a moment, turned and looked again at what she hoped was an error of vision. What met her eyes was a truck filled with eagle carcasses. They were golden brown birds, with the blue-white membranes of death closed over their eyes" (109-10). The sight of a hundred and seventeen dead eagles strikes Belle silent. Several minutes pass within Belle's mute reaction. Then, she screams at the men driving the truck filled with dead birds. By breaking her silence and exposing the senseless destruction of life, Belle takes up the banner of what Adamson calls "an alternate vision of what might constitute proper human/environment interrelations and practices" (*American Indian Literature* 174). By confronting those who perpetuate ideologies that situate non-humans as separate and inferior to humans, Belle takes the first step in correcting these destructive belief systems. When

one of the men yells back ““They’re just birds”” (110), Belle’s anger grows, and she assaults the men. She becomes the voice of the silenced eagles.

Addressing the silence of non-humans, Belle often leads the way to a means of understanding and kinship. From a human/non-human interaction perspective, silence opens a new world of communication. For example, when Belle stands up to defend the bats at Sorrow Cave, her strength is manifested in silence:

But Belle pretended to hear nothing as she remained there protecting the double world of bats with their whistling songs and their lives in the cool deep darkness, the bats who were husbands to trees, the beautiful creatures who were hated by those who lived in what they called the light." (279)

Belle's silence antagonizes the sheriff and his men. When the lawman claims that the bats are "pests" that don't benefit humans in any way, Belle stands her ground by remaining silent (279). She quietly represents the bats, who lack the means to speak in their own defense.

Here, silence in the novel has undergone a major change. From fear to courage, from oppression to strength, silence is held by Belle in order to protect the bats and initialize a war of sorts between her people and the law that has for so long dismissed the cultures of both humans and animals. As Murphy argues, in conflicts of environmental and cultural ethics, "answerability must necessarily involve both human and nonhuman actants, must necessarily involve other entities that have their own unique once occurrent event of being, whether they enjoy volitional behaviour or not" (“Grounding Anotherness” 2).

Forced from any sort of secure existence, the bats and Belle create a united front of resistance, and they use silence as both weapon and shield. Within Sorrow Cave, the bats wait, knowing from history’s ancient lessons that making their presence known to humans has almost

always been a deadly mistake. This time, however, Belle's presence is needed at the mouth of the cave. Hogan juxtaposes the silent atmosphere of the cave and Belle's silent resistance, which creates a dilemma for the sheriff and his men. The conflict becomes a major standoff as more tribal people and Belle's family and friends join her.

After the sheriff and his men give up and retreat, at least for the day, the resistance group explores Sorrow Cave. Going deep within its many hidden passages, the group finds "paintings of bats. Red bats. In a hallway there were blue fish, and more bats with red, opened wings, and the paintings of black buffalo. It was a sacred world they entered and everyone became silent and heard a distant dripping of water in the caveways, the echoing sounds, the breathing of earth" (284). The paintings in Sorrow Cave represent what Derrida calls writing "between the lines" (*Of Grammatology* 86). A part of history, the artwork deep within the cave tells a story that Western texts have silenced and marginalized. Words are absent from the walls, but the paintings silently reveal and change the archive of history nonetheless.

The scene changes from battleground to sacred place. The awareness generated at the mouth of the cave and carried to the cool walls within symbolizes what is happening to many of the Osage. Belle's resistance at Sorrow Cave represents a larger movement of awareness within her social circle.

One of the people in Belle's social circle who visibly changes due to increasing awareness of the destructive changes in his congregation and beyond is the Indian minister, Joe Billy:

Joe Billy's face was rubbed with red clay and yellow ochre, the elements of earth.
He wore a red scarf around his neck. His eyes were closed and he was praying,
but he was a different man than the one who wore the black suit on Sunday

mornings. And even his prayers were different, deeper somehow, more heartfelt, more physical as if they came through the body and not just the mind. He stretched wet buckskin across a small drum, and when he arranged the holy sage all the talkers became silent. (73)

Joe Billy leaves his life as a Baptist preacher and returns to the traditional ways of his people, visiting Sorrow Cave and waiting for a vision or revelation to come to him, a vision that “could not be named or spoken” (212). Throughout *Mean Spirit*, the value of the unspoken illustrates power in ways that reveal the limitation of words. Reverend Billy is more powerful and sure of himself when he returns to traditional ways; his silent patience becomes a sign of maturity and wisdom. His non-native wife, Martha, joins him in learning about tribal ways. Eventually, she embraces Native American traditions and leaves her own culture behind. In doing so, Martha takes up the cause of resistance with her Indian husband.

As Adamson asserts, “American Indian people have not given up their lands without a fight. Taking up positions of resistance. . . they appeal to different concepts embedded in other cultures, languages, and relationships to the land” (*American Indian Literature* 72). Resistance in *Mean Spirit* takes the shape of silence against the dominant culture as well as silence within the natives’ clearing of sacred spaces for animals and ancient traditions. The “echoing sounds, the breathing of the earth” (284) cannot be heard unless we are silent long enough to enable us to hear them. In this way, silence becomes a conduit to awareness and understanding. Another way of looking at the connection to sacred spaces involves the respect for other cultures, including non-human cultures: “‘You know,’ Joe Billy said, stirring the fire, ‘One of the best things about bats is that they are a race of people that stand in two worlds like we do. . . . And they live in earth’s ancient places’” (Hogan 257).

Absence and mystery take center stage when Stacey Red Hawk, who crosses the borderland between white and native cultures, tries to find people at the Hill settlement. Their absence astonishes him. Red Hawk works in Washington, D.C. as an investigator. The mystery surrounding the deaths of so many Indians in Oklahoma draws him into the investigation. The effect on Red Hawk's life is two-fold: he leads the inquiry into the murders, and he also returns to native ways and traditions. Described as "a keeper of tradition, and a carrier of the sacred pipe of his people" (50), Red Hawk looks for the Hill People, who may have the answers he seeks. Discovering their absence, the mystery puzzles him and he "wondered if he had, as Levee suggested, gone crazy. Or was it possible a whole people could vanish into blue air?" (303). Because too many curious people were approaching the Hill settlement, the natives had to retreat deeper into the wilderness. Their absence reveals the defensive tactics of silence and mystery. We can infer from tactics such as these--learned across hundreds of years of genocide and oppression--that Hogan's use of the device of silence resonates with a long contextual history.

Addressing the tactic of opacity in oppressed cultures, Edouard Glissant notes that when one culture has "evolved at the expense of the other, we can state that the only possible strategy is to make them *opaque* to each other" (133). Opacity in the oppressed culture of which Glissant writes in *Caribbean Discourse* has much in common with the natives' silent opacity in *Mean Spirit*. The absence of transparency serves to protect the Osage from those of the dominant culture who would harm—and in some cases--kill them. Silence, in turn, becomes a type of opacity for those who have been silenced. In a way, the return of the silence of the oppressed becomes a defensive weapon of survival.

Again, silence and absence play a major role in *Mean Spirit* when the courtroom scene dissolves into mystery:

Between that new information, the fact that witnesses did not appear, and the disturbing exodus of many of the Osage people the previous day, many of the Indian people gave up on justice and went home. They dissolved into the town, absorbed by the shadows and streets and the leaves and trunks of trees. They might never [have] been solid, never have been really there.” (333)

The empty streets suggest an "absent presence like a word on the tip of your tongue or a dream not quite remembered" (Jameson 135). As the Osage pull up stakes and leave town, Michael Horse documents the shame of injustice that culminates in the heavy inertia at the courthouse. During the courtroom scenes, many of the Hill People gradually stop attending. They resent having to look at the defendant's face. Only half of the subpoenaed witnesses show up, and Red Hawk finds out that the original indictment is flawed, although no one informs the public about the mix-up. Business as usual in law enforcement assures Horse that the Indians will not find justice for what has been done to them. He writes, “the land is ravaged and covered with scars and so are the broken people. Those of us who still have an ounce of strength have been losing it during these testimonies in the courthouse” (341).

The absence of the Osage remains a silent testimony that speaks nonetheless. Their absence tells of genocide, displacement, and injustice, the sad song of hundreds of years of marginalization.

Because Hogan leaves the reader with an unresolved courtroom outcome, her novel's conclusion is open-ended. At the end of *Mean Spirit*, Moses and Belle leave their homes, looking at a sky on fire with the destruction of burning buildings. The Osage move through the night, carrying “generations along with them” (375). They also carry silence along with them, but this time the silence fills the air with the knowledge that their lives will go on. Because the survivors

connect with “an older world, the silent places of the ancient ones” (284), they decide to move away from the oilfields in order to continue their quest to live peacefully, embracing ancient traditions. As Murphy contends, the survivors reconnect with the Hill People and rediscover their relationship with the land, which serves as a key component of their tribal identity (*Farther Afield* 183).

Ultimately, Hogan’s first novelistic attempt to address silence strongly relates to the survival of native people. Silence as oppression, self-censorship, and opacity becomes silence as a movement toward healing and survival. Within the context of healing, silence also figures prominently in the relationship between humans and non-humans. The progress of Native Americans toward hope and against terrible oppression and injustice informs *Mean Spirit* and continues in *Solar Storms*.

CHAPTER FOUR: A JOURNEY INTO *SOLAR STORMS*

Like *Mean Spirit*, Hogan's *Solar Storms* focuses on cultural and ecological conflicts between natives and those of the dominant culture. *Solar Storms*, however, centers on the first-person perspective of a teenage girl named Angela Jensen, also known as Angel Wing. Tracing Angel's journey back to her homeland and extended family, the story takes a familiar path in Hogan's fiction: a path forged from the silence of oppression and pain to the silence born of inner strength that comes from a reconnection with the biosphere and native traditions. What makes Angel's journey difficult and life-changing also makes *Solar Storms* a unique novel in terms of ecocritical and ecofeminist perspectives. An analysis of the mother-daughter relationship reveals a de-romanticized view of maternal culture when juxtaposed with environmental trauma. Angel's mother, Hannah, bears scars from past violence against her people and her homeland. In *Solar Storms*, Hogan weaves silence created by repression of trauma with silence as native resistance. Additionally, during Hannah's death scene, Hogan presents silence as resolution.

Early in *Solar Storms*, Angel's quiet behavior masks her painful introduction to life as an abused child. As a result of abuse at the hands of her mother, Angel is removed from her homeland and placed in a succession of foster homes. Returning to the fictional town of Adam's Rib, a small settlement located on the Great Lakes boundary land between the US and Canada, Angel seeks to gain knowledge of her mother's whereabouts. Sadly, she still bears the scars of Hannah's mistreatment. One of the mysteries of *Solar Storms* lies within the reason for Angel's abuse at the hands of her mother. Initially, the girl does not know why or how her face was scarred. Angel, "full of words" (25) inside herself, lives in defensive silence behind a curtain of long red hair which she uses to cover her scars. Living in "a room of fear, fear of everything—

silence, closeness, motionlessness” (26), Angel conveys a tough exterior in order to mask her astonishing vulnerability. She feels “another room being built, but without knowing it, I was entering silence more deeply than I had entered anything before” (27). Hogan conveys the power of silence in Angel’s life, describing an almost palpable presence of pain and fear within the soundless depths of the girl’s existence.

As she does in *Mean Spirit*, Hogan uses poetic imagery in *Solar Storms* to help shape the text’s powerful depiction of the human connection with the environment. For example, Angel quietly begins to “form a kind of knowing at Adam’s Rib” (54). She starts to see “how I am like the night sky with its stars that fall through time and space and arrive here as wolves and fish and people, all of us fed by them” (54). She thinks of “the dust of sun, the turning of creation taking place” (54). Although she lives inside her own silence, Angel finds the strength to search for and find the women who took care of her when her mother could not. Reconnecting with her tribe serves to structure Angel’s ways of knowing more than all the years she spent going from one foster home to the next. Looking back, she realizes she never got the answers she sought about her scarred face. She recalls questioning one foster mother about her scars, only to be told she fell.

Angel’s family members--Bush, Agnes, and Dora-Rouge--re-enter her life at a time when she stands on the threshold of adulthood. The convergence of a coming-of-age story with a tale of environmental destruction informs the narrative. Additionally, *Solar Storms* traces Angel’s reunion with her mother, a meeting fraught with emotional pain that comes from the knowledge that her mother has been physically and emotionally damaged beyond repair. The mother-daughter conflict invites a close ecofeminist analysis because Hannah Wing’s emotional and

physical scars come from crimes committed against the natives as well as the lands in and around Adam's Rib.

The conflict between the dominant culture and the natives begins on a warm day when two young men appear at Adam's Rib and inform Angel and her family about a hydroelectric corporation's plans to build several dams in the area:

In the first flooding, the young man said, they'd killed many thousands of caribou and flooded land the people lived on and revered. Agents of the government insisted the people had no legal right to the land. No agreement had ever been signed, he said, no compensation offered. Even if it had been offered, the people would not have sold their lives. Not one of them. (57)

The stealing of lands occupied for several thousand years by Native Americans takes center stage. The "Cree, Ashinabe, and various subarctic tribes—already displaced and impoverished by the logging industry—fight to prevent construction of dams and reservoirs threatening to flood their homelands" (Rainwater 97). By featuring the true story of the James Bay Hydroelectric Project in her narrative, Hogan crosses the permeable boundary between fiction and non-fiction. The building of hydroelectric structures marked a time when the consequences of damming rivers and disrupting fragile ecosystems were seldom considered. Throughout Hogan's text, the threat of unnecessary disruption of ecosystems and the resulting damage on non-human and human lives becomes apparent.

The notion that Native Americans "emphasize collective existence and psychic connection" informs *Solar Storms* and structures the impetus of resistance against the dominant culture (Rainwater 93). As Angel continues to inhabit her silent world, she discovers the tension between her people and those of the dominant culture, a tension that threatens to silence not only

the natives but also the non-human lives that comprise the vast wilderness of the northern US/Canada Boundary region. In other words, the damming and subsequent flooding of rivers not only damages the non-human life in the area; it damages the link between non-humans and humans, a link that the US government and many large corporations ignored in the past and, unfortunately, still ignore today.

In order to articulate the strong connections between the biosphere and humans, Hogan fills her text with poetic images of astonishing beauty:

We heard the low howl of a wolf, so low it could have been mistaken for the wind. It lay down across the wet earth. Tulik's dog answered, remembering the wolf blood that still lived inside it, no matter how it had been bred out, no matter how people wanted to make of the animals something they weren't, as they'd tried to do with the people, as they were doing with the land. And so the events that followed were tribal cries, the old wailing come to new terms. (255)

Hogan's depiction of the silencing of the wolves symbolizes the larger silencing of animals, land, and people by intrusions of so-called progress. When she writes about the sound of "the train from a long ways off" (255), and how the sound "drowned out the voices of the wolves" (255), she brilliantly illustrates the approach of progress and its silencing effects on non-human life. As an economic venture, the "massive James Bay hydroelectric project and its influence on the bioregion in *Solar Storms* are important symbols of the destructive force of Euroamerican culture. The project, its effects, and the struggle against it" compel the narrative (Tarter 137). As Hogan insists, *Solar Storms* is "a form of truth, not a story. It's in some ways a retelling of history. . . . It's the story that's been repressed" (qtd. in Tarter 139).

Told through Angel's eyes, the novel articulates her coming of age within the dynamics of native culture and the conflicts surrounding the hydroelectric project. Angel lives within a painful silence when she first comes to Adam's Rib and stays with Bush, her step-grandmother. Initially, she dislikes Bush and feels the woman's silence is "unreachable" (75). Bush's connection with the land strikes Angel as mysterious and strange. Alternately resenting and admiring Bush, Angel sees her as "a goddess with a beautiful song and Levi's and graying hair" (75). Angel watches her "at the misty edges of land and water" (75), where she becomes "something else, something nearly invisible and silent" (75). Although Angel finds herself attracted to the silence, it "nearly hurt" (75). Silence, for Angel, has come to mean pain, and she reacts to it by feeling uncomfortable in the presence of a woman for whom silence has become a way of life in an often hostile environment of ice and snow. Like her unfamiliarity with the landscape of her birth, Angel's uneasiness in the presence of Bush illustrates her initial feeling of alienation upon her return to Adam's Rib.

Silence and mystery combine in the character of Bush, providing a human connection to the homeland from which Angel has been absent for most of her life. Like the Hill People in *Mean Spirit*, Bush represents silence and mystery in the form of connections with native traditions and the biosphere. Reconnecting with tribal traditions and mythologies, Bush passes her knowledge to Angel. One of the Native American tales about which Angel learns centers on Wolverine, a silent shape-shifter. Wolverine appears intermittently in the text and comes to represent many ideas and conflicts. Bush tells Angel the story of two trappers who accuse each other of stealing their catches:

"You know who it was? Who stole from the traps?" She looked at me.

I resented the quiz. "What's your point?" I said.

“It was Wolverine; they do this.”

I looked at her. “What’s that? Wolverine?”

“That’s what everyone wants to know.” She laughed. Not a hostile laugh. An easy one. (77)

Wolverine, although he never physically appears in *Solar Storms*, is a character nonetheless. He represents an absence that is a presence, a dynamic about which Derrida writes in *Of Grammatology* (154). Derrida calls writing "the disappearance of natural presence" (156). Therefore, the inherent characteristic of writing, representing absence, pervades all texts and ultimately causes deferral of meaning. Wolverine defers meaning because he represents different things at different times to different people. Wolverine, as an absent presence, defers meaning as a character; thus, a double deferral occurs when he appears and yet does not emerge per se.

When Hannah dies, Wolverine appears and yet doesn’t appear again:

Some people say Wolverine had things mixed up, too. At times it was said he was a human returned to his animal shape. At other times, he was animal inhabiting a strange, two-legged body, wearing human skin. Whichever he was, Wolverine had come to despise humans and they didn’t feel so good about him either. But he knew them, and he knew everything about them. That’s how he knew to steal the flints and other things of value to human beings and to spoil the things they needed to live by. I wondered if he was the one who stole my mother. (253)

When Hogan makes the connection between Wolverine and Hannah, she does so in order to illustrate what happens when the non-human/human bond becomes corrupted. Alongside the mystery of Wolverine stands the mystery of Hannah. Hogan never clarifies the origin of Hannah’s strange, abusive behavior, but we can reasonably infer that her behavior has something

to do with the poisoning of the environment. Hannah's people lived on Elk Island and ate the carcasses of animals that had been poisoned by white settlers. The pores of Hannah's skin exude the smell of cyanide. When people disrespect the kinship between humans and animals, "Wolverine takes away their luck in hunting" (82) and causes multiple problems to occur. Unfortunately, natives who had nothing to do with the poisonings suffered. Angel learns that there are "consequences to human sins: 'Some say Wolverine is a human gone wild,' Bush says. 'That's how it knows to hide out and escape capture. They know how to walk in the prints of other animals, especially those of men, like a shadow following them'" (84) In its absence that is presence, Wolverine haunts the text, defers meaning, and shifts from animal to human and back again. As Bush says, "'That's how Wolverine watches to see how humans treat the animals. And you never know where Wolverine is'" (84). Clearly, you never know *who* Wolverine is either.

Hogan's connection of the mysterious Wolverine to the destruction of fragile ecosystems culminates when Angel takes on the shape-shifter's characteristics in an act of silent resistance. She knows Wolverine wants "the people to leave" (322). Angel also wants the soldiers and police who are trying to stop the natives from protesting the building of dams to leave, so she steals away from the house in which she is temporarily staying. She pretends to be Wolverine so she can travel unseen in the night: "Without words, I, like Wolverine, would tell the men to leave our world. Without words, I, like Wolverine, would speak, would destroy their food" (322), starve them out, and force them to leave. By having Angel take on the persona of Wolverine, Hogan combines mystery with silence in an alchemy of Native mythology and environmental activism. Angel takes canned food, eggs, and coffee away from the soldiers' post. Ripping into bags of flour, pouring bottled water on the mounds of sugar she spills on the floor, Angel departs after ruining the food reserves, leaving behind "white footsteps, the path of a ghost" (323).

To defer meaning, Hogan sets Wolverine in motion, but only in the language and thoughts of her characters. Again, Wolverine does not appear; we can only imagine what he looks like and guess where and when he will arrive; yet, his absence/presence is powerful. As a mythical animal, Wolverine both represents and opposes a Westernized, mistaken view of non-humans that many Native Americans have rejected for a very long time:

Animal language—and animality in general—represents here the still living myth of fixity, of symbolic incapacity, of nonsupplementarity. If we consider the *concept* of animality not in its content of understanding or misunderstanding but in its specific *function*, we shall see that it must locate a moment of *life* which knows nothing of symbol, substitution, lack and supplementary addition, etc.—everything, in fact, whose appearance and play I wish to describe here. A life that has not yet broached the play of supplementarity and which at the same time has not yet let itself be violated by it: a life without difference and without articulation. (*Of Grammatology* 242)

So, the animal lives both inside and outside the play of language. With humor as well as with a tinge of threat, Hogan lets Wolverine run across her pages like the mysterious loner he has always been. Wolverine can't be fixed, he can't be caught, and he can't even be described twice in the same way. He, she, or it is the imaginative embodiment of the resistance of language to a stable meaning. Wolverine's ghostly presence shapes *Solar Storms* when disrespect of the biosphere occurs. That Angel's footsteps are etched in real flour when she runs from the provisions building only adds to Wolverine's legend and reinforces his textual presence. The dominant culture's ethnocentrism and logocentrism only serve to make Wolverine more

powerful, and the defining moment for Angel—the moment she stops letting other people decide for her—comes when she acts like Wolverine.

Using the Wolverine legend, Hogan creates a way for Angel to link tribal stories with temporal concerns. Wolverine sabotages those who do not respect animals, and Angel identifies with him. As ecofeminist Silvia Schultermandl points out, “Angel’s environmental activism relates to her political activism for the cultural survival of her tribe” (“Fighting for the Mother/Land” 71). Angel comes into contact with what Hogan calls the “inner language” of native traditions (*Dwellings* 57). She taps into the stories of her matrilineage through Bush, her great-grandmother Agnes, and her great-great grandmother Dora-Rouge.

The problematic link in Angel’s matrilineage, her mother, ultimately serves to strengthen ties to the native community. Because Angel chooses to forgive her mother for past abuse as well as take responsibility for her baby sister, Aurora, she forges strong inter-female bonds within the tribe. At the same time, she comes to terms with her painful childhood and gains personal strength as a result of treating her mother with forgiveness and compassion.

In another play of language, silence changes with every turn in Hogan’s text. On the surface, the word “silence” exists next to sound and moves within the difference between the two terms. Arguably, silence in Hogan’s work embodies the reiteration and impossibility of repetition. Silence for Angel changes from her life as an abused child, told in retrospect, to her life when she first arrives at Adam’s Rib to her life when she journeys north. Bush’s silence differs from Angel’s. The silence Angel discovers on her journey with Bush, Agnes, and Dora-Rouge changes again:

We were in the hands of nature. In these places things turned about and were other than they seemed. In silence, I pulled through the water and saw how a river

appeared through rolling fog and emptied into a lake. One day, a full-tailed fox moved inside the shadows of trees, then stepped into a cloud. I was equal to the other animals, hearing as they heard, moving as they moved, seeing as they saw. (172)

Angel's silence has changed from a product of childhood trauma to a result of her reconnection with wild places and animals, and "the way the world grows amid silence" (E. Smith 125). Hogan's poetical descriptions of Angel's journey resonate with the blurring of dichotomies. Water and land merge, and there are "no sharp distinctions left between darkness and light" (177). Water and air mingle with earth "in the marshy broth of creation" (177). Angel finds power she never knew existed as she travels on the rivers and streams, "wearing the face of the world, floating in silence" (177). The silence of loneliness has given way to the silence of wisdom: Angel and her grandmothers hear inside each other "in a tribal way" (177). What Hogan calls "feelings that can't be spoken" forge bonds between people in the tribe (*Dwellings* 57). These bonds strengthen as "currents pass between us and the rest of nature" (*Dwellings* 57). *Solar Storms*' permeable boundaries, revealed in Hogan's radiantly descriptive language, illustrate the text's consummate movement toward the blurring of dichotomies.

At North House, where Angel and the women stop to rest on their journey, Dora-Rouge meets Jere, a woman from Adam's Rib. The two talk about old times: "It was what all the old people longed for again, the time when people could merge with a cloud and help it rain, could become trees, one with bark, root, and leaf. People were more silent in those days. They listened. They heard" (203). Here, Hogan situates silence within Native American traditions and tribal beliefs. Silence appears as a way to connect with the biosphere. Rather than seeing the wilderness as something to be conquered and exploited, the natives view all life as

interconnected, and what happens to the environment necessarily has a profound impact on humans.

According to Adrian Tanner, who writes about the potentially disastrous effects of the James Bay Hydroelectric Project, government utilities organizations in the area expressed little or no concern regarding social and environmental impacts (“Culture, Social Change, and Cree Opposition” 122). In fact, aside from Cree and Inuit opposition to the dams, Hydro-Quebec never met with public discourse against the project. From the beginning, natives were apprehensive about the flooding of their harvests, campsites, and ancestors’ graves. As Tanner argues, “Most aboriginal communities throughout northern Canada have what may be referred to as the classic symptoms of a specific form of social breakdown, associated with the rapid disintegration of the traditional way of life” (124). This breakdown, connected to the absence of tribal traditions and lack of viable choices, causes extreme distress in native communities (Tanner 124).

The social breakdown caused by environmental degradation to which Tanner refers forms a central tenet in the work of ecopsychologist Andy Fisher. In *Radical Ecopsychology: Psychology in the Service of Life*, Fisher notes that psychological and social breakdowns occur as a direct result of violence against ecological systems (112). Ecopsychology, then, “is fundamentally a response to violence” (55).

Linking violence against ecological systems to violence against humans, Hogan’s depiction of Angel’s abuse at the hands of her mother holds a particularly relevant place in the novel. When Angel finally reunites with Hannah, the meeting is not a happy one: “What Hannah said, that she’d never hit me, was almost true. She hadn’t laid a hand on me. She had used weapons against me, I learned later—hot wire, her teeth. Once she even burned me with fire”

(231). Hannah's damage lives inside herself and is manifested in her abuse of Angel. When Hannah—whose people ate the carcasses of poisoned animals—dies, Angel notices that “the persons or spirits or demons who followed her about were gathering together in a truce; they were becoming silent now” (249). Silence as resolution informs Hannah's death scene, bringing Angel to another level of personal growth:

But even if she hated me, there had been a moment of something akin to love,
back at the creation. Her desperation and loneliness was my beginning. Hannah
had been my poison, my life, my sweetness and pain, my beauty and homeliness.
And when she died, I knew that I had survived in the best of ways for I was filled
with grief and compassion. (251)

Forgiving her mother, Angel moves beyond “patriarchal laws that advocate maternal guilt and bad motherhood” (Schultermandl 74). Hogan's non-romantic depiction of motherhood avoids placing full responsibility on Hannah. Because Angel and her grandmothers do not completely blame Hannah for her sickness and violence, a space opens up for recognition of the often devastating effects of “a phallogentric culture dominating women, ethnic minorities, and nonhuman nature” (Schultermandl 73). Because Angel's matrilinear culture “relies on lateral rather than hierarchical structures,” her ability to move on from painful childhood memories and forgive her mother serves to strengthen the bond with her tribe and reinforce her development into a strong, compassionate woman (Schultermandl 73).

Along with stronger intertribal bonds, Angel's environmental activism reflects her matrilinear culture because the tribal connections between women position them as leaders in their communities; hence, the opposition to the Hydro-Quebec Project encompasses intertribal and interbiospherical kinships.

One of the tribal legends about which Angel learns involves Ammah's island. Covered by lush vegetation, grain, seeds, nests, and eggs, the island stands as the home of Ammah, one of the creators and protectors of life. No one is allowed to set foot on the island. Completely shielded from human encroachment and activity, Ammah's home symbolizes the unspoiled beauty that flourishes in the absence of humans. Angel often paddles her canoe close to the island:

I sat in a canoe and daydreamed out across the water at the place Ammah protected, and I liked to see the island on my sleepless nights and mornings. I was told Ammah was a silent god and rarely spoke. The reason for this was that all things—birdsongs, the moon, even my own life—grow from rich and splendid silence. (265)

Hogan takes the device of silence and allows it to grow, "rich and splendid" (265). Rather than dismissing it as the second term in a sound/silence hierarchy, Hogan uses silence as a device that cannot be fixed in one meaning. Like Wolverine, silence lives in the pages of *Solar Storms*, encompassing and enabling endless paths of thought. For Hogan, silence does not represent lack; rather, it engenders fullness and makes possible the lives portrayed in the text and the worlds created by the words and the reader. By situating silence in the above passage on Ammah's island, Hogan leaves a space for at least one possible reading: a call for the necessity of leaving ecological systems alone to exist on their own terms. The natives permit no one to set foot on the island. From this edict we can reasonably infer that some places remain at optimal growth only through the absence of human activity. When Angel respectfully sits in her canoe and gazes at the island, she never questions the reasons why all are forbidden to go there. Accepting her tribe's position places her strongly in what ecofeminist critic Charlene Spretnak calls "radical

nonduality” (425). Radical nonduality “asserts the existence of unitive dimensions of being, a gestalt of a subtle, unitary field of form, motion, space, and time” (Spretnak 425).

By choosing not to set foot on the island, Angel regenerates her tribal heritage, what Murphy says “can be maintained only by means of the cultural conservation being practiced by the marginalized and subordinated groups who defend and recover their heritages in order to generate their futures” (*Farther Afield* 134). By not violating the culture of Ammah’s island, Angel participates in radical nonduality by removing herself from the scene; her non-participation, then, qualifies as participation. By actively choosing not to set foot on sacred ground, Angel and her people not only ensure continuance of tribal traditions; they ensure continuance of the island as a biosphere existing on its own terms.

Within the web of non-human and human life lives “the language of myths—memorable, dramatic, emotional, full of imagination, designed to enchant the mind as well as the stars” (Walter 167). The language of myth preserves “a way of talking, singing, and thinking” that connects “the sky, the earth, and human life” (Walter 167). Using the language of tribal myth, Hogan locates a nexus for silence to work its magic. The immersion in wilderness that Angel experiences unites with the deep silence “one can encounter. . . when the dualistic habit of perceiving self apart from nature gradually loses its grip” (Spretnak 430). Immersed in natural surroundings, Angel notices something extraordinary happening to her perceptions: “I had traveled long and hard to be there. I’d searched all my life for this older world that was lost to me, this world only my body remembered. In that moment I understood I was part of the same equation as birds and rain” (79).

Unfortunately, the voices of Angel and her family and friends who oppose the dam-building project do not stop the implementation of the project's first phase:

While we'd been at Two-Town, caught up in the battle over water at its source, the flooding of this place had already begun. It was the result of the damming we'd witnessed at the Fat-Eaters', the result of the stopped rivers to the north. It was the result of our failure to end the first phase of the project. (334)

Angel tells of buildings submerged, homes engulfed, and levees breached. Dead fish float in the streets at Adam's Rib. Angel's return to town renders her silent. She cannot speak about the destruction that surrounds her.

When she reunites with her friend, Tommy, a boy she met before she journeyed north with her grandmothers, the "silence of deep love" holds the young lovers together. One can envision the continuance of the tribe through Angel, Tommy, and Aurora. When Angel connects with Tommy, she "has no words" (350). They take Aurora to a tribal dance and hold her high above their heads, showing her off to the people. The three "dance the dance where songs were dressed in sunlight, where they walked silver and thin out of sky, out of a distant past" (350).

Although Angel moves into a brighter future, and although it takes "more than a year" for the dam-building to cease (344), Hannah's darkness still haunts the text:

My mother walked out of rifles of our killers. She was born of knives, the skinned-alive beaver and marten and the chewed-off legs of wolves. She hurt me because I was part of her and she hated herself. I think of her last name, Wing, as if she could fly, weightless as a bird catching a current of air. Or, like the wolverine on the rock paintings, perhaps her wings were invisible until they were wet, and then they opened, full and strong. I hoped she lived in a place where she could open those wings with a love she'd never known in life. (345)

Out of unstable and painful beginnings, Angel moves forward, enveloped by her compassion for Hannah and her love for Tommy, whom she marries. Additionally, she finds strength through the kinship of her tribe. Throughout *Solar Storms*, silence, absence, and mystery comprise a language in and of itself. As Tarter contends, the “project, at heart, for Hogan is to reconstruct our notion of language” (145). Thus, the writing “between the lines” (Derrida 86) in Hogan's text reconstructs our concept of silence, absence, and mystery.

Like *Solar Storms*, Hogan's third novel, *Power*, which I discuss in my next chapter, features the same gesture toward a reconstruction of our perception of language. Set in rural Florida, *Power* tracks the conflict between Native Americans, a panther, and the dominant culture, as told through the eyes of a teenage girl. Also like *Solar Storms*, *Power* reveals a bildungsroman structure with a strong focus on human and nonhuman spiritual connections from a Native American perspective.

CHAPTER FIVE: LINDA HOGAN'S *POWER* AND THE MAKAH WHALE HUNT CRISIS

At the intersection of feminist and ecofeminist ethical theory and conventional ethical theory lies a conflict of different perspectives. Relying on the moral authority of the traditional patriarchy is often questioned by feminists and ecofeminists alike. In determining a boundary for feminist ethics, Karen Warren insists that ecofeminism is contextualist. She claims it is “structurally pluralistic rather than unitary, giving central significance to the diversity of women’s voices; it reconceives ethical theory as theory in process, which will vary in relation to its historical and socioeconomic circumstances” (*Ecofeminist Philosophy* 83). Warren also argues that ecofeminism supports oppressed persons’ points-of-view and refuses to take an objective stand in ethical conflicts (*Ecofeminist Philosophy* 83). Yet, there is more to ecofeminism than contextuality; there has to be.

Building relationships between people within and outside of a culture and negotiating on behalf of insiders is certainly a necessary and worthwhile goal of the ecofeminist. Applying ecofeminist ethics to a work of fiction such as Linda Hogan’s *Power* presents a special challenge. Although *Power* appears to position animal rights and native rights in conflict with one another, a look at the bigger picture suggests that the dominant culture is ultimately at odds with both animal and native rights. Centered on the killing of a Florida panther, *Power* speaks volumes about what is absent and what is not said; it allows for the exploration of spaces between worlds. Silence becomes a conduit for answers that until now have never been spoken. Real power resides in life that has been torn away, pushed back, encroached upon, and marginalized. In poetically rendering silence and mystery, Hogan crosses borders, and in doing so she negotiates a space for dialogue between seemingly impassable factions of animal and

native worlds and a dominant culture that appears bent on oppressing, demonizing, and marginalizing animals and natives. Exploring the parallels between the conflict of the panther, the Taiga tribe and Ama in *Power*, and Hogan's real-life involvement in the Makah whale hunt controversy, we see that the subject of ecofeminist ethics becomes a crucial point.

Ethical concerns intersect with Native American perspectives in *Power*. Told through the eyes of a sixteen-year-old American Indian girl, Omishto, the story revolves around the killing of a Florida panther by a member of the fictional Taiga tribe. Ama, Omishto's second cousin and mentor, kills the panther. Her inexplicable action throws many in the small Florida community—native and white—into an uproar. Observations about the panther's disappearing habitat due to massive development in Florida complicate the problem and ensure that no ready-made answers exist.

One of the difficulties in *Power* centers on a right/wrong dichotomy that does not always apply to matters involving indigenous people and environmental concerns. For example, when Ama kills the panther, she is rebuked by white environmentalists, the government, and members of her own tribe. The difference in the focus of the three groups illustrates the problem. The environmentalists object to the killing of the cat, the government opposes the possible breaking of laws, and the Taiga tribe objects to the fact that Ama did not bring the panther's body to them. Omishto thinks about the problems of right and wrong when she attends Ama's courtroom appearance:

The protestors on the left of us are those who have returned to a reverence for animals and they are Americans who want her to go to jail and I would like to say to them that they are right, that it is wrong to kill land, animals, that it was wrong to destroy any of it, even us, but they are the children of those who were alive

from the deaths of others and so I do not look at them even though they are right; they are taking up our beliefs and judging us, and to them I am a monster because for them everything has been so easy, but they do not see themselves or know their own history. (138)

In *Power*, Omishto thinks about panthers and how they have all but disappeared from the wild lands in and around where she lives. She discerns the presence of the cat, and “it feels like space has eyes and ears, and it watches with all its might, listens with ears that can pick up the slightest hint of sound, and it moves slowly, silently”(2). Her sense of the panther calls into question whether she means that it is somewhere in the brush, watching her, or whether its absence from the wild has created a void in the environment, a space that has manifested itself in mystery.

The Florida panther’s numbers have decreased to the point that scientists fear the cat is near extinction (McMullen 380). When a species becomes extinct, a void is created in the ecological balance. Hogan writes of balance, silence, emptiness, and space throughout the novel, and the refrain of absence plays like a silent symphony. A critical reading of *Power*, therefore, would necessarily investigate the importance of absence. Omishto’s feeling of being watched by the unseen panther is a haunting cadence throughout the novel that can be interpreted in many ways, one of which involves an ecofeminist reading.

That Hogan occupies a middle place in environmental and cultural concerns becomes evident during her involvement in the 1996 Makah whale hunt conflict. Certain members of the tribe demanded the right to resume hunting of the great gray whale. The whale's numbers had increased over the years due to governmental protection, and the Makah hunters pushed for a return of the traditional hunt. Because of dissension within the Makah tribe over the petition to

resume hunting the whales, Hogan offered to listen to all sides and put forward suggestions (Gaard, "Tools" 16). Hunters, environmental activists, antiracist whites, and tribal dissenters argued while Hogan listened and mediated.

In "Revaluing Nature" Lori Gruen makes a case for "a richer theory of community" (359). In other words, the tendency to superimpose typically hegemonic, hierarchical Western values on all communities remains problematic and should be avoided. Moving past the potential storm of values assumptions, communities form and thrive within a climate of communication. Dialoging with one another precludes "the desire to talk at or dictate to other members of the community" (Gruen 361). Because of ecological ethics situated within Native American and ecofeminist concerns, an awareness of Hogan's actions during the Makah Whale crisis and her ability to fill the silence created by feminist groups necessitates a closer look at similar conflicts in *Power*. Because of the silence from feminist groups during the whale hunt conflict and the poetically rendered silence in *Power*, an examination of the relevance and effectiveness of the use of silence in environmental fiction becomes necessary.

In *Power*, a passage that makes use of mystery, silence, and space describes the disappearance of wild places: "But we, us Taiga people, haven't run. Instead, silent and nearly invisible, most of us have been pushed up against the wild places, backed against them. And some of them are still there, like a dark corner in the minds of the intruders. I walk as silent as possible toward Ama's" (8). Because Omishto watches Ama defy tradition and go against both her own tribe and the larger culture when she kills the panther, the young girl must occupy the space between two worlds: the traditional Taiga world and the dominant white culture. Omishto's is a culture of waiting and watching; in fact, her name means "one who watches" (4). Her role in the novel is one of border-crosser, and a conflict ensues, but it is a quiet one, taking

place largely within Omishto's mind and the minds of Ama and the elders. Although white environmentalists and lawmakers chime in, their perspectives are largely pushed to the margins. The main concern of the novel is what Omishto observes, suffers, and decides.

Drawing a parallel between the panther crisis in *Power* and the Makah Whale Hunt, we see that the whale controversy attracted a similar mixture of activist groups: anti-whaling organizations, animal rights groups, and individuals protesting cultural essentialism. To give native people a voice and simultaneously acknowledge environmental concerns demands analysis and exploration of social and environmental ethics, not a simplistic, knee-jerk reaction. Such an extreme, reactionary response is illustrated in Omishto's reception at school when she returns. The word "Killer" is painted on her locker door, and whispers of "[t]here she is. Cat Killer" follow her as she walks into class (105). Only sixteen years old, Omishto must span not only time but different worlds in her coming-of-age story. She must cross borders in order to find a place for herself and come to terms with what Ama has done; she must also come to terms with her own silent role in the killing of the panther.

When Omishto watches Ama kill the panther, her suffering has as much to do with the animal's death as with her mentor's perceived crime. As Gaard contends, the "association between native and animal, and their joint oppression under colonization is made all the more painful by the loss between humans and animals" ("Strategies" 93). In *Power*, this loss is a double tragedy. Omishto recalls her mother's story about being lost and then guided home by a red wolf, and she remembers "Janie Soto and one of the other old Taiga women, Annie Hide, telling about how sometimes the animals used to help the humans, how they would teach them the plants that were healing, sing songs for them to learn, how they would show the people the way to renew the broken world" (29). Omishto's strong belief in the animal/human connection

makes the killing of the panther that much more disturbing, and her emotional anguish causes her to feel estranged from Ama. What makes the estrangement more difficult for Omishto involves her love and admiration for Ama:

On the days when Ama is silent, I learn from her stillness. It's not that she's moody. It's not an empty quiet, either, the way it would be with some people. It's a full silence and I like sitting with it and it's a relief from the chattiness of my sister and mom. I can't say what I learn from it; there's no words for it. Words are such noisy things and silence is something you have to listen to and when you do, it takes you by the hand, it catches hold of you. It tells you how to know things, like how sounds travel, where a certain bird is calling from. (19)

Hogan builds Ama's character and shapes the power of poetic imagery with silence. Because Ama embodies silence in *Power*, and because she remains a person Omishto looks up to and follows, her place in the text invites analysis. Additionally, Ama's position within the ecocritical ethics dilemma is pivotal. If not for her killing of the panther and her subsequent silence regarding the reason why, no one would challenge the Taiga tribe to come up with answers to environmental problems that are arguably not their doing. In fact, the tribe has not over-developed Florida to the point of squeezing out the panthers' habitat and bringing the great cat close to extinction; the dominant culture has.

Throughout the text, Ama's silence leaves room for speculation. For example, Omishto narrates a story about Ama's past disappearance. Ama does not divulge where she's been when she returns from a weeks-long absence, and speculation and superstition abound, rendering Ama something of a legend in tribal circles. Some believe she was taken by the "little people" (22). According to tribal lore, the little people kidnap others and teach them about medicines. Other

stories concerning Ama's disappearance involve her murder by a bear and subsequent metamorphosis into a "spirit that changed bodies the way they used to do when people could turn into animals and transform themselves into human shape" (22). Ama's mystery positions her in the center and periphery of the novel at the same time. Unable to determine her exact role in the tribe as well as in white society, no one quite knows what to do with her. Her action drives the novel but her silence puts her somewhere outside explanation. She defers meaning the way Wolverine defies description and, consequently, capture, in *Solar Storms*. The difference between Wolverine and Ama, of course, is that Hogan presents Ama as a real woman, even though members of the tribe think she may be some sort of mystical being. Her banishment from the Taiga clan near the end of the novel situates her in another ambiguous role. Although the thought of living alone in the wilderness would be enough to devastate most people, Ama has lived alone in the swamps before. She can do it again. The question that arises concerns punishment. Is banishment into wild Florida punishment for Ama? Perhaps the greater question is this: should she be punished at all?

What is intriguing about *Power* from an ecological ethics standpoint centers on the parallel between the conflict within the fictional Taiga tribe and the real-life division in the Makah tribe over the whale hunt. In a striking similarity to the panther conflict in *Power*, the Makah tribe has been divided over the killing of whales. Several Makah elders protested, publishing a statement that opposed the hunt. Additionally, seven Makah tribal members attended a 1996 commission in Scotland to protest the whaling (Gaard, "Tools" 4). The disagreement within the tribe and the resulting harassment from pro-hunting factions caused some dissenters to become silent. Unfortunately, members of feminist organizations also avoided involvement, adding to the overall silence. As Gaard asserts, this "silence needs to be broken, for

as the earth's wild places and wild species diminish through the rapacious practices of multinational corporations and the forces of industrial 'development,' the interests of indigenous people, animals, and the environment—interests that Euro-Americans have romanticized as harmoniously intertwined—now seem to be increasingly at odds” (“Tools for a Cross-Cultural Feminist Ethics” 1). From an ecofeminist perspective, the battle over Makah's right to hunt whales and the rights of the animals themselves invites a cross-cultural approach.

Voicing the cross-cultural approach, in a *Seattle Times* editorial, Hogan argues that while Native treaties should be honored, the Makah would benefit by following tribal traditions that are older than the hunting of whales: they should listen to the grandmothers of the tribe. Dottie Chamblin, one of the Makah elders, speaks about "'grandmothers fighting this fight against them [pro-whale-hunting tribal council]. The tribal council issued a memo that nobody was to talk to the newspaper. . . . They wanted to banish those of us who oppose whaling from the reservation. This fear of banishment really stopped a lot of people from helping us'" (qtd. in Peterson B-7). From an ecofeminist viewpoint, reverence of matriarchs holds a long-standing place in many Native American communities. As Andy Smith points out, most native societies were matrilinear. Males did not dominate; rather, they enjoyed equal status regarding division of labor. Additionally, the women of the tribes often held positions of power, both spiritually and militarily. In fact, “violence against women and children was unheard of” before colonialism (“Ecofeminism through an Anticolonial Framework” 22).

From the whales' perspective--as far as anyone can claim to represent them—Makah tribal elder Alberta Thompson suggests that many involved in the conflict “‘haven't reckoned with the spirit of the whale’” (qtd. in Hogan B-9). Peterson also argues for the whales when she so eloquently writes this passage for the *Seattle Times*:

This is really a dialogue much deeper than treaty rights; it is about the connections we make between ourselves, other species and our living world. Let our connection with the whales—from Baja to the Bering Sea—be the human hand and heart, not the harpoon. As we begin a new century, why not listen to the Makah elders, because these grandmothers are speaking bravely and eloquently for other elders of a species more ancient than our own. (B-8)

Tribal silencing of the Makah grandmothers, however, differs from the silencing of the much younger Omishto in *Power*. Omishto maintains her silence by fulfilling her promise to Ama. Strongly encouraged to speak about all aspects of the killing by members of the court and members of the tribe, the young girl does not speak about certain details in order to remain true to herself and her friend. Ama does not want the elders to know about the miserable condition of the panther while it lived. The great cat had been reduced to a “ragged, flea-bitten” creature with “broken teeth” (166). Although she refuses to answer all questions the elders put to her, Omishto is most like the leaders of her tribe when she holds her silence: “From here I can see how the old people sit, quiet and still, almost stiff. In this place where words can lie, their stillness and discomfort is honest, and silence is a kind of truth” (120)

In her understanding of both sides of the conflict, Omishto reveals wisdom beyond her years. Border-crossing for her also means entering the “opening between the worlds,” an opening illustrated by the ancient story of the Panther Clan:

This is how I heard it. Years ago, Panther walked on two feet. A woman lived in the dark swamp of the early world in those days. She was raised by wild animals because her human family had rejected her, but the animals favored her. It was given this woman to keep the world in balance. So she was a person who sang the

sun up in the morning, and if she could do this it would keep the world alive. Like memory, she was there to refresh our thoughts and renew our acts. (110)

In *Power*, the Panther Clan myth goes deeper than tribal legend. Omishto links the ancient story to Ama's killing of the panther when she relates the Taiga belief that "all the hunted, if hunted correctly, would return again" (111). In the legend, the Panther Woman enters the opening between the worlds and witnesses—prophetically--panthers dying of sickness in a terribly damaged environment. The woman follows the panther through the opening between the worlds, and because of the weakened condition of the cats, the panther asks her to kill him. Panther Woman performs the sacrifice so that "all the animals and the panther would come back again and they would be whole" (111).

Connecting the Panther Clan myth to Ama's actions, we can reasonably infer that Hogan creates an ambiguous situation that defies a right or wrong answer. Ama, aware of tribal laws and traditions, kills the panther. In her eyes, perhaps, she performs a service and ensures the survival of only the healthiest panthers. She does not, however, bring the animal's body to the elders of the Panther Clan, thereby violating tribal rule. Therefore, she runs afoul of both Native American culture and white environmental law. White environmental law holds the panther in protected species status; in the dominant culture's eyes, Ama has broken the law. The reason she walks away from the court proceedings without being convicted involves Native American treaties and the tribe's right to hunt.

As stated before in this chapter, Ama occupies a central, yet marginalized place in the novel. Rejected by the white world as well as the tribal elders, Ama holds her silence about the sad condition of the panther she killed. Wanting to shield the clan from the truth about the cat, Ama sacrifices her status in the tribe in order to ensure continuance of the Taiga. Whether she

cares about how whites view her can easily be discerned: Ama does not need the dominant culture's approval, nor does she seek it.

In the opening between worlds, the place where no one willingly goes, Omishto imagines the Taiga myths, the old stories that hold the tribe together. Although she claims to ignore "superstition" (22), Omishto does not invalidate the Taiga myths or, for that matter, her mother's Christianity. Consequently, Omishto is able to coexist in the tribal world and the world of white culture, although by the end of the novel she comes to prefer the traditional tribal ways.

Although her relationship with her mother is somewhat strained, Omishto loves and understands her. Trying for years to pass as white, Omishto's mother engenders a protective and tender pity within her daughter. Omishto is able to cross from the white to the tribal world, and she accepts the love she feels for both her mother and Ama, although they are nearly polar opposites in belief and behavior. Omishto listens to her mother and Ama, and from their words and within her own silence, she makes up her mind.

In much the same way, Hogan is a border-crosser. As Gaard points out, "ecofeminism's critique of dualistic thought and 'truncated narratives' suggests that rather than seeing different perspectives as competing, a more holistic approach would be inclusive of all these layers of relationships, examining the interrelationship between the ethical context and the ethical contents" ("Tools" 7). Ethically, Hogan explored the whole story of the Makah tribe, revealing the fact that in years past there was no whale hunt ritual in their culture. Looking at the how and why of the crisis demands going far enough back in time to get a holistic view of the Makah's practices. In her *Seattle Times* article, Hogan writes:

At the time our treaties were created, we did not foresee the loss of species, large-scale toxicity, the thinning of waters, the deforestation of continents. . . . as

Indians, we have the necessity, the requirement, really, to speak out for both the old people and the old ways. What most tribes shared in common has been the respect for life. In the traditional and historic past, we recognized the sovereignty of other species, animal and plant. We held treaties with the animals, treaties shaped by mutual respect and knowledge of the complex working of the world, and these were laws the legal system can't come close to. That is what gave us our past. That is what the Europeans who arrived here did not have. (B-9)

Although Hogan is a Chickasaw rather than a Makah, she sees matriarchal leaders as bridging the gap between tribal cultures, environmentalists, and the dominant white culture. These women dare to challenge “the ethics of their own traditions” (17). As noted earlier in my thesis, Hogan writes about how the tribal grandmothers spoke powerfully on behalf of the whales when no one else would (B9). Interrogating practices involving unfair human dominance over the rights of animals, nature, and other humans, therefore, should be a characteristic of border-crossing and ethics.

In *Power*, Omishto questions all sides of the conflict:

But I realize the trial is about more than one thing, more than if she's insane or not, if she killed the cat or not, because now they are asking a biologist whether or not it was a true Florida panther and not another species, because if it wasn't it wouldn't be endangered and all she'd have been doing was hunting. And that would open up the laws, make a hole in the law that was to protect. (121)

As the debate becomes more complicated, Omishto resorts to silence, and she begins to think about the panther's culture, and how “[t]hey've never been known to hurt one person yet,

but they will follow you. And no one wants them to eat cattle or dogs. There's no place human wants will let them be" (123). Speaking for the panther rarely happens, especially in the courtroom. Instead, Omishto gives the panther a voice, if only briefly, silently, in her mind:

And on the other side, as if divided by choice, are the native protesters who have come to speak for Ama, and I would like to say to them, too, that it wasn't her right to kill the cat; it's no one's right to take one of those god-damned poor animals, and who in this place will speak out for the panther. (138)

Yet, Omishto feels the pull of her tribe. They are her people, after all. There are no easy answers in this novel. "Again, both sides are wrong, but both sides, also, are right" (138).

As Joni Adamson states in *American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice, and Ecocriticism: The Middle Place*, there is a "middle place that encompasses both nature and culture" (88). The middle place, therefore, stresses knowledge and understanding rather than a right/wrong dichotomy. In Hogan's writing, because she refuses "to grant the reader a simple dichotomy of innocent and good versus evil and corrupt," she opens up a space for diversity "of forms of resistance" (Murphy 184). Consequently, when facing a conflict like the one in *Power*, Omishto's knowledge of native culture is most important, and because the novel is a coming-of-age story, Omishto's discovery of her heritage becomes that much more relevant. She occupies a middle place through most of the story because she doesn't demonize anyone, except for Herm, her stepfather. Herm eyes Omishto up and down like she's a piece of meat, but he does not have anything to do with the main conflict of the novel.

Omishto's compassion for her mother--who runs from her ancestry--ties in with her understanding of white culture, and as a result she does not point fingers of blame at anyone.

Crossing borders, she begins to realize the power of unseen forces, the mystery of invisible energies, for which we have no explanation. Jacqueline Shea Murphy contends that Omishto, and “through her we as readers—start to see that meaning that isn’t spelled out or clearly stated, information that’s withheld, can play as vital a part in the story of renewal as what is clearly explained” (3).

Meaning that isn’t spelled out brings us to the mysterious power that travels through the novel like a whisper, like the breath of life: the power which inhabits the space left by the panther. The absence created by the disappearance of the cat has caused a void in the balance of the world, and as Ama says, “there are other worlds beside us all the time and every now and then we cross over and enter one, and every so often, too, one passes over and enters ours” (55). After it is gone, the panther has “power over us, some kind of sway” (74). The space it inhabited “is crying out with emptiness” (184). Power is also breathed out by trees, and as a result, “there is no such thing as emptiness in our world, only the fullness of the unseen. It is the sea of creation we live inside. We are tossed about in its currents alongside the panther,” and the power of silence and mystery merges with the power of the unseen (178). How much longer can the unseen in the environment and the power of the animals within be ignored by the dominant culture?

Like the Florida panther, the great gray whale has been protected by laws passed to ensure its survival. Now that the whales’ numbers have increased (unlike the dwindling panthers’), some members of the Makah tribe feel it is time to resume the hunt. A bitter conflict has opened up between environmentalists, the hunters, and the members of the tribe in opposition to the hunt. Yet, a dialogue between environmentalists protesting the killing of the whales and the Makah hunters should be a spiritual one (Peterson B7). An ethical approach

demands a holistic view of the Makah culture as well as the culture of the whale and the songs it has sung for millions of years. Because the whale is traditionally seen by the tribe as not only a source of subsistence but also of spirituality, the Makah crisis is very much like the crisis in *Power*. The hide and claws of the panther are used by the clan as more than mere trophies. The connection between the panther and the tribe is a powerfully spiritual relationship because the cat is “god-like, all powerful” and it is the “animal that came here before us and taught us the word, Oni, which is the word for life itself, for wind and breath” (73). Mysterious and elusive, the panther represents more than just an entry on the endangered list.

For the ecofeminist, negotiating a space within and outside of cultures is a necessary and worthwhile pursuit. In this pursuit of ethical positioning, the power of border-crossing, silence, and mystery is interconnected within and outside of fiction and non-fiction texts, sometimes blurring the lines between categories. As we explore the parallels between *Power* and the Makah whale hunt crisis, place becomes a land without impassable borders. As Buell contends, “Every place signifies; every place, every creature has a story connected with it that forms a web of significance (always in process, not a constant) within which human thought assumes form and meaning” (287). In Hogan’s *Power*, the story becomes a conduit through which characters and readers cross boundaries to awareness and understanding of many of the most important issues of our time. Awareness comes when we realize that one of the most important issues of our time centers on the interconnectedness of all life, which guarantees our being affected by the absence of a species.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Throughout *Mean Spirit*, *Solar Storms*, and *Power*, Hogan uses silence, absence, and mystery to articulate her characters' inner lives. As cultural and environmental changes destabilize the natives' daily existence and endanger their ways of life, Hogan uses poetic imagery to inform the texts and provide a way to open up new worlds of interpretation. Each of the novels features Native Americans as major characters, and each novel shows influence from true stories regarding cultural and ecological crises. Hogan's narrators attempt to negotiate these crises, and in some cases, they struggle to remain alive through the dominant culture's marginalization and oppression of their ways of life. In order to negotiate their places in the world, the characters of *Mean Spirit*, *Solar Storms*, and *Power* use silence to foster transition, healing, and continuity.

Turning first to *Mean Spirit*, we can discern that the narrative benefits from a multi-voiced perspective. No single character emerges as the main protagonist, although much of the focus remains on Belle Graycloud. By featuring various perspectives and voices, Hogan creates a powerful depiction of great numbers of people affected by corrupt business and governmental practices. Because of the oil-rich land in Oklahoma on which the natives have lived for so long, local businessmen and authorities participate in dishonesty, thievery, and murder in order to take over the land and extract profits. Additionally, governmental agencies contribute to the overall marginalization and oppression of the natives. One method of oppression involves the silencing of native voices. When members of the Osage community are murdered, the authorities use silencing tactics in order to convince the natives that nothing can be done. Additionally, authorities perpetuate silence in the form of veiled threats against the Osage. Silencing witnesses and people who have information about the murders contributes to fear, frustration, and anxiety.

Because of such leaders as Belle Graycloud, Michael Horse, and Joe Billy, the Osage band together and realize the crimes being committed against them begin with silence. Although the final trial involving the worst of the businessmen does not bring justice to those who were swindled and murdered, the natives garner strength and courage through reconnection with ancient tribal beliefs and ways. The silent world of the old traditions and the connection of the Osage people with nonhuman life build a strong resistance to the dominant culture. In a way, the natives take the forced silence used against them and turn it back on local and national government. By keeping to the old ways and traditions and rejecting the whites' destructive, despicable, and foolish exploitation of people and the environment, the Osage survive.

Because *Mean Spirit* begins by looking at assimilated natives who dye their hair, dress like whites, and squander the money they receive from their oil-rich lands, Hogan sets up an opposition between the falseness of turning away from a rich cultural heritage and the ultimate peace of mind and survival of those who return to tribal traditions. Mystery and silence reinforce the power of the unseen, the unknown, and the unspoken. In the end, the silence that serves to oppress and endanger the Osage becomes a way to form lasting bonds between members of the tribe and, ultimately, the environment they will call home in the future. One gets the feeling that wherever the Osage go, they bring with them a strong native community based on beliefs and practices that have lasted thousands of years.

Like *Mean Spirit*, *Solar Storms* focuses on cultural damage that manifests itself in the aftermath of forced environmental changes. For Angel, the first-person narrator, life has played out in a series of foster homes. Additionally, the mystery of her scarred face preoccupies her and haunts the text. Again, silence and mystery play major roles in the story. Also, like *Mean Spirit*, *Solar Storms* is inspired by true events. In *Solar Storms*, the environmental conflict centers on

native resistance against the James Bay Hydroelectric Project. While the massive project gets underway, Angel and her family become involved in protests against the government. While they journey to the north in search of Angel's birth mother, the family reconnects with native traditions, and Angel discovers the astonishing power of silence in the Canadian wilderness. Mystery and absence fuse together in a poetic, haunting mix of native mythologies, legends about Angel's abusive mother, and the family's extensive local history. Reunited with her birthplace and her mother, Angel enters the power of silence and draws strength and continuance through compassion. Hogan sets up a link between Angel's newly-learned connection with the biosphere and her resolution to forgive her mother for past abuse. In addition, Hogan juxtaposes Angel's scarred face with environmental abuse committed against humans and non-humans, culminating in the retrospective narration of Hannah's abuse of Angel as a child.

As she does in *Mean Spirit*, Hogan ends *Solar Storms* with an open-ended possibility of interpretation. Although Angel and her family fail to stop the initial building of dams and the ensuing biospherical and cultural damage, her marriage to Tommy and her commitment to Aurora combine to form a picture of tribal strength and continuance. Like the natives in *Mean Spirit*, the tribal people in *Solar Storms* build a community based on ancient wisdom and tradition born of an indestructible reverence and connection with all life. As she completes her journey, Angel silently connects with her native heritage and the living world at the same time. In *Dwellings*, Hogan describes the deep canopy of silence under which kinship communities form:

There is a still place, a gap between worlds, spoken by the tribal knowings of thousands of years. In it are silent flyings that stand aside from human struggles and the designs of our own makings. At times, when we are silent enough, still

enough, we take a step into such mystery, the place of spirit, and mystery, we must remember, by its very nature does not wish to be known. (20)

Respect for the right of non-human life to exist on its own terms informs Hogan's novels. Power engendered by silence and mystery thrives in places where human interference is limited or absent. Although the characters in Hogan's novels interact with animal and plant life, they do so without destroying the balance necessary to sustain ecological systems. Instead of seeing non-human life as the "other," the Native Americans in Hogan's texts see each living being as "another" (Murphy "Anotherness and Answerability" 3). By following their beliefs in kinship systems, Hogan's characters survive through environmental and cultural crises in order to take their resistance against the dominant culture into the future.

As in *Mean Spirit* and *Solar Storms*, the natives in *Power* find themselves in a position of opposition against the dominant culture. Like the narrator in *Solar Storms*, the primary character in *Power* is a teenaged girl. The young native girl, Omishto, must come to terms with a situation that echoes real-life events. Specifically, the killing of a Florida panther in *Power* creates a conflict of animal and cultural rights that resounds in the factual Makah Whale Hunt crisis. A close reading of *Power* necessitates an examination of real-life resolutions in cases where natives and environmental activists oppose one another. Because of Hogan's involvement and subsequent call for cross-cultural solutions in the whale conflict, my reading of *Power* situates the novel within the ongoing struggle to find a common ground of discourse within Native American and ecocritical communities confronted by ethical dilemmas. My purpose in this cross-reading is not an attempt to find an easy answer. Rather, I use multiple critics and factual events in order to open the possibility of additional paths and approaches.

In addition to critical perspectives involving historical events, ecofeminist and ecopsychological analyses support my thesis. Because of Hogan's depiction of matriarchal communities, specifically in *Solar Storms* and *Power*, ecofeminist perspectives shed light on the difference between indigenous Americans' kinship systems and Eurocentric attitudes of superiority over natives, women, and non-humans. The result of the dominant culture's damage to native communities and the environment causes tremendous pain and anguish for the characters. Ecofeminist approaches strengthen the contention that women and nature suffer from oppression. In the end, the women within the texts and their negotiation of the crises in which they find themselves demonstrate great power.

In view of ecopsychological approaches, the interdependence of human and non-human life reveals profound sadness and loss on all sides when the biosphere is threatened and damaged. Hogan's characters live through psychic pain and suffering. An ecopsychological analysis, therefore, allows us to come to terms with how the mind structures and controls the ways in which one acts within a geographically situated context. I think that the application of ecopsychology serves to broaden our understanding of the life-threatening situations Hogan's characters often experience.

Turning to another critical approach, the reader may note that because of Hogan's use of silence, absence, and mystery, her novels lend themselves to deconstruction. Especially in *Solar Storms* and *Power*, deconstructive approaches open the readings and question the motivations of characters who reside in the margins of the text. Wolverine's indeterminate identity and Ama's mysterious persona enrich the novels while they disseminate meaning. The absence/presence of Wolverine creates a clear path to Derrida's theory, which then refracts any notion of stabilization. Like sunset-haunted clouds, changing shape and color as the eye takes them in,

Wolverine and Ama defy expectations. They remain among the most fascinating characters in Hogan's work.

From the oil fields of Oklahoma to the icy lakes of the Canadian border to the swamplands of Florida, Hogan's novels encompass a broad sweep of Native American territories. Within the silence of her characters' lives, a silence often caused by genocide and oppression, Hogan combines fiction with non-fiction. She blurs the boundaries between fictional narrative and history. Revealing human and non-human worlds that survive under a cloak of silence and mystery, Hogan ultimately clears a space for alternative approaches within an environment that is increasingly under attack from overdevelopment and greed. Her work has never been more relevant than it is today.

Although Hogan's writing opens itself up to many critical approaches, I have restricted myself to the four methods outlined in Chapter One. Therefore, in narrowing the scope of my thesis, I hope I have succeeded in presenting a sufficient close reading of *Mean Spirit*, *Solar Storms*, and *Power* within the limited space the project requires. My aim has been to illustrate the various ways in which silence, absence, and mystery enrich Hogan's novels and generate ecocritical discourse. At the same time, my goal has been to expand the ways in which we move toward an understanding of the interdependence of all living systems. In the words of Jacques Derrida, "are other paths not possible?" (*Of Grammatology* 161).

LIST OF REFERENCES

- Adamson, Joni. *American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice, and Ecocriticism: The Middle Place*. Tucson: U of Arizona P, 2001.
- Baird, W. David. *The Osage People*. Ed. John I. Griffin. Phoenix: Indian Tribal Series, 1972.
- Buell, Lawrence. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. Cambridge: Belknap-Harvard U P, 1995.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1997.
- Fisher, Andy. *Radical Ecopsychology: Psychology in the Service of Life*. Albany: SUNY P, 2002.
- Gaard, Greta. "Strategies for a Cross-Cultural Ecofeminist Ethics: Interrogating Tradition, Preserving Nature." *New Essays in Ecofeminist Literary Criticism*. Ed. Glynnis Carr. Lewisburg: Bucknell U P, 2000. 82-101.
- . "Tools for a Cross-Cultural Feminist Ethics: Exploring Ethical Contexts and Contents in the Makah Whale Hunt." *Hypatia* 16.1 (2001): 1-23. *Literature Resource Center*. 1 July 2005 <<http://galenet.com.ucfproxy.fcla.edu>>.
- Glissant, Edouard. "Cross-Cultural Poetics." *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*. Trans. J. Michael Dash. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1999. 97-119.
- Greenwald, Emily. *Reconfiguring the Reservation: The Nez Perces, Jicarilla Apaches, and the Dawes Act*. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 2002.
- Gruen, Lori. "Revaluing Nature." *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*. Ed. Karen Warren. Bloomington: Indiana U P, 1997. 356-370.

- Hogan, Linda. *Dwellings: A Spiritual History of the Living World*. New York: Touchstone, 1995.
- . *Mean Spirit*. New York: Ivy, 1990.
- . *Power*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1998.
- . "Silencing Tribal Grandmothers: Traditions, Old Values at Heart of Makah's Clash Over Whaling." *The Seattle Times* 15 Dec. 1996. B9-10.
- . *Solar Storms*. New York: Scribner, 1995.
- . "Walking." *Listening to Earth*. Ed. Christopher Hallowell and Walter Levy. New York: Pearson Longman, 2005. 207-210.
- Jameson, Fredric. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981.
- McAuliffe Jr., Dennis. *Bloodland: A Family Story of Oil, Greed, and Murder on the Osage Reservation*. San Francisco: Council Oak, 1994.
- McMullen, James P. *Cry of the Panther: Quest of a Species*. Sarasota: Pineapple Press, 1984.
- Murphy, Patrick D. *Farther Afield in the Study of Nature-Oriented Literature*. Charlottesville: University P of Virginia, 2000.
- . "Grounding Anotherness and Answerability Through Allonational Ecoliterature Formations." *Literature, Culture, Environment: Positioning Ecocriticism*. Ed. Sylvia Mayer and Catrin Gersdorf. Amsterdam: Rodopi, forthcoming 2006.
- Otis, D.S. *The Dawes Act and the Allotment of Indian Lands*. Ed. Francis Paul Prucha. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1973.
- Peterson, Brenda. "Who Will Speak for the Whales? Elders Call for a Spiritual Dialogue on Makah Tribe's Whaling Proposal." *The Seattle Times* 22 Dec. 1996. B7-8.

- Rainwater, Catherine. "Intertextual Twins and Their Relations: Linda Hogan's *Mean Spirit* and *Solar Storms*." *Modern Fiction Studies*. 45.1 (1999) 93-113. Project Muse. 2 Feb. 2006. <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/modern_fiction_studies/v045/45.1rainwater.htm>.
- Schultermandl, Silvia. "Fighting for the Mother/Land: An Ecofeminist Reading of Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms*." *Studies in American Indian Literatures*. 17.3 (2005): 67-84.
- Smith, Ernest. "'The Inside of Lies and History': Linda Hogan's Poetry of Conscience. *From the Center of Tradition: Critical Perspectives on Linda Hogan*. Ed. Barbara J. Cook. Boulder: U of Colorado P, 2003.121-134.
- Spretnak, Charlene. "Radical Nonduality in Ecofeminist Philosophy." *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*. Ed. Karen J. Warren. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1997. 425-436.
- Tanner, Adrian. "Culture, Social Change, and Cree Opposition to the James Bay Hydroelectric Development." *Social and Environmental Impacts of the James Bay Hydroelectric Project*. Ed. James F. Hornig. Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 1999. 121-138.
- Tarter, Jim. "'Dreams of Earth: Place, Multiethnicity, and Environmental Justice in Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms*." *Reading Under the Sign of Nature: New Essays in Ecocriticism*. Ed. John Tallmadge and Henry Harrington. Salt Lake City: U of Utah P, 2000. 128-145.
- Walter, Eugene Victor. *Placeways: A Theory of the Human Environment*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1988
- Warren, Karen J., ed. *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*. Bloomington: Indiana U P, 1997.
- . *Ecofeminist Philosophy: a Western Perspective on What it is and Why it Matters*. Lanham, MD: Rowman-Littlefield, 2000.