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Linda Hogan: Calling Us Home

Betty Louise Bell, Guest Editor

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Calling Myself Home

Linda Hogan

There were old women
who lived on amber.
Their dark hands
laced the shells of turtles
together, pebbles inside
and they danced
with rattles strong on their legs.

There is a dry river
between them and us.
Its banks divide up our land.
Its bed was the road
I walked to return.
We are plodding creatures

like the turtle
born of an old people.
We are nearly stone
turning slow as the earth.
Our mountains are underground
they are so old.

This land is the house
we have always lived in.
The women,
their bones are holding up the earth.
The red tail of a hawk
cuts open the sky
and the sun

brings their faces back
with the new grass.

Dust from yarrow
is in the air,
the yellow sun.
Insects are clicking again.

I came back to say good-bye
to the turtle
to those bones
to the shells locked together
on his back,
gold atoms dancing underground.

Introduction:

Linda Hogan's Lessons in Making Do

Betty Louise Bell

"We make art out of our loss." —Linda Hogan

Linda Hogan's poetry and prose concerns itself with the detritus of loss and the need to take and create life from the remnants of personal and cultural histories. In her work, there is no possible return to Native American lives and cultures before colonization: the heroism and future of Native Americans is in their capacity for *making do*. By no means is the art of making do an ignoble or unworthy act, an unnecessary compromise of passion and belief for continued survival, but a recognition of ordinary lives, the lives of Native Americans, fragmented and forever effected by extraordinary losses. The survival of tribal peoples is not located in continuous, isolated acts of recovery but in adaptations to loss that discover continuity and affirm life.

Indian Country in Hogan's work is the land she knows and loves: the Red Earth of Oklahoma. From chickens to oil, the reader inhabits the land of removal: pick-up trucks and stomp dances, rodeos and powwows, family histories and cultural histories in a tight, neverending weave from one generation to the next. Oklahoma was the destination for those tribes removed from their homelands in the Nineteenth Century, and it became Indian Territory, a land dedicated to tribal peoples, before becoming the Sooner State. Oklahoma Indians are, as are all indigenous peoples, adept at loss.

Linda Hogan and I grew up in towns about fifteen miles apart in southwestern Oklahoma. There, the people were mostly farmers—or more accurately tenant farmers—living self-reliant, inventive lives, and making what poverty prevented them from buying: lye soap, bathtub beer, and quilts. These quilts had nothing in common with the decorative aesthetic of contemporary folk art. They were

made from odd strips of old dresses and overalls, old curtains and flour sacks layered and sewn together by hand, piece by piece. Like generations of Indian women before them, they took the worn, the castoff, the handy and created use, beauty, and warmth from them. In this way, Linda Hogan has made her own elegant quilt from ordinary Indian lives in twentieth-century America. Story by story, poem by poem, it holds ruggedly together, with the enduring beauty and eloquence of a common yet complex cloth.

By chance, all the contributors to this volume are women. Native and non-Native, we began with Hogan's poetry and prose, finding in it pieces of our own lives and professional interests. From the MLA panel in Toronto to the present issue, this effort has been inspired by an admiration and respect for Linda Hogan's work. Kathryn Shanley and Kimberley Blaeser read original and provocative papers on Hogan's work at the MLA panel, and I regret that their papers are not included in this issue.

Significantly, we begin with the breaking of boundaries in an essay by Peggy Maddux Ackerberg. It is in the refusal to be contained or known within boundaries—race, class, gender, and genre—that Ms. Ackerberg locates the act of Linda Hogan's coming to writing. She centers her argument in the strategies women writers use to smash narratives of experience and culture that have served to silence difference. Ms. Ackerberg, currently working on a transatlantic study of Native American images exchanged between New France and France, offers insights (and breaks a few genres herself) into Hogan's acts as woman writer through the lens of the nineteenth-century French poet Marceline Desbordes-Valmore. Ms. Ackerberg's question "From what *grounds* can Hogan desire to write?" becomes the question considered in the remaining essays. And her answer, "Literally, no grounds at all, it seems," is the challenge to every indigenous writer in the creation of *home* and *place*.

Hogan's novel, *Mean Spirit*, is the common subject of four of the essays. The Graycloud's exile becomes the opportunity for an ingenious postcolonial discussion of home and place in Elizabeth Blair's essay; Andrea Musher does a meticulous reading of resistance and regeneration in Sorrow Cave; Anna Carew-Miller invites us to consider the communion between caretaking and work in the novel; and Alix Casteel convincingly argues the commodification and exploitation of the Osage. Whether the contributors rely on feminist, postcolonial, or materialist readings for their arguments, all honor Linda Hogan's words not only to inform their arguments but to illuminate ways of being within the world.

It would be difficult to privilege any theoretical practice in a reading of Hogan's works. Often, as our essays demonstrate, such

application is interrupted by Hogan swerving from the expected narrative. For instance, an important departure from the works of other indigenous writers is Hogan's refusal to equate removal from the land with the loss of land and community. In *Mean Spirit*, the Grayclouds endure, as Ms. Blair argues, "landless, but not loveless," taking not only their lives into exile but also the living and constant possible recreation of home and community. The Grayclouds, like all tribal peoples, frustrate attempts at extinction and destruction with the very fact of their lives.

The following essays do not discuss the controversial response to Hogan's use of Osage history in her novel. As a Chickasaw, she wrote of Osage experience and as a novelist, she dared to rewrite history. These criticisms are founded on the grounds of experience: only an Osage can tell the story of the greedy destruction of the Osage, and a story, if founded on history, must rely completely on history as its muse. In *Mean Spirit*, Hogan courageously creates a pan-Indian community brought together by a shared history of sorrow and struggle and a belief in the sanctity of the land. Like Wounded Knee or the Trail of Tears, the Osage tragedy serves, without diminishment or distortion, as a metaphor for the attempted devastation of tribal peoples.

Hogan has been criticized for her deviation from some historical *facts* in *Mean Spirit*. This assumes that there is a sole and accurate historical narrative to every event and that truth resides only in that narrative. In fact, to the advantage of all peoples once absent from History, the privileged voice of History has long been reduced to its narrative form and intent. It is just another way of telling a story. As a Native American woman, Hogan knows the dangers of complicity with History; as a writer, she insists on the primacy of the imagination. Few literary scholars would complain of Dickens' historical representation of London. Why, then, are such complaints filed against a Native American woman writer? Are Native American literatures still obliged to be *real* historical, ethnographic glimpses into other cultures? By combining the authorities of experience and imagination, Linda Hogan claims the rights of every writer and propels Native American literatures into a new century of self-creation.

This volume is dedicated to Linda Hogan, for her gifts of wisdom and courage. The project has been informed by love and enthusiasm for her work by all involved in it.

And blessings, Linda, for inspiring us with the lessons of *making do*.

Breaking Boundaries: Writing Past Gender, Genre, and Genocide in Linda Hogan

Peggy Maddux Ackerberg

May all the walls be like those of the jungle,
filled with animals
singing into the ears of night
Let them be
made of the mysteries further in
in the heart, joined with the lives of all,
all bridges of flesh
all singing,
all covering the wounded land
showing again, again
that boundaries are all lies.¹

"Boundaries are all lies." If there is one message that rings loud and clear to me throughout Hogan's writing, this is it. Despite, or perhaps *because* of the various intertwined concerns and reflections that Hogan weaves together in her writing, she stubbornly clings to her concern for breaking boundaries. And why shouldn't she? She's had to break so many. Hogan weaves her boundary-breaking imperative throughout her poetry, fiction, essays, and interviews: the imperative to break, break down, break open, break out and break free ("Women"). In a recent radio interview, Hogan states that she "work[s] at trying to break down boundaries. I spent years of my life creating walls and at a certain point decided I didn't want walls. I wanted to take them apart piece by piece" ("Contemporary Writers"). What does it mean in Hogan's world and writing to break down boundaries? On an immediate, existential level, it means daring to throw off inner and outer constraints that join together to forbid her to write. For Hogan these constraints are multiple and complex. Both inner and outer

constraints stem from, among other things, Hogan's lack of exposure to the benefits that come with privilege, one of these benefits being a formal education. In her autobiographical essay "The Two Lives," Hogan describes her working-class upbringing and her rather late arrival on the college scene: "I went to college as an older student. I had years of work experience behind me. I started work at fifteen as a nurse's aide in Hill Haven Nursing Home, where there were rats and where we aides laundered the sheets and diapers of the patients at 4:00 a.m. I felt fortunate to have this 75-cents-an-hour job. I did not know how many other girls prepared for college at that age, did not work full time. It was never mentioned to me that I might go to college, although my mother did try to convince me not to quit high school. I was engaged young and I wanted to get married. I didn't know anyone who went to college, or even what it was" ("Two Lives" 244). In an interview entitled "A Heart Made Out of Crickets," Hogan stakes out literature as an unfamiliar territory in her life except for a brief brush with poetry in high school:

I had never read any literature. Maybe some magazines. When I was thirteen or fourteen, I liked those true stories and true romance magazines that are still popular with working class girls and women. But, no! I was never interested in anything that had to do with literature or scholarly work. I did go to public school, and they did try to make me learn what a verb was . . . I wrote a poem when I was in high school. What I did was I looked up words in the dictionary, using words like "cherubim" and "seraphim." It must have been good because I was a poor student, and I was accused of plagiarism by the teacher. ("A Heart" 108-09).

Her quality work is automatically assumed by the teacher to be the result of foul play—hardly an incentive to pursue poetry, or for that matter, education. It isn't that Hogan outwardly rejects college, it's simply that it never occurs to her that college is an option for her. In true Native tradition, Hogan is very adept, a little too adept perhaps, at making do and admits that "[w]e often settle for very little because it seems like so much to us. . . . We assume we are lucky to be doing so well" ("Two Lives" 237). No literary mentor. No literary role model. No formal education. In short, no qualifications or credentials to enter into the sacred garden of literature. By what *right* does a woman without qualifications and credentials desire to *write*? No *right* at all, it seems. But, as we all know, desire is precisely what doesn't ask whether it has a *right* to exist.

So, one might ask: How *did* she find her way to writing? At this

point, I'd like to juxtapose the genesis of Hogan's poetic practice with that of another poet, Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, one of the most prolific nineteenth-century French poets. This is, in no way, an attempt to make a global comparison between Hogan and Desbordes-Valmore, but rather to simply look at what I think can be called the primal scene of poetic practice of each of these women poets, from two different centuries, two different continents, two different cultures—but who, both, seem to be able to transgress into the traditionally male-dominated genre of poetry despite an apparent lack of training or qualifications. In an article entitled "Gender and Poetry: Charles Baudelaire and Marceline Desbordes-Valmore," Barbara Johnson analyzes an autobiographical letter wherein Desbordes-Valmore writes of her seemingly fortuitous beginnings as a poet. Desbordes-Valmore writes:

At age twenty, profound sufferings obliged me to give up singing, because my voice made me cry; but music still rolled about in my fevered head, and regular measures always arranged my ideas, without my thinking about it. I was forced to write them down in order to free myself from this feverish beat, and someone told me I had written an elegy. Mr. Alibert, who was nursing my frail health, advised me to write as a cure, since he could think of no other remedy. I tried it, without having read or learned anything at all. (Johnson 166)

Barbara Johnson then goes on to point out that

[f]ar from grabbing the pen out of the patriarch's hands, Desbordes-Valmore goes to great lengths to depict her birth as a writer as a kind of victimization: she couldn't help it, didn't want it, didn't know what to call it, didn't think about it, and had no qualifications for it, but, since the doctor couldn't cure her any other way, she had to take his advice. Otherwise she would have gone on being a bother. Nowhere does her "I" appear as an active, knowing, desiring subject. (166)

Now, let's look at what I think can be called the primal scene of Hogan's poetic practice. When Hogan finally did begin to write poetry, she was in her late twenties and worked at a school for orthopedically handicapped children. Hogan says:

I thought all poetry was written by dead people, and, that it all had to do with ravens that say "Never more." I was never interested in books. But on my lunch hours I wanted to get away from the school. There was a little place out in the woods where I could sit. I sat there and

I was very quiet . . . Then I got a hold of the collected works of Rexroth. I read this poem about a cow and I thought, "Wow, I could write like that; you don't have to rhyme or anything," and I started writing . . . ("A Heart" 108)

Miraculous metamorphosis. Unlike Desbordes-Valmore, Hogan cannot grab the patriarch's pen fast enough. Rather than waiting for poetry to come to her, *she* "got a hold" of *it*. Rather than waiting for the patriarch to bestow upon her his blessing to enter the sacred garden of poetry, *she* authorizes *herself*. She thought "Wow, I could write like that," and she started writing. No hesitation. No apology. No accident. Just desire. The desire to write can even take apart the double wall of gender and genre.

So, one might ask: What fuels Hogan's desire to write? Hogan's writing is fueled by loss, foreignness, and death; by giving, love, and life; and by all of the above and being a woman—a Native American woman. As the female protagonist in the essay entitled "Making Do" puts it: "Us Chickasaws have lost so much we hold on to everything. Even our muscles hold on to their aches. We love our lovers long after they are gone, better than when they were present. . . . We make art out of our loss" (194-95). The kind of loss Hogan writes about spans generations and finds its way into her world and writing through the attempted genocide of a people and their culture, land loss, and an economic genocide that continues to plague Indians today. Hogan's grandmother, who was a big influence in her life, went to the Bloomfield Chickasaw Girls' School. She was trained there, as Hogan puts it,

to be a lady—they taught violin there. It was like a finishing school for Indian girls. They had big plans about what they were going to do with all the Indians in that part of the country and they were "civilizing" everyone. No more "Indian problem." So, she learned to play the violin and she could play classical music. She learned how to play the piano and she learned how to have good manners. Then she spent the rest of her life living in small rural places with outhouses and selling eggs in town. It was not because they didn't work hard, but because of policies that allowed for the removal of every single thing my grandparents created for themselves. . . . [Hogan's grandmother] always knew that nothing material in the world would ever belong to her. That the government or other agencies could come in and take whatever they wanted, whenever they wanted . . . White people are shocked when their homes are taken away.

It's unjust. But Indians have known that in their DNA.
 ("To Take Care" 125-27).

Hogan's family was one of the Chickasaw families that were foreclosed upon during the Thirties by the government, by the banks, and who lost everything else in bank closings. Hogan explains that

they were taken advantage of by loans, just as is happening now, and has also been happening in this part of the country [the Upper Midwest] for some time. For Indian people, you could almost say it was another death, another destruction of Indian people, or a step toward that—the people being hungry, and having the banks come out and offer to loan them money—and, at that time, people were desperate. And they would of course take the money, because you had to survive for the *now*, and they were all unable to pay back, and they lost their land, and that's the history of land loss among that particular Chickasaw and Choctaw people. That's why it is a landless tribe. There is no reservation, and I really know of no one who still has their original allotment. (Interview 146)

From what *grounds* can Hogan desire to write? Literally, no *grounds* at all, it seems. Just that nagging desire to make art out of loss. Writing is Hogan's materiality and no bank or government agency can remove it.

Hogan's desire to write is also fueled by the nourishing and ordering effects of words and language. "[O]ne life does not fit neatly into the other always [and] [c]reative work is a way to order it" ("To Take Care" 123). When asked what influenced her to write poetry, Hogan recalls that while living in Washington, D.C. she wasn't around an Indian community. She says: "I was married and was only with working-class white people and two friends from Venezuela. The poetry writing was very important to me. It was a way of trying to define who I was in an environment that felt foreign. I realize now that writing had everything to do with my life and my survival" ("To Take Care" 121). In Hogan's novel, *Mean Spirit*, the nourishing and ordering qualities of language are expressed by Belle Graycloud when Grace Blanket, the richest person in the Territory, is mysteriously murdered. *Mean Spirit* is set in the 1920s in Oklahoma Indian Territory and many of the Osage Indians have become instantly wealthy after, in hopes of finding water on their dried up, barren land, they have discovered oil, and that's when the trouble begins. Grace Blanket has been mysteriously murdered and the next day Belle Graycloud tries to make sense out of senselessness:

"It's so strange, you know. We act like it's any day, like our daily chores are planted in us with long roots, like a devil's claw in a field of wheat. You'd think time would stop when someone gets killed. But the house settled all night, and creaked, and this morning I set a platter of eggs on the table, Moses drank his tea, and Lettie came downstairs wearing one of her hats." Horse stirred the fire while he listened to Belle. He knew she was using words as a road out of pain and fear. (33)

For Belle Graycloud, as for Hogan, words and language are her comfort zone. Not to be overlooked in the novel is the significance of the last item that Lettie removed from Grace Blanket's opulent home after the murder. While choosing *not* to take the crystal, the cut glass, the European furniture, or even the sun-blistered piano, Lettie is sure to not leave without Grace's typewriter: "Horse would like it, Lettie knew. He'd put it to good use" (49). And put it to good use he does. Michael Horse accepts the responsibility of recording the atrocities being committed against the Indians by Washington, D.C. agents who are sent to the town of Watona to teach the Indians the "cultured, civilized ways of the Americans" (36). The narrator tells us:

Horse knew that they had ideas about Indians, that [the Indians] were unschooled, ignorant people who knew nothing about life or money. But whenever an Indian didn't fit their vision, the clerks and agents became afraid. That was why Michael Horse . . . always remained silent in the presence of the men from Washington. If they knew he kept a journal of all the events in Watona, and if they knew he had translated three languages back and forth during the Boxer Rebellion in China, they would have found a way to cut him down to the size they wanted him to be, and he knew it. Not that all of them were bad. Far from it. Nevertheless, Horse was afraid to even let them see that he had three gold teeth because he knew some of them were so greedy they'd find a reason to pull them out of his head, so he kept his mouth closed and his ears wide open. (60)

The character of Michael Horse, then, is really the *mise en abyme* for Hogan's project of documenting history so that it will continue to include past and future generations and so that Native American history and cultures can break out of silence and defeat. Breaking the language boundary, Horse translates three languages during the Boxer Rebellion, facilitating communication between the colonizer and the colonized. In turn, Hogan's writing facilitates communication between Indians and

non-Indians alike. Breaking canonical boundaries, Horse rewrites the Bible by inserting what he thinks is missing from its pages. In turn, Hogan breaks the boundary of the literary canon by inserting what *she* thinks is missing from *its* pages. When asked by the oldest Indian woman what he had written, Horse hesitates,

but he went inside and took papers from within the cedar trunk. Some of the words were written neatly in the script Horse had learned in China. Other pages were typed. "First I have to tell you about the book they call the Bible. It is a holy book for the European people, like those who live in the towns. It carries visions, commandments, and songs. I've added what I think is missing from its pages." One of the younger women interrupted him. "Why can't you just speak it?" "They don't believe anything is true unless they see it in writing." Then he explained to the many listeners, "You know all this. It's very simple. That's why it took me so long to write it." (361)

As we all know, writing the simple is often the most difficult. For Hogan to write her own personal experience, it's not that there's simply no way to write it, but rather there's no *simple* way to write it—and that is precisely why it took her so long.

The nourishing qualities of words and language carry over from the written page into Hogan's world. She says: "When I go to a conference for Indian women and I'm sitting in the audience and one of the speakers says, 'There's Linda Hogan, the poet, and we're so proud that Indian women are doing these things,' it keeps me going. I realize then, that when we get to see our real life written down in words, it feeds us" ("A Heart" 116).

Finally, one might ask: Is it possible to categorize Hogan's work? Is it poetry? Historical commentary? Autobiography? Ethical reflection? Feminist theory? Yes. After all, her essays and fiction are as much prose poems as historical commenary. One boundary Hogan relentlessly breaks down is the boundary of genre, and writing is, as she puts it, her "primary crowbar, saw, and hammer" ("Two Lives" 244). Linda Hogan is a poet, playwright, fiction and essay writer, and I'm so proud that she's doing these things; her work keeps me going. When I see my life written down in words, it feeds me and serves as a constant reminder that boundaries are created to maintain silence and defeat, to colonize gender, class and culture with the words of others, to alienate our histories from our very lives.

NOTES

¹This is the last stanza of "Wall Song," a poem written and read by Linda Hogan in a sound recording, "Contemporary Writers on Radio," University of Missouri, Kansas City MO (1990), on file at Hillis Library, Harvard University, Cambridge MA.

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The Politics of Place in Linda Hogan's Mean Spirit

Elizabeth Blair

"In Native American novels, coming home, staying put, contracting, even what we call 'regressing' to a place, a past where one has been before, is not only the primary story, it is a primary mode of knowledge and a primary good," argues William Bevis in his essay, "Native American Novels: Homing In" (582). Perhaps so, but Bevis' contention that the hero comes home in most Native American novels presupposes that there is a place of origin, an ancestral homeland, or even a recently acquired reservation to come home to.

In her autobiographical essay "The Two Lives," Chickasaw mixedblood writer Linda Hogan states that land-loss is a common characteristic of contemporary Indian people: "We are landless Indians . . . We are made to believe that poverty is created by ourselves" rather than being a predictable product of the history of colonization (Coltelli 237). Born of working class parents and raised in Colorado in and near major metropolitan areas, Hogan's own "homing in" must, of necessity, be an imaginative act rather than an actual one.

In the title poem of her 1978 book *Calling Myself Home* she asserts: "This land is the house / we have always lived in" (6). While that poem and many others are ostensibly about her father's roots in (and her childhood visits to) the red clay of rural Oklahoma, local place is not her only or even primary concern, nor can it be, as the following lines from "Heritage" make clear: "From my family I have learned the secrets / of never having a home" (*Calling* 17). This homelessness has roots at least as far back as Hogan's paternal grandmother, who recounts tribal tales of a sacred stick that sent the Chickasaw people on their peripatetic way (*Calling* 17). In "Blessing," Hogan defines her tribe's name thus: "Chickasaw / chikkih asachi, which means / they left as a tribe not a very great while ago. / They are always leaving, those

people" (*Calling* 27). How then, in the face of departure, landlessness, and lack of place, does one "call oneself home?" How establish a "home" at all?

In her 1990 novel, *Mean Spirit*, a story of white greed and deceit in the Oklahoma oil fields of the 1920s, Hogan explores the theme of calling oneself home in the face of imminent dispossession and departure. The novel explores the varying ways in which its Osage characters struggle to define "home" and "place" while attempting to live in a borrowed and broken land.

Historically, the Osage Indians, like the Chickasaw and the Cherokee, were forced by encroaching white immigration and governmental pressure to sell their ancestral homelands. According to mixedblood writer John Joseph Mathews, Osage spokesman Wah Ti an Kah made this case for relocating in Oklahoma Indian Territory:

There is much game in this country; there is much grass and water . . . White men cannot put iron thing in ground here. White man will not come to this land . . . This country is not good for things which white man puts in ground. (*Wakontah* 50-51)

Hogan's *Mean Spirit* is the ironic sequel to Wah Ti an Kah's hopeful dreams for a future life in Oklahoma Indian Territory. In the story, the white man does indeed succeed in putting an "iron thing" into the hard-packed Oklahoma clay. Immediately following reports that oil has been discovered, drilling rigs pock the land and whites come in droves, an influx that results in the exploitation, dispossession, and death of Watona's Indian inhabitants.

Victims of cultural imperialism as well as political corruption, the Indian citizens of Watona face a spiritual crisis in addition to political and economic ones. Even characters with the deepest connections to Indian traditions, such as Lila Blanket, Nola Blanket, Michael Horse, Belle Graycloud, John Stink, and the sacred runners from the hills, find themselves rendered next to powerless in the wake of events in the summer of 1922. Confronted with the cultural disintegration around them, they are forced to seek new ways to live on the land.

Mean Spirit opens to a surreal scene of tribal dreamers on cots in kitchen-gardens, iron beds in horse pastures, and four-posters in cornfields. "Given half a chance," the wild iris leaves, bluegrass, and vines "would have crept up the beds" to reclaim the sleepers and bind them to the earth (3). But there are divisive forces at work in this Edenic paradise. Beyond the sleepers lie "a forest of burned trees" and the black, skeletal forms of oil pumps, hard at work in the red light of dawn (4). Trained to mimic the "civilized" habits of whites, the modern members of dreamer Belle Graycloud's family choose to stay

inside the "oven-hot" house, and even dark-skinned Grace Blanket, who sleeps in her flower garden, restlessly returns to the glass house that oil money has enabled her to build.

One of the wealthiest members of the tribe, Grace Blanket was sent as a girl to learn white ways in order to better protect the traditional life of her people, a group of Indians who live a separatist existence in the isolated hills above Watona. But instead of infiltrating the whites Grace tries to emulate them. Dominated by heavy, carved furniture, gold angels, and marble mantles, her Roman-columned house is "an icy palace of crystal, and European to the ceiling" (48). While Grace prefers moccasins to high-heeled shoes, retains her traditional braids, and allows her grand piano to become a roost for chickens, her house is a monument to assimilationist good taste. Within it, nature is temporarily tamed and domesticated: "Glass swans sat on the mantle and they were swimming in a marble lake. The silence was like the calm eye of a tornado" (19).

Dreaming in one world and living the affluent life in the other, Grace is doomed, as the novel's vivid symbolism makes clear. As *Mean Spirit* opens, Hogan's camera lens zooms in on the sleeping Grace, highlighting the "shocking red blooms of roses" at her feet (3), an image that foreshadows her brutal murder by white, greed-stricken conspirators.

In fact, impending disaster is embedded in the novel's first sentences: "That summer a water diviner named Michael Horse forecast a two-week dry spell. Until then, Horse's predictions were known to be reliable" (3). As these words indicate, the summer of 1922 marks a turning point for Watona's Indian inhabitants. Up to now, many had maintained a delicate balance between the new ways and their Indian heritage. They lived Christianized lives yet continued to rely on traditional spiritual figures such as Michael Horse for instruction, inspiration, and prediction.

Nola Blanket, born of the Hill Indians and able from childhood to speak the language of animals, walks for a time in the netherlands between the dream world and the world of the living after the murder of her mother, Grace. Like the legendary hermit John Stink, she is a ghost in life. Without speech, she sleeps with her eyes open. It was "as if she'd been broken all the way through her body to her bones" (105), Hogan writes. Eventually healed by the presence of her guardians, the sacred runners from the Hills, Nola is transformed from a sweet, quiet girl to a belligerent child who resists the cultural coercion practiced by the Watona Indian school.

Despite this change, Nola agrees to marry the son of her white guardian. While she wears an Osage wedding coat and puts on a traditional giveaway, the wedding feast itself is a decidedly European

affair. It includes an ice peacock, vegetables carved into lilies and birds, and a wedding cake, topped with "an Indian maiden, a cowboy, and a model of the Eiffel tower that looked more like an oil derrick than the real thing" (183).

Like her mother, Nola furnishes her house with crystal, but "every glass-filled room looked fragile and breakable" no matter what European import she added (194). Clearly ill-at-ease in her "cultured" house, Nola gradually recognizes that her heart remains with the Hill Indians, that her glass-filled house is not her home, that another Nola furnished it and lived in it.

Like Grace and Nola Blanket, wealthy but traditional Jim Josh purchases the material trappings of white society. Less tragic than Nola and more pragmatic than Grace, he converts luxury items into agricultural containers, growing beefsteak tomatoes in his new luxury car and corn in his ten clawfooted bathtubs.

For traditional figure Belle Graycloud, who is "Indian from the heart out," the earth also represents sustenance rather than mineral or material wealth. A "guardian of nature" (Bonham 114-15), Belle conditions her fields with words, songs, and cornmeal and treats her sick neighbors with healing plants. As the novel opens, we find Belle sleeping

in the middle of her herb garden with a stubborn golden chicken roosting on the foot of her bed, a calico cat by [her] side, a fat spotted dog snoring on the ground, and a white horse standing as close to Belle as the fence permitted, looking at her with wide, reverent eyes. (10)

Farmer, gardener, and keeper of bees, Belle defends golden eagles from the brutality and cupidity of white bounty hunters and the sacred bats of Sorrow Cave from the white townspeople of Watona.

Like Margaret Kashpaw of Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*, Belle merges Christian beliefs and Indian spirituality: "She sat before the burning sacred heart candle, a cross, and an eagle prayer feather . . . she cried and prayed" (67). Belle's way of life represents a middle ground between Indians like Grace Blanket, who live in luxury on "barren" land, and the Hill Indians, who have renounced the world of town for an older life more in tune with the rhythms of the earth.

As traditional as Belle, Michael Horse is the last person in Indian territory to live in a tepee and one of the few who do not attend Reverend Billy's Indian Baptist church. Water diviner, healer, seer, and keeper of the traditional Osage fire, Horse is noted for prescient dreams of danger that allow him to warn potential victims of impending disaster. But his gifts begin to elude him in the summer of 1922; he fails to dream of Grace Blanket's impending death or to predict the

imminent approach of rain, and in his role as diviner he douses oil rather than water on tribal lands.

Unaccountably, while Horse sleeps peacefully, all around him "bad dreams were as common as gas fires at the drill sites, as ordinary as black Buicks" (39). Troubled by his failing powers, Horse attempts to provide a logical explanation for the people's dreams: "Disturbances of earth . . . made for disturbances of life and sleep" (39), he reasons. But it is clear to all that something has gone wrong. Prophets, preachers, and water diviners alike find their power fading in the face of new and disruptive forces that they barely understand. As Hogan points out, "second sight" is "easy to lose" (40).

"One of the last proud holdouts from the new ways" (13), Horse is surrounded by tribal members who choose to train their sights on "the world of automobiles and blond people" (7). What many of Horse's friends and neighbors ignore in their rush to gain the material products of white culture is their old, vital connection with the land. According to Native preacher Reverend Joe Billy, "The Indian world is on a collision course with the white world" (13). "It's more than a race war," Reverend Billy explains. "They are waging a war with earth" (14). It is this war with earth that precipitates both the loss of traditional power and the disasters that follow.

Despite her own hard-won balance, Belle Graycloud fears the changes that are occurring as much as anyone: "All along the smell of the blue-black oil that seeped out of the earth had smelled like death to her" (29). In their thirst for wealth and power, the white oil drillers mutilate the land. Their gas wells create enormous craters that swallow mules and workers, their oil pumps belch away the night's silence, and their drilling drains the land of water, leaving dead trees and burned grasses. As the trader McMann puts it, "You should see them down south of here. The land's dead. They're boiling rocks for soup." In an apocalyptic passage, Hogan sums up the condition of the land in the midst of this war against it: "These bruised fields were noisy and dark. The earth had turned oily black. Blue flames rose up and roared like torches of burning gas. The earth bled oil" (54). Like the blasted earth, the Indian survivors are "broken all apart" and suffer from "spiritual malnutrition." The world, Moses Graycloud concludes, is as upside-down as an inverted umbrella (64).

Yet some positive changes are afoot. Joe Billy returns to the old religion of his father, medicine man Sam Billy; his white wife Velma embraces Indian customs and beliefs; Louise Graycloud gives up the white world "almost overnight"; and even the Catholic priest, Father Dunne, "awakens" to hear "the deep and dreaming voice of the land" (188). In like manner, refugees Nola Blanket, Belle Graycloud, Stace Red Hawk, and Michael Horse flee Watona and join the Hill Indians,

who live high above the town in a silence that goes "deep down into the fiery bones of earth" (253).

Sporting lithe bodies that play the wind like flutes, the Hill Indians live in earth-colored huts and bless the soil in age-old planting rituals. Their spiritually-integrated community provides a cultural safe house for Indians like Nola Blanket and Belle Graycloud who have been forced to flee because they have taken an active stand against an alien way of life.

Before the murder trial in Guthrie, Belle Graycloud pays a last visit to the cave of Sorrow, another sacred site for the Watona Indians. There she merges with the earth's "four-chambered heart" and feels "hope in the land, hope and tomorrow living in the veins and stones of earth" (344).

Meanwhile, back in Watona, even the most assimilated townspeople start to sense the kind of world they are living in. "They began to see white people as wisps of smoke stealing by and around their own more solid world (340)," writes Hogan. Yet, despite this insight, they have no choice but to become refugees. As Michael Horse watches the mass exodus of Indians from Watona, he concludes: "It was a fatal ignorance we had of our place" (341). "They were driven out," Hogan tells us, "or maybe it was that they escaped, that they survived by leaving this land and its waters and rich black earth" (342).

Despite the final conflagration, the Grayclouds, too, endure. Landless but not loveless, they have lost "place" but carry with them respect for the sacredness of all life, which, as Hogan suggests, is the only way to create a proper "home" on this planet, the only way to make this land into "the house we have always lived in." As Hogan argues in an interview with Laura Coltelli: "If you believe that the earth, and all living things, and all the stones are sacred, your responsibility really is to protect those things. I do believe that's our duty, to be custodians of the planet" ("Linda Hogan" 79).

To Hogan's way of thinking, both the daily news and historical events like those depicted in *Mean Spirit* are directly connected to "the continuing destruction of the Third World and tribal people, and the exploitation of our earth" ("The Two Lives" 233). Believing that denial and repression are the greatest hindrances to liberation and growth ("The Two Lives" 241), Hogan retells this American tragedy because many of us still have not learned the essential lesson of the sanctity of the earth, as evidenced by the world we have made.

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Showdown at Sorrow Cave: Bat Medicine and the Spirit of Resistance in Mean Spirit

Andrea Musher

Life resides in all things, even the motionless stones.
Take care of the insects for they have their place. . . All is
sacred, especially the bats.
from the Gospel according to Horse

First, for Native Americans, humans exist in community
with all living things (all of whom are known to be
intelligent, aware, and self-aware). . . Nor does the tribal
community or relatives end with human kin: the supernat-
urals, spirit people, animal people of all varieties, the
thunders, snows, rains, rivers, lakes, hills, mountains,
fire, water, rock and plants are perceived to be members
of one's community.

Paula Gunn Allen, *Spiderwoman's Granddaughters*

If as we enter the world of Linda Hogan's novel, *Mean Spirit*, we
doubt the veracity of the statements I have used as epigraphs, by the
time we reach the "showdown" at Sorrow Cave, which occurs about
three-fifths of the way through the novel, we find that we have been
converted and inducted into the tribal spiritual community that
embraces these values in opposition to the "savage" white *naholies* who
are wantonly massacring men, eagles, women, bats, children, and the
native prairie grasses. As members of the tribal community, we
penetrate the depths of Sorrow Cave escaping the rifle-toting men and
boys of the town of Talbert, Oklahoma.

Father Dunne, "the hog priest" whose Catholic beliefs have been
transformed by a series of animist revelations, says during the journey
into the cave, "Sorrow runs deeper than we ever knew or could have

guessed" (284). While in the immediate context he is referring to the many hidden caverns of Sorrow Cave that are located behind the large, obvious outer chamber, his words set up elegaic ripples that ring the full measure of sadness in this novel that is steeped in death from its first pages to its last. Indian people are tortured, poisoned, gunned down, strung up and blown up so that white men can gain "free" access to their oil-rich lands. But despite the book's grim account of scores of murders, Linda Hogan's dramatic historical chronicle is also a vibrant celebration of the life and survival of Indian people, their precepts, and their practices.

Although the showdown at Sorrow Cave is neither the climax nor the most dramatic event in this complexly plotted, panoramic novel, close examination of this incident functions like a prism through which various themes of the novel are gathered and laid out in clear bands of color. For those raised on movie westerns, no "real" showdown occurs at the cave. There is no shootout. The action seems to dissipate and it appears we are left with an inconclusive standoff. Depending on one's perspective, something of great magnitude happens, or almost nothing at all happens. While the men of Talbert can't understand what the Indians are up to, we recognize the extent to which our mainstream, Judeo-Christian values have been subverted. Hogan has led us to question our automatic privileging of human life over other life forms, thereby removing the biblical concept of human dominion; she ties us into a webwork of existence where all beings—even those that are by Western standards considered inorganic—have their importance, their stories and their language from which we can learn. The incident at Sorrow Cave becomes a ritual center in the narrative, an affirmation of Indian spiritual values, a vital act of resistance. Events at the cave define for the reader who the true members of the Indian community are and the strategies they will pursue to escape annihilation, while also demonstrating, both literally and symbolically, the efficacy of the paradoxical proposition that Indian survival depends on journeying forward into the past.

The incident begins as Belle Graycloud nears the region of Sorrow Cave. She hears the "high-pitched sound of young men talking" (277). Then she hears shots and cheers. Belle is an Osage matriarch, one of the important tribal elders in the novel, a woman who has thus far successfully negotiated the difficulties of living in both the Indian world and the white world. She still uses the traditional chants when she plants her corn, but she also uses her crystal radio set to check on what the white government is up to. In one of the novel's early descriptions of her, we learn that at "first glance she looked small, but in spite of her slight stature, she was a giant on the inside, and hard to reckon with" (13).

Belle approaches Sorrow Cave with Silver, one of the Hill Indians. At the start of the novel, set in Oklahoma in 1922, Hogan informs the reader that the Hill Indians "were a peaceful group who had gone away from the changing world some sixty years earlier, in the 1860s. Their survival depended on returning to a simpler way of life, so they left behind them everything they could not carry and moved up into the hills and bluffs" (5). Thus the Hill Indians provide a relatively uncorrupted link to the past and their settlement serves as an actual and symbolic refuge to the Indians dwelling in the modern, white-dominated world. Significantly, Sorrow Cave is located halfway between the town—called *Watona* by the Indians, but *Talbert* by the whites—and the Hill Settlement. The cave thus marks a boundary between the modern world and the traditional Indian world and is used as a sanctuary by those who travel between these two worlds.

As Belle and Silver come upon the entrance to Sorrow Cave, they discover that a large group of men and boys from Talbert are shooting the bats that live in the cave:

Unknown to the Indians . . . a war had been declared on bats after the case of rabies that killed the young girl. They mistakenly believed the bats carried the disease. There was a one-dollar bounty per "flying rat," as the newspaper called them. And now a good number of well-dressed men and their fathers stood outside the cave and shot into it, knocking the frightened bats to the ground, then shooting randomly while the animals screamed with terror, unable to escape the man-blocked entrance to the cave. (277)

The war that the trigger-happy men of Talbert have declared against the bats is similar in many ways to the undeclared war that they are waging against the Native Americans in their town. The white men callously misperceive the bats, positing them as loathsome, unwholesome objects to be slaughtered with impunity just as they continue to maintain the belief that the Indians are "a dark people . . . unschooled, ignorant" (60), to be feared, controlled, and killed when necessary to serve the interests of their superiors, the white people. Both the bats and the Indians seem impotent and doomed in the face of hostility, greed, and corruption reigning all around them. Notably, the entrance to the cave, the Sheriff, Jess Gold, is standing by along with a group of unemployed oil workers who are ready to "gas the cave" when the shooting is over. Thus the killing of the bats, like the killing of the Indians, is carried on while the forces of law and order stand by in complicit collusion.

When Belle realizes what is happening to the bats, she sends Silver away saying, "Go get some of the people to help us" (278). She then

empties herself of anger and readies herself to take her stand. Firmly centered, certain of her responsibility, she plants herself at the entrance of the cave, pistol in hand, and forbids anyone to come near. The young men scoff, proclaiming that she's just a crazy old woman, but the Sheriff warns them off. Though he recognizes Belle's determination, he misunderstands the significance of her actions. He knows she means business, but he also accuses her of losing her head and being "backward." That we see Belle's willingness to kill or be killed to save the bats not as "batty" but as morally necessary demonstrates how successfully Hogan draws her readers into the Native American value system she is inculcating. Belle's empathic perspective invests the bats with a dignity and a stature exceeding that of most of the vicious, small-minded humans standing around the cave:

She remained there protecting the double world of bats with their whistling songs and their double lives in the cool and 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. . . . Behind her, the dark animals made soft yelping sounds now and then, and shifted their positions. Some of them, sheltered by the old woman, were busy dying, those animals whose voices were their guide like a prayer opening the way, showing them the passage through life. Others settled back into silence, opening and folding their wings, some hanging from stones and looking toward the doorway with their glittering eyes. (279)

Certainly the reader prefers these gentle, dying bats to the boys who, spitting on the ground, say of Belle, "Shit, she's crazy. She doesn't even make sense. Why don't you just shoot her?" (279). The Sheriff tries to appeal to Belle's "reason," informing her "We have a rabies problem here, Belle." And Belle, who definitely has not lost her wit, replies, "It probably comes from your biting people" (279).

Belle's militant vehemence in defense of the bats recalls the one other incident in the novel when she becomes totally enraged. Although she and her husband, Moses, maintain an outward demeanor of stoic forbearance in the face of Grace Blanket's murder, the loss of their money and land, the loss of their grandchildren to the white boarding school, and the ever-increasing number of suspicious deaths and grave robberies happening to the Indians in their community, Belle does not even attempt to hide her feelings when she comes upon a group of white hunters who have slaughtered hundreds of golden eagles:

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. . . . She stared at the dead, sacred eagles. They looked like a tribe of small, gone people, murdered and taken away in the back of a truck. The hunters were busy beside the truck counting the eagles.

There were 317 carcasses in all. (109-10)

On this occasion, Belle flings herself on the eagle hunters, beating them and smashing out the windows of their truck. The hunters, who are carefully "preserving" the eagles by packing them in ice, try to calm the wild old woman by saying, "They're just birds." While they have no comprehension of the crime they have committed by failing to respect the living beauty of the birds they are shipping to taxidermists out East, for Belle the lives of the eagles are as important as the lives of her people.

Throughout the course of the narrative, Hogan forces us to question the hierarchical privileging of human life that is so central to Western thought. A case in point is the description that occurs later in the novel of a nineteenth-century Sioux massacre. As recalled by the elderly Sioux healer, Lionel Tall, the scene echoes Belle's discovery of the dead eagles:

It was on Christmas Day when Lionel left Canada and began the trek homeward. And it was on Christmas Day that the Sioux people were murdered by the cavalry all riding uniform gray horses.

When he rode in from the Badlands, he found his people gone, the bodies of children frozen in the snow. The frozen women lay in broken clusters where they'd tried to escape. When Tall saw his wife, the young son in her arms, he sat on the ice beside them. . . . He sat there in the blue-white light of evening until his hands were frostbitten and his clothing had frozen to the earth. (221)

The Sioux and the eagles are each portrayed as a tribe of "gone people" caught and frozen in the blue-white light of death. Both are killed with the same efficiency by uncomprehending white hunters who feel they are within their rights carrying out such slaughter—hunters who feel they are engaged in reasonable behavior.

Confronting Belle's unreasonable behavior at Sorrow Cave, as she stands with her pistol poised, the Sheriff notices that "she looked like a mountain." However, he makes the mistake of talking to her as if she were merely an ignorant child when he says to her, "Bats are pests. They aren't good for us" (279). Then daunted by her silence and intransigence, he sends his Indian deputy, Willis, to get Moses

Graycloud. The Sheriff is convinced that Belle's husband will "talk some sense" into this crazy woman's "hard head" (280). Jess Gold assumes that he and Moses, as men, hold certain ideas in common. Gold takes for granted the idea that human welfare and human dominance take precedence in all situations—i.e., if the bats constitute any kind of threat to human life, then the bats should be exterminated; such a supposition seems to Gold eminently reasonable, and he assumes that Moses will see it the way that he does, or at the very least will counsel Belle that she must respect the authority vested in Gold as the representative of the law. Gold also takes for granted the prerogatives of male dominance; he assumes that Moses would have the desire and the right to control his wife. Ultimately, Gold assumes that resistance in the face of superior force is crazy on Belle's part, and that Moses will share this assessment of the situation. But the Sheriff is wrong in all of his unexamined assumptions. He doesn't take into account the respect that Moses has for Belle, nor does he understand that Belle's action constitutes an ethical imperative, a call to arms that grows out of her traditional female role as preserver of life, a role that has real value and meaning within tribal culture. Finally, Gold has misjudged the situation because he believes that he is dealing with a single, crazed individual. Belle, in the initial moments of the encounter, had immediately sent Silver for help because she knew she was acting on behalf of the community; she was acting out of deeply held, communal values. She was not just "acting out" as Gold suspected. Her value judgment in this case is representative of a different code of law, and her authority as a leader is recognized by her husband as well as the rest of the tribal community.

Thus, Gold is caught completely off guard when Moses goes up into the cave and takes his stand beside Belle, and the Sheriff is even more surprised when "a throng of Hill Indians" suddenly looms up as if "out of the land itself" (280). At first Gold cannot imagine who the group of Indians confronting him could be, nor can he fathom where they came from. But as he looks he recognizes some faces in the crowd; he is able to distinguish Joe Billy and Martha, Stace Redhawk, Father Dunne, and Michael Horse. We are also informed by the narrator that Jim Josh is there as well.

The group that arrives to defy the gunmen of Talbert serves to identify the Indian tribal community that Hogan is defining for us through her narrative. Hogan demonstrates here that community, like one's identity as a member of a specific community, is neither static nor predetermined. She shows that one's Indianness is not necessarily dependent on bloodlines but rather is a process, involving active choice and an ongoing affirmation of Native American spiritual values. As we examine the make-up of the group of resisters at Sorrow Cave and the

nature of the action they take, we also see how, according to Hogan, Indian survival in the Twentieth Century will be accomplished despite the ongoing implicit and explicit policy of Indian cultural annihilation built into the American way of life. Within the group there are four spiritual leaders and two white people; two generations are represented (along with the promise of a third generation implicit both in Martha Billy's pregnancy and in the young Hill children); there are men who have embraced the precepts and the promises of the white institutions in hopes of helping their people and there are the Hill people who have withdrawn from white contact; the Indians are mixed-blood and full-blood, and come originally from many different tribes; two of the people present at the Cave will later be murdered. All who have gathered affirm their Indian values in their willingness to place their lives on the line to preserve the lives of the bats. All of them trust Belle's judgment

The spiritual leaders who have gathered at the cave include Michael Horse, Joe Billy, Stace Redhawk, and Father Dunne. They have all been there before and recognize it as sacred space. Michael Horse, an elder, diviner, and seer, fluent in English and Chinese (he learned Chinese as a member of the U.S. Army during the Boxer Rebellion) as well as his native dialect, is the first character in the novel to seek the sanctuary of Sorrow Cave. At the start of the book he is living on the outskirts of town, the last Indian in Indian Territory still living in a tepee. But parked in front of his traditional dwelling is his shiny gold Cadillac convertible. After the discovery of oil on Indian land—ironically he, a water diviner, locates the first oil—Horse withdraws further and further from the white culture he had participated in during his younger years. As the murders multiply, Horse gives up his car, packs up his tepee, and retreats to Sorrow Cave. A keeper of the sacred fire in both a literal and metaphoric sense, he keeps "the people's fire" constantly alive, feeding and tending the actual burning embers he has inherited from past generations, and he also keeps a written record of his spiritual beliefs and all the events going on in Indian Territory. With his writing he translates between worlds, preserving a record of the destruction of Indian people and Indian ways while also creating a legacy that can reconstruct Indian identity in the future. He knows that he has a responsibility to keep his Indian heritage alive and that doing so constitutes an act of resistance that is intrinsically dangerous.

Joe Billy is a spiritual leader of the next generation after Horse and the Grayclouds. His father, Sam Billy, had "been a medicine man for twenty-three years before he'd converted to the Christian faith" (14). Joe, a Creek, is at the beginning of the novel the presiding minister of the Indian Baptist Church who, we are told, had "gone to seminary

back East in Boston, married a white society woman [Martha] against her father's will, and returned home determined to save and serve his own Indian people" (14). But despite his marriage and his Christian training at a white institution, Joe Billy knows and says to his congregation on the novel's first Sunday in 1922, "The Indian world is on a collision course with the white world. . . . It's more than a race war. They're waging war with the earth" (13-14). Initially, the Reverend Joe Billy maintains his spiritual ties to the Baptist church *and* to the Native Church where he is also a presiding minister as "the road man" who "shows Indian people the path of life, takes stones out of their way, and maps out the spirit's terrain" (73). He helps people to pray within the spirit of both traditions but is deeply disturbed by the devastation and the murders going on around him. Eventually, he resigns his position with the Baptist Church as he finds himself dreaming of his father, Sam Billy, "standing in Sorrow Cave surrounded by crystals and sleeping bats" (138). We are told that "Sam Billy had been a practitioner of bat medicine, one of the strongest traditions of healing" (136). As Sam's son and spiritual heir, Joe Billy has inherited his father's bat medicine bundle and finds himself praying at night with the leather bag on his lap. When his wife, Martha, comes upon him sleeping in his study with the bundle "bumping and turning" in his hands and asks him what is in the pouch, he tells her "It's the older world, wanting out" (138). Afraid to tell her anything about bat medicine, he gradually becomes aware that Martha is growing more and more Indian in her ways of dressing, thinking, and even dreaming. When she begins to have bat dreams of her own, Joe Billy decides it is time to leave town and head for Sorrow Cave.

In answer to Martha's question, which is also the reader's question, "What's all this about bats?" (256), the road man tells his wife that "they are a race of people that stand in two worlds like we do. . . . And they live in the earth's ancient places" (257). Thus we begin to understand the way in which Hogan is retraining us to respond to the awe-worthy dual nature of bats, who are after all mammals like us but who can fly. These nocturnal creatures with their strangely human faces and webbed wings, so often associated with terror and evil in Western mythology, are for the Indians in Hogan's narrative a source of protection. They see the bats' survival as emblematic of their own. Reviled and misunderstood by whites, both the bats and the Indians preserve ways of living that are far more ancient than white, Christian culture. Within the incident at Sorrow Cave, Hogan establishes a protection racket that operates between the bats and the Indian community. First the Indians save the bats' lives, and then the bats save the Indians' lives.

Ironically, Joe Billy speaks of the bats' ability to live in two worlds

at the very point in the novel where he himself is withdrawing as much as possible from one of the worlds that he had thought to inhabit. After camping briefly at Sorrow Cave, Martha and Joe Billy continue up the bluff, leaving behind the world of the town and white civilization as they go to join the Hill Settlement. Thus, Joe Billy's journey subverts the dominant American assimilationist paradigm that is predicated on the notion that progress, power, and enlightenment are derived from embracing mainstream culture and leaving behind one's traditional, tribal values.

Stace Red Hawk, the third spiritual leader who comes to stand by Belle in defense of the bats at Sorrow Cave, makes a journey that in many aspects parallels Joe Billy's. A Lakota Sioux Indian from South Dakota, Stace is "a keeper of tradition, and a carrier of the sacred pipe of his people" (50). Like Joe Billy, he has gone East to the institutions of white power, but Stace believed he could save and serve his people by allying himself with the U.S. Bureau of Investigation (the precursor of the F.B.I.) in Washington DC. When he hears about the murders taking place in Watona/Talbert, Oklahoma, he longs to investigate, to use the power of the federal government to solve the crimes, and to make things right. He finds, however, that it is not the knowledge, methods, or powers of the federal agents that help him to understand what is going on, but rather his contacts with the Indians. Prior to finding Sorrow Cave and the Hill Settlement beyond it, Stace announces to his boss, Ballard, that he needs to go up into the hills to think and to search out some of the "old-timers." Ballard openly articulates his contempt for Indians and what he sees as Stace's lamentable reversion to type:

"If you're looking for something, you turn things over.
... You lift them up like a rock covering a scorpion and
you look underneath. You're not supposed to go sit in
some hills and dream and talk to people who haven't been
civilized." (224)

Stace's Indian "instincts" have, however, led him in the right direction. On his journey into the hills, he meets up with Michael Horse, who is at that point living in Sorrow Cave and who invites Stace to stay with him. Horse, seer that he is, decides to show the younger, earnest man the journals he has been keeping that document all of the suspicious events and murderous "accidents" that have taken place. Thus, Stace has come upon the person who can fill in many of the missing pieces of the "mystery" he seeks to solve, while Horse has wrought a necessary living link with the next generation, having found someone who knows the value of his writings.

As Stace continues his investigation, he grows increasingly

distrustful of the Federal agents with whom he has been working, gradually becoming convinced that there is a larger conspiracy operating and that the agents of the white law are neither disinterested nor objective. Journeying spiritually and literally towards community with the Indians while disengaging from his work for the federal government, Stace discovers the existence of the Hill Settlement and knows that he has found the right spirit path. He realizes that the white "justice" system will do as much to conceal as to reveal the corrupt oil deals in Oklahoma and that he cannot "save" himself or his people by cooperating with the forces of oppression. Thus, when during the confrontation at Sorrow Cave the Sheriff and some of the federal agents with whom Stace has been working stand outside the cave supporting the "rights" of the bat-killers, Stace knows that he will take his stand with the Indians.

The fourth spiritual leader present at Sorrow Cave is Father Dunne. Initially a Catholic priest whose job it is to "convert" the Indians, Father Dunne, a white man, undergoes a conversion to Indian values and in doing so becomes one of the readers' guides in the process of moving from the dominant community to the tribal community. Father Dunne's conversion also underscores Hogan's concept that one can choose an Indian identity and that such an identity is not necessarily dependent on bloodlines or marriage.

As Father Dunne begins to listen to the voice of the earth, he starts to understand God and community in what are for him radically new ways. Ironically, his "new" insights are both ancient and fundamental to the Indians. What he learns is profoundly simple. The first stage of his conversion comes after the tornado that touches down in various places throughout Indian Territory. Though Father Dunne's church is destroyed, all the saints and icons from within the sanctuary "landed unbroken in the forest" (161), and the priest interprets this as a message from God "that the church should be moved into the woods" (162). He not only holds church services outdoors but also sleeps outside close to the earth. Thus, when a major oil explosion causes the earth to shift and roar and fire lights up the night sky, Father Dunne wakes to feel that again God is delivering a message to which he needs to pay attention. But at this juncture he seeks guidance from Michael Horse, who tells the young man that what he heard "wasn't the voice of God. 'It's the rage of mother earth'" (189). Gradually without any official articulation of such a concept, Father Dunne becomes Horse's pupil. Discovering that animals have souls, Dunne starts blessing chickens and hogs. "The Indians began to call him the hog priest. And they said it was the year when the priest went sane" (189).

Having accepted the Indian valuation of the priest's conversion and having become an initiate along with the hog priest, the reader

understands the new title not as a term of denigration but as one of approbation. Conversion, however, is not always an easy process for the priest. In dialogue with Horse, he is often initially resistant to the older man's ideas. The hog priest is particularly appalled by what he can't help but feel is the blasphemous notion of Horse adding a new book to the Bible. He has trouble integrating his old and new value systems. Even after his own revelation that "the snake is our sister" (262), he tells Horse that the Bible says "man shall have dominion over the animals" and that Horse can't set himself up to "correct" the word of God (273-74). But the hog priest's respect for the souls of animals from army ants to crows leads him to the Hill Settlement and to a place within the Indian tribal community. By the time Belle sends out her summons to save the lives of the bats, the white Catholic priest has become one of "the people"; entrusted by Horse to watch over the sacred fire, he is both humble enough and knowledgeable enough to help find the way into the hidden depths of Sorrow.

Among the people whom Sheriff Gold recognizes on the hillside is one more well-known Indian "old-timer" who has also made the journey from town life to the Hill Settlement. Jim Josh becomes a two-way mirror, showing the reader the subtle and not so subtle differences between what is valued by the white world and what is of value in the Indian world. The people of Talbert justify their contention that the Indians are backward, wasteful people who don't know the value of a dollar by pointing to Jim Josh, who lives in a shack with no running water but who keeps buying claw-footed bathtubs. Josh also buys a car that he can't drive and leaves stuck in the mud outside his house, but because Hogan brings the reader into the Native American community, we learn that Jim Josh's purchases are far from being value-less or useless. We visit Jim Josh's land when Belle goes to see him and find that he has covered the tubs with glass and turned them into hothouses where corn is growing even as winter begins, while the automobile provides the perfect environment for beefsteak tomatoes that are ripe while the snow is frozen on the ground. Rather than being an ignorant spendthrift, Jim Josh proves himself to be a sophisticated and innovative gardener. He also figures out that the Sheriff is in on the killing conspiracy but is careless enough to mention his suspicions out loud in public. After the showdown at Sorrow Cave, Jim Josh becomes another one of the murder victims.

The last person who joins the defenders of the bats at the entrance to the cave is the mixed-blood deputy, Willis. He, too, will be murdered after the incident at the cave has been concluded. Jess Gold, faced with the crowd of silent Indians, decides to send for reinforcements for his side. The state police arrive just as it is growing dark, at which point Gold surprises everyone by announcing, "Belle. We're

going to do as you ask and leave" (281). The Sheriff's decision to leave for the night is derided by the men of Talbert who protest, saying, "You're setting a precedent here. . . . Now they'll resist everything" (281). Thus, despite their initial incomprehension, the Talbert-ites have finally recognized Belle's seeming craziness as an important act of resistance. While the white community has counted on the Indians' inability to understand or to confront their legal system to stop the swindles and the murders, the men of Talbert had not suspected that their lack of knowledge about the Indians could hinder their operations in any way.

The white men's ignorance provides the Indians with a staging ground, both literal and metaphoric, on which to fight back. Of course, the interesting point here is that no actual fight occurs. The Indians, though initially fearful that the Sheriff and his troops have not really left, occupy Sorrow Cave throughout the night in a spirit of celebration. Their coming together and their affirmation of what they hold sacred give them a heady sense of power. They have created their own survival rites and have felt the magic of the ancient bat medicine coming alive. In the morning they recognize that the bats have disappeared into a secret inner chamber of the cave. Thus, the bats provide an escape for the Indians; the bat medicine gives them a way to slip right past the blockade of the law of the white killers who have returned with tear gas and rifles to finish up the job of getting rid of both the bats and the Indians.

Michael Horse, in order to determine where the bats have gone through the walls of the outer cave, winds up observing a line of army ants "disappearing at the floor of the back wall" (283). The ants, in a sense, tell Horse, who is joined by Joe Billy and Father Dunne, where to dig to gain access to the inner chambers of Sorrow. These spiritual leaders are able to discover a narrow passageway; along with Stace Redhawk they are the road men who lead the tribal community into a series of caverns where aspects of the sacred past have literally been preserved. They find mummified human remains, the skins of bears that have long been rendered extinct in the region outside the cave, beautifully crafted pottery vessels painted with spiral designs, wall paintings of bats, fish, and buffalo, and ancient corn kernels. Though they enter the tomb, they preserve it by leaving it intact, by once again sealing off the passageway through which they entered. When the Indians exit, unseen, out the back on an underground path that leads to the river, they have succeeded in staging an uncanny escape right under the eyes of Talbert gunman and the state police.

Hogan takes us on a journey through Sorrow Cave to teach us that in penetrating the depths of sorrow we come to a place that is both ancient and spiritually potent, which, therefore, provides the way out

of sorrow. The Indians succeed—they survive despite the immense killing conspiracy surrounding them. As they re-establish a communal link to the past, the Indians create a future for themselves that is like the corn kernel Jim Josh carries in his pocket as he emerges from the cave. The seed contains the germ plasm from hundreds of years ago. It is the once and future child of the corn, the mythic made actual when the seed is planted. The journey through Sorrow Cave parallels the journey that the growing numbers of prescient Indians (and those who convert to Indian values) make into the Hills as the book progresses. This journey towards connection with ancient, traditional tribal life is neither regressive nor, according to Hogan, does it represent a naive attempt to cling to a vanished past. At the tragic juncture in Indian history that Hogan documents in *Mean Spirit*, the Indians learn that they cannot escape sorrow through denying their heritage or through embracing the ideal of white assimilation. Since they will never be allowed to fully assimilate, and since the traces of their Indianness represent a threat and a recurring nightmare to the dominant culture, their only recourse lies in creating the perfect disappearing act, rendering themselves temporarily invisible to the white community but coming together in a spiritual gathering that makes them more visible to each other.

The journey through a cave-tomb that leads to a rebirth has significant spiritual resonances within many cultures, but importantly, in Hogan's retelling of this archetypal action no one person makes the journey alone. Michael Horse had previously discovered the existence of the interior caves, and Joe Billy had been told about them by his father, but not until the community is assembled can the ritual action transpire. This underlines the lesson that no one hero can save everyone else through his or her actions, nor can any one person solve the plague of murders. The saving power evoked in this ritual journey comes from the creation and preservation of a community that "remembers" the past—thus filling the present and future with members who share memories that link them together. So although the individual killings do not stop—the bat magic does not save the lives of Jim Josh or Willis after the emergence from Sorrow Cave—the killing off of the tribe and tribal values has been stopped. In this sense the bats do have a powerful medicine, and the Indians have come through sorrow and out the other side. And we come to recognize that for Hogan the spiritual is political. In the face of U.S. policies meant to annihilate the Indian way of life—whether through overt warfare or the cultural stripping intrinsic to the boarding school mandates—continued investment in the traditional tribal belief systems becomes a significant form of resistance. Hogan subverts General Pratt's Carlisle School motto, "Kill the Indian, and save the man" (177), by in effect saying,

if we save that which is Indian, then even if they kill the individual man, the tribe will survive.

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Caretaking and the Work of the Text in Linda Hogan's Mean Spirit

Anna Carew-Miller

In the introduction to a collection of writings on women's spiritual development, American Indian poet and novelist Linda Hogan writes:

Earth consciousness is the foundation of women's growing, and it is an honor for us to give back to the earth, to care for animals, plants, people, minerals, to fight with all our will, politics, and the many forms of education we have earned in order to preserve life inside and outside ourselves. ("Women" xiv)

Hogan's first novel, *Mean Spirit*, speaks both about the goodness of preserving life and the current shift in values of the American community in relation to the land. Hogan draws on aesthetic traditions radically different from those that usually govern contemporary literary taste: the traditions of the American Indian and working class communities of which she has been a member. While at times *Mean Spirit* might seem to behave as a murder mystery, the novel shrugs off the confines of that familiar genre to comment on a collision of cultures and values, taking for its subject the relationship between work, profit, and the land. Beyond theme and plot, the subtext of Hogan's writing theoretically engages the role of the writer and the work of the text. *Mean Spirit* does not perform in the expected ways of a novel, lacking labyrinthine symbolism and polished sequencing; instead, it invites the reader to think and act on the issues that concern us all: the health of our culture and our physical world.

The historical moment that provides the scene and situation for this novel is Oklahoma in the 1920s. This was the period after the Dawes Severalty Act of 1887 which turned tribally held lands into individually owned parcels for the purpose of making those lands more easily purchased by non-Indians. While this legislation had devastating

impact on many tribes throughout the country, its effects on the tribes of Oklahoma, particularly the Chickasaw of Hogan's ancestry and the Osage of the novel, were incalculably impoverishing. When oil was discovered beneath the red dirt once thought worthless by Anglo-Americans, the rush to gain access to it through legal and illegal means swept away any concern that may have existed for those Oklahoma tribes. The *New York Times* files from that time record a series of murders, extortions, and swindles that scarred the Native American communities and insured the wealth of oil profiteers. The plot of the novel revolves around one such murder, and the violent struggle for control of the land propels its action.

I. Working the Land, Engendering Violence

In American culture, labor and struggle have long been associated with the transformation of the American landscape. American writing mythologized the yeoman farmer, the man who could turn a forest into a field. However, the work of transforming the landscape has been caught in a discourse about controlling what Annette Kolodny calls the "total feminine principle"—land as mother and bride, virgin and seductress (4). This work of control was a moral necessity to a people convinced of the dangers of the untamed feminine. Furthermore, by making the clearing of a forest or the plowing of a field the means of establishing manhood (also a moral necessity), working for profit and personal gain were made secondary motives: in this scenario, the labor of the farmer makes men, not money. While the role of the farmer has given way to other manly occupations such as oil drilling, as found in Hogan's novel, the power struggle between the female force of the land (or another unknown) and the male worker is the same.

From a position outside Anglo-American culture, Linda Hogan provides a critique of this system and offers an alternative relationship between work and the land. Instead of transforming the land for profit in a narrative that pits the masculine against the feminine, the model proposed by Hogan is one of both caretaking and communion. *Mean Spirit* highlights the contrast between the work of the white oil men and that of the American Indian community. Within this characterization of difference, Hogan gives the Oklahoma earth personality and substance that responds to the underlying discourse about controlling the feminine.

Although the wounded earth has a strong feminine presence within Hogan's novel, it is tribally feminine: powerful and conscious. It is mother, but not the faceless metaphorical breast of Anglo-American (male) longing identified by Kolodny; rather, the earth is a unity of body and spirit. Susan Scarberry-García writes of the tribally-conceived feminine earth: "The earth is a woman, sustaining her

children with her body. . . . Land and human being are one, bound together by the understanding that flesh takes many forms, that touch energizes the natural world" (25). Because Hogan invests her representation of the earth with such spiritedness, the earth functions not as a setting for the novel, but as a character. The violations of the earth are depicted by Hogan not so much in terms of its passive victimization as its restless and angry power.

The images of drill bits penetrating the Oklahoma red dirt are invariably phallic; this is a rape. The drillers are not simply bleeding a vein; they are tapping into an explosive power that thunders and growls beyond their reach. Early in the novel, Hogan describes a crater from a gas blowout and the nearby oil fields:

It was fifty feet deep and five hundred feet across. This gouge in the earth, just a year earlier, had swallowed five workmen and ten mules. The water was gone from that land forever, the trees dead, and the grass, once long and rich, was burned black. The cars passed by this ugly sight, and not far from there, they passed another oil field where pumps, fueled by diesel, worked day and night. These bruised fields were noisy and dark. The earth had turned oily black. Blue flames rose up and roared like torches of burning gas. The earth bled oil. (52)

This scarred, ugly, and angry mother swallows her children who violate her.

For Anglo-American culture, this violence is simply part of the job of the oil workers, a continuation of the narrative in which the (female) land is forced to yield to its (male) masters. Later in the novel, Hogan describes these men:

Landless men labored out there. They worked for John Hale, the oilman, who kept watch over them in their steel-toe boots as they pulled the great chains back and forth and, inch by inch, drove the pipes down and into the earth. The sound of metal grated against metal out there. Gas rumbled under the ground like earth complaining through an open mouth, moaning sometimes and sometimes roaring with rage. (145)

Restless and fiercely angry, this mother earth can punish the workers, her wayward children, with a sudden violence of her own. Hogan depicts the workers as both victim and criminal, pitted against a power they don't understand by the man whose pockets they fill. In her poem, "Oil," Hogan fleshes out these workers more fully: "Men smile like they know everything / but walking in slant heel boots / their butts show that they are tense."¹ The swagger of the worker conceals his

uneasiness with the danger of his work and his powerlessness. While his labor forces him to take risks glorified by a macho culture, that same labor is controlled by those who own the rights to the oil, not the worker himself.

As a writer who identifies her origins as working class nearly as often as she does as Chickasaw, Hogan doesn't blame these victims but sees them as caught in a larger circle of power and profit. The workers' anger and violent energy are almost always deflected by those who control their labor onto a landscape depicted as feminine. Her Marxist understanding of the economic forces which propel this destruction grows out of her experience as a working-class woman, and her writing is invigorated by it. In an interview with Pat Clark Smith, she describes herself:

I, an Indian woman, from a non-middle class background, on the margin, not a member of the dominant culture—I need to speak for what my struggle has been, and offer the strength of that survival to keep us all moving together, to offer back my own words. This means to speak about what it's like to be of mixed blood, to have suffered losses, to have not been educated, to have worked primarily at working-class jobs until fairly recently—and to have worked as a writer. (Interview 154)²

Hogan perceives the struggles of those on the margins of the dominant culture to be connected to each other and central to her work and life. She has been "deeply interested in the work of writers from the 1930s, and of writers from other countries who are engaged in struggles for survival" ("Two Lives" 234). Her interest in the literature of social change and her own lived experience as a woman from the margin inform *Mean Spirit* and its portrayal of greed and profiteering; clearly, loudly, she talks back to the powerful, to tradition, giving voice an alternative understanding of work.

II. Caretaking as Work, Working as Connection

In *Mean Spirit*, Hogan provides an alternative to work that sucks the land dry: caretaking. The word "caretaking," and, indeed, the concept appear frequently in Hogan's writing; in one interview, for example, she privileges this term as a moral precept: "I consider caretaking the basic work of living on earth. . . . I see a direct relation between how we care for animal-people and plants and insects and land and water, and how we care for each other, and for ourselves. Part of our work here is to care for life" (Interview 148). Two central figures in *Mean Spirit* do the work of caretaking: Belle, the matriarch of the Graycloud family, and Michael Horse, the local diviner. Their work

is not done to the land, but for the living, the community who exchanges needs and gifts. There is no room in Hogan's alternative model for a male/female power struggle, for a dynamic of mastery and submission, because of the value placed in interdependence.

Belle Graycloud is a woman of domestic tasks and cosmic duties; much of the novel takes place around her kitchen table where she provides food, talk, and coffee for her large family and anyone else who passes through her home. When her neighbor, Grace Blanket, is murdered, Belle takes in Grace's daughter, Nola, to live as part of the family. When another neighbor, Jim Josh, complains about his chronically sore feet, Belle packs up her herbs and pays him a visit. Belle extends this comfort and protection beyond her human family. As a beekeeper, she understands the delicate balance caretaking requires, nurturing her hives in exchange for the honey they provide, sharing with them a symbiotic relationship. In her corn field, she feeds sprouting corn plants with her prayers; she prepared her "fields with words and songs, first sprinkling sacred cornmeal that was ground from the previous year's corn to foster new life. The old corn would tell the new corn how to grow" (207). Her presence is not one of power, but nurturing and understanding of the power within each living thing. Instead of grabbing what she wants from the land, she maintains a relationship with her environment that can best be described as familial.

Occasionally, Belle steps outside her usual domain as the caretaker of this gentle economy and assumes a more forceful role in order to counteract the wanton destruction, first of the eagles and later of the bats. In one of the strongest passages in the novel, Belle confronts the eagle hunters on a trip into town:

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. For what seemed like a long time, Belle stood rooted to the spot. Her marrow went cold. She stared at the dead, sacred eagles. They looked like a tribe of small, gone people, murdered and taken away in the back of a truck. The hunters were busy beside the truck, counting the eagles. . . . [S]he dropped her eggs in the road, threw down her bags, and ran toward the truck yelling at the men. (107-08)

After her attack on the hunters and subsequent visit to the local jail, Belle returns home with her husband, Moses, where she disappears into their cellar, her "holy cave" (115). There, she sings and prays for the loss of the eagle people. Her caretaking assumes a more global perspective as her love and attention shift from her family to the sacred life of eagles. This aspect of caretaking is apparent when Belle protects

the sacred bat people at Sorrow Cave; this time, however, her intervention comes in time to prevent destruction and is successful because she is joined by so many other people; the sheriff's posse bent on exterminating the supposedly rabid bats is forced to give up.

Like Belle, Michael Horse also functions as a caretaker, but his duties are somewhat more abstract and communal. Informed by his dreams of prophesy, he is able to foresee and forewarn his neighbors of dangers and worries. He can predict the weather and divine water under ground; these gifts seem to be part of the continual conversation he engages in with his environment which is interrupted when the subterranean current of oil is brought to the surface. Throughout the novel, he is plagued by the failure of these gifts; however, Horse never fails in his duty as the keeper of the tribal fire: "The task of the firekeeper had been handed down to Michael Horse through his mother even before the Osage Indians had bought land in Oklahoma and moved there from the Neosho River in Kansas" (31). As the keeper the earthly element of a tribal continuity of life and light, Michael Horse feels the burden of his task, but he never abandons it.

In a fairly recent interview, Hogan reiterates her feelings about the importance of caretaking: "If you believe that the earth, and all living things, and all stones are sacred, your responsibility really is to protect those things. I do believe that's our duty, to be custodians of the earth" (Coltelli 79). So clear (and so often repeated in her own words) is Hogan's vision of the human role and responsibility in relation to the rest of the planet that the importance of caretaking in the text cannot be exaggerated. Without the caretaking of Belle Graycloud and Michael Horse, *Mean Spirit* would be a very painful novel; their acts of humaneness offset, to some degree, the relentless violence and oil-hungry greed that dominate much of the text.

III. Caretaking as the Work of the Text: Community and the Oral Tradition

Caretaking also provides the model for how the cultural work of this text is performed, shaping Hogan's role as writer and defining the relationship of her art to the community. The survival of the community seems central to Hogan's work, and its borders are expansive and mobile, sometimes broader than those of the tribe, sometimes including only a single family. Perhaps, because of her mixed-blood background and its peripheral relation to both Anglo and Indian identities, Hogan's notion of community is very generous. Gerald Vizenor claims: "Crossbloods are communal, and their stories are splendid considerations of survivance" (viii). For Hogan, survival is not a question of individual struggle but of cooperative yearning for wholeness. She has commented on her interest in community life and has spoken of

"breaking down those barriers between communities . . . [as being] much more important than building them up" ("To Take Care" 132). Community can mean much more than cultural identity; community can also mean the coming together of diverse peoples in a common cause such as caring for a shared planet.

While her concerns for community go beyond the borders of her tribal identity, it is that identity which shapes her understanding of the role of art and the artist within the community. I once heard Navajo poet Nia Francisco say that for tribal peoples, there is no special designation for the poet; anyone can be a singer, anyone can be an artist. In an interview with Joe Bruchac, Hogan expands on this view, declaring: "In tribal culture, *every* person has their place and one who speaks more clearly with the spirits than others is not a better person or is not in a higher position but simply performs one of the many functions of the people" ("To Take Care" 132). The tradition of the alienated artist defying his or her community found in modern Western culture has little to do with the creativity of tribal peoples. Art happens for the community; stories are told to and for the people.

For most tribal people, the mind of the artist is not the generative womb of genius, but the place where stories are set in motion. The storyteller of the oral tradition is a participant in an action whose power comes from shared language. Hogan speaks of this in her essay about Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*:

Words . . . are a materialization of consciousness. And deeds are the manifestation of words. By evoking in the hearer or reader a one-pointedness of mind, the poem, song, or prayer becomes more than just expression. It is a form of divine utterance that moves us to action, that is action itself. It is an extension of the internal into the external. ("Who Puts" 176)

Language has the power to create action, to join the internal and the external, the private and the public. Such language tells the community how to live. The oral tradition, according to Karl Kroeber, is "concerned with utterances as effective event: because language is powerful, one must attend carefully to its actual performances, its transformations" (82). Within this tradition, what stories can do is as important as what stories can mean.

Anthropologist Keith Basso's work recording story-telling among the Apache people confirms such an active and didactic role for the stories of oral tradition. His concern is with a specific type of story-telling that involves historical tales (the relation of past events in that Apache community). Basso explains:

In addition to everything else—places, events, moral stan-

dards, conceptions of cultural identity—every historical tale is also about the person at whom it is directed. This is because the telling of a historical tale is always prompted by an individual having committed one or more social offenses to which the act of narration, together with the tale itself, is intended as a critical and remedial response. (108)

These stories are told within the context of communal need, with very intentional notions of how the story should affect the community of listeners and those within that community who need that story.

Like the Apache of Basso's study, Hogan tells historical tales for a community in need. Voices from history commingle with her own; together they tell the story of *Mean Spirit* and Watona, Oklahoma. A letter from an Anglo man to an Oklahoma territory Indian agent is printed verbatim within the novel; in the letter, the writer requests a land-rich Indian bride; promise of a pay-off is included as the man claims that such an arranged marriage is "a plain business proposition" (33). This historical voice reminds the community (of readers) that love and profit have long been partners in the Anglo-American relationship with Native Americans; that such a relationship continues and is in need of what Basso calls a "critical and remedial response" is attested to by the production of films such as *Dances With Wolves* that turn love (of an image) or admiration to profit. Another voice from history that performs in such a way is a voice which provides an accounting of the wildlife killed by Zebulon Pike; he had "reported shooting in these hills, forests, and prairies 770 wildcats, 300 female bears, and 3,000 deer" (*Mean Spirit* 263). Such wholesale destruction of the natural world needs to be remembered in order to shame those in the community who continue to be guilty of carelessly destroying the planet; those who profit from destruction, like Exxon in Alaska, need these histories told again.

These historical voices participate in a highly textured narrative which is connected to the oral tradition. The multivocalism of that tradition comes from the layering of personality apparent in the telling and re-telling of familiar stories in both secular and sacred situations (I'm not sure such a clear line should be drawn between these types of stories). By invoking the heteroglossia of the oral tradition, Hogan participates in a complicated maneuver. Louis Owens explains this strategy of tapping into the power of the oral tradition:

Native American writing represents an attempt to recover identity and authenticity by invoking and incorporating the world found within the oral tradition—the reality of myth and ceremony—an authorless "original" literature. Yet

through the inscription of an authorial signature, the Indian writer places him- or herself in immediate tension with this communal, authorless, and identity-conferring source, at once highlighting the very questions of identity and authenticity the new literature attempts to resolve. (11)

For Hogan, this technique allows the voices of the oppressors to be heard but not incorporated as her own; maintaining this distance and difference is important to Hogan's self-ascribed identity as a voice from the margin.

Yet to write in English and to use the novel form inevitably situates her near some cultural "center." Owens writes: "Native American writers repeatedly demonstrate . . . this conflict between an authoritative 'alien' discourse and an internally persuasive worldview articulated by traditional values" (12). By employing the multivocal, interactive dynamic of the oral tradition, Hogan can maintain a voice enough outside of the dominant culture in order to critique it. However, she does not exploit the oral tradition by repeating the traditional stories of her own people or of the Osage people; by tapping into the vibrancy of the multivocal text, she engages its energies without desacrilizing it. As such, the spiritual and moral strength of her novel's message moves across cultural borders and reaches her mixed audience.

IV. Cultural Work and the Challenge of the Working Text

Novels with "messages" are not usually well-received by American audiences—Americans don't like to be told how to live, in general, especially those who are living well. To speak clearly about social values or moral situations in literature often invites discomfort or even hostility. According to Myra Jehlen, the residue of New Criticism of the Fifties created a "common critical wisdom that in literature, ideology was the trace of incomplete combustion in the transformation of the material of history into the spirit of literature" (3). In short, writing that revealed its ideological bias was poor writing. The tradition of the dominant culture has it that "literature . . . is a vehicle for abiding truths, and ideology, a system of interested deceit. . . . The concept of ideology has been especially suspect in this country, where the very consciousness of history has been repudiated for making unacceptable inroads on self-determination" (Jehlen 5). With such a privileging of the individual, the notion that texts perform some sort of communal work is unthinkable.

Maintaining distance from the (bourgeois) culture that preserves the realm of literature as an apolitical domain of "abiding truths," Hogan remains connected to the communal traditions of art by her working class and Native American roots. These traditions are what give life

to the pages of *Mean Spirit*. At the present time of enormous social tensions and environmental hazards, art created for the community, for its needs, seems essential. In *Social Values and Poetic Acts*, Jerome McGann articulates the way that texts like this novel can work to heal the community:

Texts governed by memory and imagination—poetic texts—display networks of human interests which are massively heterodox. They are not merely open to various "readings," they are inhabited by long histories of complex and often self-conflicted self-understandings. In this respect they hold a mirror up to the human world. But the mirror is held up as a challenge. . . . This challenge is to imagine more than you know, and to understand the imperative of such an act of imagining. (9)

By imagining more than we know, we can move ourselves and our culture to a better place. A literature that reminds us of the necessity of justice, of the value of human relationships, of the imperative of caring for the planet may be unfashionably clear about what is important, but it undeniably recalls its readers to the cultural work of community.

Louis Owens notes that the recent attention given to writing by Native Americans has much to do with its perspective, now seen as valuable to the dominant culture: "It is a holistic, ecological perspective, one that places essential value upon the totality of existence, making humanity equal to all elements but superior to none and giving humankind crucial responsibility for the care of the world we inhabit" (29). Such a literature for the community is corrective but not conservative. It is the literature of change, of social justice, of possibilities.

V. Conclusion

Western culture usually thinks in terms of what texts mean to the individual, not what texts do for the community. By connecting *Mean Spirit* to the communality of the oral tradition, to the social justice-oriented literature of the working class, and to the caretaking land ethic of the American Indian community, Hogan engages her spirituality as a catalyst in her writing, in creating a text that asks her audience to be active. She clarifies this relationship in her autobiographical essay in *I Tell You Now*. There, she states: "I have learned that to be spiritually conscious means to undertake a journey that is often a political one, a vision of equality and freedom" ("Two Lives" 247). To connect spirituality with political action, to unite the public and the private, is not a step usually taken in the dominant culture of American society.

But for an American Indian woman, making such connections is often inevitable. According to Paula Gunn Allen: "American Indian women writers have as our first and most significant perceptual characteristic a solid, impregnable, and ineradicable orientation toward a spirit-informed view of the universe which provides an internal structure to both our consciousness and our art" (166). By accessing the power of the "spirited-ness" of her Indian identity, Hogan explodes the "personal" borders delimiting the authorial voice of the novel.

Hogan's "spirit-informed" writing links her to a tradition that values the power of the word to create not only meaning but action as well. *Mean Spirit* reminds its readers to act in keeping with the environmental ethics that will "preserve life." Hogan believes in the power of the written word to inspire this action, explaining:

When I realized that people were going to read the poems, I thought of the best ways to use words, how great was my responsibility to transmit words, ideas, and acts by which we could live with liberation, love, self-respect, good humor and joy. In learning that, I also had to offer up our pain and grief and sorrow, because I know denial and repression are the greatest hindrances to growth. ("Two Lives" 241)

By connecting what she does as a writer to how the community lives, Hogan breaks the Western aesthetic code of the romantic artist who creates for personal and often personally tormented reasons. But I think our culture needs this kind of art; this form of caretaking can nurture what is neglected and devalued and can remind us of what life together as humans should mean. Generously, Hogan goes beyond a tribal concept of community in order to include us all.

NOTES

¹Written long before Hogan started her work on *Mean Spirit*, this poem contains the essence of the novel in its brief meditation on the relationships between masculinity, land, and labor. Hogan's poem is collected in *The Remembered Earth* (58).

²I have relied much on interviews with Hogan in constructing this theory of caretaking in part because of my discomfort in putting words or ideas into the mouth of a living writer. This seems particularly important when a writer is part of a community whose image has been used to represent interests far from its own.

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Dark Wealth in Linda Hogan's Mean Spirit

Alix Casteel

Terry P. Wilson comments in his book *The Underground Reservation: Osage Oil* that "[f]or many of the white inhabitants of Osage County, the tribe occupied the same category as the area's other natural resources: grazing land and mineral deposits" (135). Linda Hogan takes this idea and works it into the narrative structure of her novel *Mean Spirit*. In her novel the Euroamericans view the oil-rich Osage as a form of natural resource akin to the oil itself. Sentences referring to the oil—"The dam would not go in until all the dark wealth was removed from inside the land"—might just as easily refer to the dark and wealthy Indians (10). The dam to the hungry greed of the enterprising Euroamericans would not go in until all the dark and wealthy Indians were removed from their land.

From the first paragraph of Wilson's preface to his book about Osage oil during the last one hundred years, his knowledge and study of the milieu of the Osage oil boom necessarily involves his participation in a language community which talks about the Osage simultaneously as a cultural group and a material resource:

Osage County—"the Osage," as cattlemen, oilmen, journalists, and many resident Indians call it—is situated in northeastern Oklahoma. . . . The county is distinctive mainly for its oil and Indians. It was established as the reservation of the Osage Indians. Today, what remains of that reservation is underground. (ix)

"The Osage" operates simultaneously as a term to signify an oil-rich territory and the Indian tribe that occupies it. Although this area was originally designated "Osage" to refer to an Indian tribe and their reservation, the discovery of oil on this land has resulted in the term "Osage" primarily referring to the land rather than to its Indian

inhabitants.¹

This represents a curious though pragmatic evolution in Euroamerican thinking about connections between the American Indians and the American land. Earlier paradigms functioned to sever connections, whether rooted in legal notions of property or grounded in an ideology of the vanishing savage, for the explicit purpose of land acquisition. It was more politic to adhere to a belief that the Indians held no title or right to the land, and most expedient, after making this figurative split, to sever the Indians from the land physically as well in the policy of dispossession and removal. But once the denial of Native American rights to the land becomes an accepted idea, once the Indians have ideologically vanished as human beings, it is no longer imperative to separate the Indians from the land. In fact, it becomes opportune not only to reestablish this connection but also to construct the Native Americans as a natural resource because all arguments in favor of land development and exploitation then can be applied to the Indians. When in *Mean Spirit* the white lawyer Forrest describes "outsiders" (meaning non-Oklahoman Euroamericans) as "tapping into our pools and draining them" (190), he refers in a possessive manner not only to the oil reserves but also to the oil-rich Indians.

This turn-of-the-century conflation of Osage oil and Osage Indians should not in turn be conflated with Native American conceptualizations that unite the earth with all living beings as one harmonious ecosystem. First, the Native American places him- or herself within this system as a participant, while the Euroamerican places him- or herself outside and above this system as an owner and interpreter. The Indians understand not only that they and the land are connected, as evidenced by their suffering similar wounds, but also that they both suffer these violations through the common motive of profit. When Michael Horse writes that "the land is ravaged and covered with scars and so are the broken people" (341), he intends to convey both of these meanings.

The Euroamericans in Hogan's novel have a low regard for any kind of natural resource, reducing both the land and the Native Americans to exploitable commodities.² In Stacey Red Hawk's estimation, Oklahoma is a "dark burial ground . . . outlaw country through and through" (127). He understands how the law is used by those who move in and out of it, like John Hale. At Hale's court of inquiry, Mardy Green testifies that the plot to kill oil-rich Indians is no more than "clearing the land for your farm, or hunting the food you eat" (327). In other words, the Indians lack all subjectivity; they are objects to be cleared or hunted.

The Osage are shot, blown up, and poisoned in the same manner, and for the same reasons, that the earth is drilled, dynamited, and despoiled for oil.³ Grace Blanket is shot in the heart, and John Thomas

in the neck, while the earth endures the metal penetration of drills. Walker is poisoned with wood alcohol, just as the earth is poisoned with oil and saltwater spills that ruin fields and pastures for either farming or grazing. The hanged Benoit sways from his own belt, just as metal chains swing back and forth inside oil derricks to work pipe into the ground. The explosion that kills Sara Blanket "rocked the earth like it had been split wide apart" (75). The Cajun fortune-teller Isabelle couches her prediction of the explosion of Sara's house in words that describe organic death as well as a rent in the metaphysical continuum: ". . . there's flying feathers. Flying wood. Things are flying apart" (70). One is reminded of Belle's eagle prayer feather and her cross. These two symbols of Osage and Christian religious faith are being blown asunder. "The earth bled oil" (54), while the Osage bleed red blood. Oil workers move across the oil fields "like swarming bees" (54), just as the "horrible flies" (26) go to work on Grace's dead and bleeding body. Of course there had already been seventeen murders in the last six months in the Osage are prior to those that occur in the novel. The world had gone crazy because of the incessant drilling and dynamiting, but mostly because of the insanity created by boom wealth, "part of the madness cropping up like Johnson grass in dry, barren towns that grew rich overnight" (40).

Euroamericans also "mine" their Indians by grave robbing, which is simply another way to excavate all the dark wealth from the land. Stacey Red Hawk, a Lakota Sioux working for the U.S. Bureau of Investigation (the precursor to the F.B.I.), points out to his federal colleague Dr. Philip Levee that there are "'at least fifty holes dug out there [in the Osage cemetery] and those are just the ones no one's bothered to fill back up.'" There is a brisk trade in grave robbing because of "how much money Indian bodies are getting on the black market from museums and roadside zoos" (318). The bodies were "at a premium for displays" (120), not only in the United States but in Europe as well. One museum in Connecticut is known for acquiring bodies, moccasins, and baskets, as if Indian bodies could be logically categorized as the same type of commodity as moccasins and baskets. When Ona Neck discovers that Grace Blanket's gravesite has been violated, she weeps from grief and frustration. If she reports the crime, it will only guarantee an increased publicizing of the Osage custom of placing valuables in the coffins and thus an increase in the rate of looting. Hogan makes it clear that Ona Neck has no hope of restitution. The news of graveyard vandalization only terrifies the Osage into a "deeper silence" as they realize that even "their afterlives were bound to be haunted by money-hungry people who weren't above" grave robbing (59).

"They don't have a buffalo. . . . No wonder we don't understand

each other'" (177). The Euroamericans do not treat the Indians like buffalo from which they may feed, killing only what they need. Native American tribes utilized natural resources carefully so as not to disturb ecological balances. Just as Euroamerican values permitted the decimation of the buffalo herds, they also explain the ability to view the herd as a large deposit of raw material rather than as a collection of individual animals. Oilman John Hale's murderous conspiracy to acquire oil arises from a comprehension of the Native Americans as one large group, quantifiable but not understood qualitatively.⁴

Hale also displays these Euroamerican economic attitudes through the eagle hunt which he sponsors. The Euroamericans perceive the eagles as a natural resource to be plundered. The eagles have no individual significance; they are units in a vast pool just like barrels of oil: the eastern eagle hunters look at the eagles and see "just birds," three hundred and seventeen souvenirs to be shipped to a taxidermist. Belle Graycloud looks at the dead, sacred eagles and sees "a tribe of small, gone people, murdered and taken away in the back of a truck" (110). Her fear and rage is inexplicable to the eagle hunters: "She was insane, they thought" (110). But as Belle, Moses Graycloud, and Michael Horse return to the depot to witness the sacrilege, their mirroring of the dead eagles underlines the spiritual shock they experience through this trophy-hunting. "Moses' face went dead and empty" like the dead eagle carcasses; "Belle's eyes turned silver as knife blades" like "the blue-white membranes of death" over the eagle eyes; and "Horse looked smaller than usual" like the "small, gone" eagles (110, 114). They consider this kind of killing to be a massacre rather than hunting because mere trophy-hunting has no value in tribal communities.

The eagle hunters think Belle is insane; they look at her and see a "pesky old woman" who is "assaulting them and their cargo" (110). However, Hogan's description of the eagle hunters through Osage eyes redirects the reader's attention to the true source of insanity: "they looked foreign and strange, like visitors from another world, a world that eats itself and uses up the earth" (114). A world that eats itself is more than insane, it is psychotic. Where Belle's face assumes the appearance of a screaming, spitting old witch, the eagle hunters have no faces at all. The smoke from the dry ice rises up and erases them. In this same vein, when Martha Billy begins to look like an Indian, her face seems "stronger, more clearly defined" (175).

Joe Billy observes that the Euroamericans are waging a war with the earth that exceeds racial prejudice, but this universal hatred of life does not eclipse the ugliness of genocide. The genocidal impulse implicit in the moneymaking endeavors of Euroamericans in Indian Territory reaches its fullest expression with the war on bats. After a

young girl dies of rabies, the Euroamericans, believing that the animals carry the disease, place a one-dollar bounty on each dead specimen with the explicit intention of exterminating them all. This sacrilege mobilizes the Hill Indians as well as those sympathetic to the "good, red road," such as the hog priest, with the result that the bulk of the bats survive.

The Creek medicine man, Sam Billy, had practiced bat medicine, which represents one of the strongest traditions of healing. His son Joe, a Baptist preacher, prays holding his father's bat medicine bundle in his hands. The bat realm is a "nation of night people" (169) who cry out messages from the spirit world, "'the older world, wanting out'" (138). Like humans, bats inhabit two worlds at once, the spirit world and the tangible one. However, as far as the Euroamericans can tell, bats are only pests with no useful purpose. This is remarkably similar to the way many of them view the Native Americans, useful only for their bounty.

Wilson comments ably on the general climate of exploitation in which the Osage were compelled to exist for generations:

From the time of their removal from Kansas [in 1871] until the entry of the United States into World War II, government—local, state, and federal—failed to protect the Osages from the larcenous among their non-Indian neighbors. Although perhaps only a few persons directly participated in acts of violence, fraud, and theft, a much larger number—I would say an overwhelming majority—viewed the Osages as prime subjects for exploitation, if not by murder and robbery, then by sharp business practices, corrupt guardianships, and especially, a general willingness to share in dispossessing them. (xii)

This pervasive commitment to social Darwinism testifies to the gap between the murderous few and the thieving many in which the Osage found themselves. They were caught between the rock of murder and the hard place of theft, always encountering either one or the other. Besides "corrupt guardianships" many inventive ways are found to fleece the Native Americans. For example, Hale takes out a life insurance policy on Walker as a way to collect on his debt after death. In an ironic twist this arrangement provides a form of "death insurance," for as soon as Hale is named beneficiary to the policy, Walker's early demise is a foregone conclusion.

Regarding yet another creative way to plunder the Osage, John Joseph Mathews asserts that the "great frenzy" (as he refers to the period of the Osage oil boom and money fever) provided writers and journalists the opportunity to squeeze copy from the Osage. In 1879 the Osage began receiving their annuities in quarterly cash payments.

Soon payment days at the Pawhuska agency were regularly announced by Kansas and Arkansas newspapers, which inflated the sums paid out into gargantuan amounts (Wilson 50). Mathews refers to "the sentimental writers, taking the opportunity to be vindictive and the magazine writers and Sunday supplement writers enjoying the bizarre impact of wealth on the Neolithic men, with the usual smugness and wisdom of the unlearned" (775). Additionally, the Osage tribe received particular attention because of the unusual communal nature of their wealth and the corresponding aggregate spending potential of the tribe.⁵

Photography proves to be yet another process by which the Euroamericans extract commodity from the Osage as the faces of "Oil Rich Indians" appear on the covers of national magazines. John Tate, Moses Graycloud's brother-in-law, photographs every significant event that occurs in the area. His tripod is set up during the quarterly pay periods in Watona, at the carnival, at Grace Blanket's exhumation, at Nola Blanket's wedding, and at Benoit's funeral. He has used his wife Ruth as a model and a source of income, or in other words, he married her for whatever use he could get out of her. In keeping with his relentless camera-shooting, this "little" man also runs horses until they drop.

Even those Euroamericans who love and marry Indian women still profit from them and their people. Will Forrest collects and sells artifacts which looters have stolen from various aboriginal graveyards of the world. He does not ask where they come from because he does not want to know. Nola herself, "as an Indian woman, represent[s] something old and gone to him, something from another time" (195). One of Will Forrest's friends comments: "[Will] doesn't need a business. He's got an Indian wife" (193). Even Floyd Graycloud, who is depicted sympathetically as a "likable" (34) Missourian who imitates Indian ways, from taking the Graycloud name to wearing his hair long and uncut, makes his money as a whiskey peddler to the Osage to finance his "extravagant ways" (171). His business is at least partly responsible for the crowded jail on payment days.

This transformation of the Osage into a "natural" resource is exacerbated and enabled by the cultural disjuncture in the handling of money. In Euroamerican culture, personhood is conferred by the ability to understand and play by the rules when participating in the economic game of acquisition and consumption. With regard to acquisitiveness, the Native Americans display a deplorable lack of self-interest. Senator Henry L. Dawes of Massachusetts, widely known as a "distinguished Indian theorist" and sponsor of the Dawes Severalty Act of 1887, provided this combination of overly idyllic description with faulty analysis in 1885:

"The head chief told us that there was not a family in that whole nation that had not a home of its own. There was not a pauper in that nation, and the nation did not owe a dollar. It built its own capitol . . . and it built its schools and its hospitals. Yet the defect of the system was apparent. They have got as far as they can go, because they own their land in common. It is Henry George's system, and under that there is no enterprise to make your home any better than that of your neighbors. *There is no selfishness, which is at the bottom of civilization.* Till this people will consent to give up their lands, and divide them among their citizens so that each can own the land he cultivates, they will not make much more progress." (Debo 21-22) [emphasis added]⁶

Angie Debo astutely notes that Dawes illogically condemns the Indian principle of communal land tenure. It is important to state at this point that while land occupancy and use was recognized by Native American tribes, land was not deemed merchantable.⁷ This in no way was considered to abrogate non-merchantable possessory rights held communally by tribes because an acknowledgment of land occupancy and use implies a recognition of the concepts of boundary and trespass. According to Osage tradition, land was held in communal tenure and enterprise was generally of the collective nature. Through tenacious negotiating, the Osage had succeeded in retaining the mineral rights of the reservations as a tribal holding, which was to have a disastrous impact on their lives and culture.

In 1917 the Board of Indian Commissioners dispatched George Vaux, Jr. to investigate the Osage tribe. Vaux quickly discovered that the Osage situation was singularly different from that of other tribes in Oklahoma. "'As a rule, the problem of the Indian is the problem of poverty. With the Osages,' Vaux declared, 'the problem is the problem of riches.'" Vaux also reported that "'many residents [of Pawhuska] frankly told me that the whole community lived off the Indians'" (Wilson 127, 134). But whose problem is it and how has this problem been conceptualized? William Shepherd had this response in 1920.

The Osage Indians are becoming so rich that something will have to be done about it. . . . It's oil that's done it. The Osage Indians own this whole county. There ain't many of them, and every time a new well comes in they get more money. . . . Unless someone heads 'em off they'll all be red millionaires, these fellows. (723)

According to the politics of consumption, since the Indians do not know

how to spend their windfall money, they are unable to prove that they have earned the right to control it. Or to be more precise, since most of the Indians have proved to the Euroamericans that they do not know how to properly consume, the Osage cannot prove they have the right to retain their money. The Osage find inventive ways to use their new commodities that seem nonsensical to the Euroamericans. For example, Jim Josh discovers that his new car functions as an outstanding tomato hothouse. He finds nothing incongruous in the sight of a parked car full of plump, red tomatoes. As Hogan writes, "it was hard for the newly rich Indians to take their wealth seriously . . ." (57).

Even those sympathetic to the Indians viewed the two sets of cultural values as diametrically opposed, such as this oil operator who married a Native American woman: "There are two sides to that question. There is the Indian side to it and there is the commercial side to it. There is the side that affects the Indians and there is a side that affects the material progress of the country" (Debo 144). Notice that one side is clearly identified as "Indian," a cultural tag, while the other side appears to be the monolithic juggernaut of manifest destiny. Notice also that any play between these cultural opposites is bound to result in a clash which would mitigate against the Indians. Notice finally how clearly this demonstrates that for Euroamericans there is obviously more to commerce than making money. To the Euroamericans, Indians were the "shadow people, living invisibly on the fringes" of their material reality (81). To the Native Americans, on the other hand, the Euroamericans exist in a "shadowy white world" (353) of thieves and murderers, mere "wisps of smoke stealing by and around their own more solid world" (340).

Lionel Tall, who conducts a healing ceremony in Watona, grieves that "Uncle Sam was a cold uncle with a mean soul and a cruel spirit . . . even a prophet, even a warrior, could not survive the ways of the Americans, especially the government with rules and words that kept human life at a distance and made it live by their regulations and books" (221). Mean spirit. These are important words. "Mean" can interchange with the following adjectives: paltry, contemptible, shabby, petty, stingy, selfish, grudging, mercenary, greedy, grasping, or rapacious. It also carries the connotation of being low: low-minded, lowborn, low-bred, low class. It conveys a sense both of worthlessness and unworthiness. A mean spirit is not only an inferior and deficient spirit, it is a small one in every way. Ruth Graycloud Tate is described as rich, warm, and gentle; her husband is described as a "busy little photographer" (73) opposite to her in all ways. Where Tate is "weak," Ruth possesses "inner strength" (134). Where Nola "looked large with all the life growing inside her, [Will] looked small and diminished" (262). Hale, whose exterior obscures a "frame of knife-

sharp bones" (247), walks in "narrow boots" (54), one of the mean spirits walking the land. Mrs. Seward, the Indian school headmistress, is "sharp, emotionless" and "thin-lipped" (129). When Father Dunne becomes the hog priest he loses his "narrow-boned" (196) self.

The Osage have a difficult time understanding the literal and narrow materialism of the Euroamericans. Wilson states that the "carnival atmosphere" of the quarterly cash payment gatherings ended after World War I with the advent of mailed checks, and then "many Osages regretted the passing of the old custom, for the social aspect of the occasions had become almost more important than the financial transactions" (51). They cannot attach any moral significance to money, as the Euroamericans do, and they do attach humorous significance to it, as the Euroamericans do not. Another way of saying this is that money is sacred to the Euroamerican Oklahomans, but not to the Osage. Dr. Black, "an honest man in a world gone wrong" (154), expresses the ethic at work: "'In any other time or place it would sound strange, I should say. But here, business is business. I don't understand it. It's a different kind of law at work here. Nothing's wrong when cash is at stake'" (155).

Because the Osage do not take their wealth "seriously," they are judged primitive and child-like. In the spring of 1922, nearly all of the full-blood Indians were deemed incompetent and placed under the authority of guardians who would control their money. Mixed-bloods, although deemed competent, were ineligible to receive full payments.⁸ The logic at work here is that Indian blood confers the right to receive money, while white blood guarantees the right to control money. Therefore, the mixed-bloods receive partial payments because they are only partially Indian, but because they are partially white they automatically have a better chance of keeping whatever portion they do receive. On the other hand, the full-blood Osage cannot retain their oil money because they *are*, as "natural" resources, the oil money.

Best-selling author Edna Ferber, who had won the Pulitzer Prize in 1924 for her novel *So Big*, in 1929 published *Cimarron*, a novel based on "actual happenings" in the history of Oklahoma. She wryly adds that "material entirely true was discarded as unfit for use because it was so melodramatic, so absurd as to be too strange for the realm of fiction" (ix). One of the "absurd" events about which she writes is the Osage oil wealth:

Millions of barrels of oil. Millions of dollars. Millions of dollars yearly to be divided somehow among two thousand Osage Indians, to whom a blanket, a bowl of soffica, a mangy pony, a bit of tobacco, a disk of peyote had meant riches. And now every full blood, half blood, or quarter blood Osage was put on the Indian Roll, and

every name on the Indian Roll was entitled to a Head Right. Every head right meant a definite share in the millions. . . . The Indian Agent's office was full of typewriters, files, pads, ledgers, neat young clerks all occupied with papers and documents that read like some fantastic nightmare. The white man's eye, traveling down the tidy list, with its story-book Indian names and its hard, cold, matter-of-fact figures, rejected what it read as being too absurd for the mind to grasp. (340)

Ferber conveys how strangely incompatible the appearance of Indian names seems in a text of money to the Euroamericans of Oklahoma. The "story-book" Indians heretofore banished to the periphery of the vanishing past have suddenly been catapulted into the center of the moneyed present. Ferber complicates the absurdity of this "fantastic nightmare" through a conversation between the two main characters, Yancey and Sabra Cravat, by questioning where the absurdity lies:

[Yancey] seemed to find enormous satisfaction in the lavishness with which [the Osages] spent their oil money; in the very absurdity of the things they bought.

"The joke gets better and better. We took their land away from them and exterminated the buffalo, then expected them to squat on the Reservations weaving baskets and molding pottery that nobody wanted to buy. Well, at least the Osages never did that. They're spending their money just as the white people do when they get a handful of it—chicken and plush and automobiles and phonographs and silk shirts and jewelry."

"Why don't they do some good with it?" Sabra demanded.

"What good's Wyatt doing? Or Nisbett, or old Buckner, or Ike Hawes, or their wives! Blowing it on houses and travel and diamonds and high-priced cars." (346)

Yancey is making an important point: all those who found themselves oil millionaires overnight, whether Osage or Euroamerican, tended to embark on spending sprees for the same types of commodities. However, the Osage continued to wear their brilliant blankets while driving in their Cadillacs or Pierce Arrow roadsters. And they continued to *be* Osage even after they commenced being wealthy. The same controlling image that authorizes the Carlisle slogan "Kill the Indian and save the man!" refuses to permit complexity to Native Americans and allow for an identity that may be contradictory but self-defining.

Another important point needs to be made. Some of the Osage do know how to handle money. Moses Graycloud cultivates his fields,

owns livestock, and trades goods. His prosperity results as much from his accumulated business experience as from his hard work. His numerous commercial transactions make possible his adaptation to the world of financial enterprise. It is his very competency that scares the Euroamericans:

They were prepared for trouble, and they were tense, afraid of the dark people. They had ideas about Indians, that they were unschooled, ignorant people who knew nothing about life or money. But whenever an Indian didn't fit their vision, the clerks and agents became afraid. (60)

Because Moses Graycloud does not conform to the stereotype expected of him, that of the ignorant savage, he brings into question the extremely tenuous reasoning of the Euroamericans that it was acceptable to cheat the Indians of their money because they exhibited financial innocence. As the above passage illustrates, the Euroamericans became afraid whenever an Indian did not fit their vision, but they were always already tense and afraid because they expected their vision to be continually challenged. Also clearly delineated is the Euroamerican all-encompassing equation of life and money.

Another salient detail should be mentioned. The payments from mineral headrights represented a surplus to the typical Osage budget. Wilson points out that "the allotment checks were rarely cashed to pay for ordinary living expenses; income derived from the working or leasing of allotted surface land for farming or ranching usually provided Osage families with the necessities of life" (127). It would be like winning the lottery on a regular basis, so it comes as no surprise that the Osage might have treated these payments as winnings rather than as income. Moreover, because of their history of easily obtained credit from white traders, the Osage had developed a pattern of overspending. As Louis Burns remarks, "they rarely had ready cash and did not develop a 'feel' for the value of money" (555).

Not that the Osage were ever encouraged to develop money management skills. No training was ever provided to the Osage in the handling of their great wealth. This lack of financial training is not unique to the history of the Osage Indians. Other Native American tribes experienced the same paucity of business education. Angie Debo notes: "No attempt was made to develop the business capacity of the Indians by any system of accounting. If they inquired, they were informed as to the amount of their balance, but no statements were ever furnished them" (289). However, because of the great wealth of the Osage, even prior to the discovery of oil, it seems particularly⁹ inappropriate that the federal government declined this responsibility.

It appears even more appalling because, as Debo comments, "the unholy power of the Osage guardians . . . had created a situation in that small and wealthy tribe even more scandalous than what existed in the Five Tribes area" (323-34). Previously I contended that because the Osage do not take their wealth "seriously," they are judged primitive and child-like. But in a Catch-22 situation, it is equally true that because the Osage are considered ignorant savages, they are denied the opportunity to take their wealth seriously. Eventually this glaring lapse in government policy received an appropriate Euroamerican interpretation. The Meriam investigation, an economic and social study of Indian conditions authorized by the federal government in 1926, found that the allotment policy had failed because individual Indians had been made property owners without receiving adequate education for that role (McNickle 91). In fact, it failed because it was foreign to the communal nature.

Government policy at this time with regard to Indian education was in conflict with Indian desires and needs. The Bureau of Indian Affairs sought to divorce the Native American children from their extended families, tribal connections, and the influence of the Catholic mission schools by placing them in government boarding schools. The children were expected to learn to speak English, to become Protestants and patriots, and to acquire the Protestant work ethic which they would display in the performance of manual labor. The Osage did not desire their children to be stolen, converted, and indoctrinated; and the Osage certainly did not need to be trained in manual labor.

These preconditions ran counter to the prevailing philosophy of the Protestant-dominated Bureau of Indian Affairs, . . . whose underpaid, overworked agents daily had their sensibilities outraged by the complacency of the idly rich Osages. As a consequence, the schools adhered rigidly to the standard acculturation policy derived from the Protestant work ethic. . . . (Wilson 82)

Government policy aimed to train the Indians to become servants and farmers, ignoring the fact that it was clearly ludicrous to train wealthy individuals to earn a living as servants or subsistence farmers, and that it would have been much more beneficial to steer them into professions such as law or business.

It becomes clear that the stereotype of the financially incompetent and profligate Osage, while true for some individuals, is a convenient construction for broad application to all Osage in order to more easily steal from them. On payment day, one clerk in *Mean Spirit* says to another, "Hell, some of them buy three cars. We don't even have that kind of money, and we're Americans" (61).¹⁰ The appellation

"American" voices the Euroamerican certainty of entitlement, which is no more than an appropriation of indigenous rights. It also highlights the resentment felt by Euroamericans who maintain that they have been denied their "rightful due." Mathews comments that the rapacious exploiters actually behaved quite naturally, but that in terms of their own professed Christian ethics they branded themselves as hypocritical transgressors because they espoused a humanitarianism which they failed to enact. Interestingly, he adds that they clung to their lies because they needed to believe them.

Burchardt comments that "[c]riminals did not prey on the Osages because they were Indians, but because they had money" (264). This is certainly true, but it is also true that these criminals could not have succeeded so well if their victims had not been Indians. As Burns puts it, "the attitude that honest people could honorably cheat the Osages prevailed throughout the county" (561). The oxymoronic concept of honest cheating appears to be one of those transparent lies in which the Euroamericans needed to believe. For example, Forrest is both Nola Blanket's guardian and Benoit's defense attorney. This represents a clear conflict of interest because should Benoit be found guilty of Sara's murder he could not inherit any part of her estate and it would all pass to Nola, the next of kin. Forrest controls Nola's estate. If he fails to prevent his client Benoit from being convicted of murder, he will be able to control more money. Moreover, his son Will marries her, which deepens the conflict. But, not only is the situation legal, but Forrest actually seems to think that he can honorably discharge both obligations.

Euroamericans have invented and reinvented Indians to justify continual and continuing exploitation. Hogan's novel conveys that the way of the Euroamericans is to infantilize the Indians, such as by declaring adults incompetent and in need of a guardian. Calvin Severance literally has to hold his whiskey bottle "the way an infant would drink" (151) because he was hung by his thumbs at the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania. If the Osage persist in learning business ways (that is, "growing up"), they discover that it comes with a high vampiric-cannibalistic price: "before long they had no choice themselves but to become meat-eaters with sharp teeth, devouring their own land and themselves in the process" (54). It seems that growing up into an adult American entails either suicide or murder or both.

In *Mean Spirit*, the Blanket women and John Stink represent the richest veins of the dark wealth of oil in the territory. However, while the wealth of Grace and Nola is common knowledge because of their conspicuous consumption, few people realize that the hermit Stink is a millionaire. Hogan skillfully presents the gendered facets of Osage

victimization through Stink and the Blanket women, emphasizing their mythic and emblematic status through fire and water imagery. Osage women are business investments for Euroamerican 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" (34). The Blankets, flaunting their female emblem of the widow's peak, are an all-woman family of "dark-skinned angels" whose last name emphasizes their fullblood status (4).¹¹ Where the Blankets represent the culture of women, John Stink incarnates the ultimate in marooned alienation. Stink is a mute hermit who becomes a deaf and mute ghost. This good-natured giant is the silenced, walking dead of Indian nations.

When Grace dies something upsets the balance of the earth itself. As Grace becomes still with fear, even the air becomes still (23). When Grace is murdered, the gunshot is "[l]ike a stone cracking apart, something falling away from the world" (24). Despite Michael Horse's prediction of a two-week dry spell (predictions which had previously been reliable), "something uneasy in the air that day, like a dry, hot wind" (15) heralds the arrival of a violent storm of sharp rain that begins after the killing. It rains again on the day that Grace is buried.

Several days later, in a continuing parallel with the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, Ona Neck discovers that Grace Blanket's resting place has been disturbed. The angel tombstone has been overturned, its west-pointing finger now aimed at the sky, and the casket has been upended, opened, and emptied. Leticia Graycloud detects Grace's "uncanny presence" in the rose-flowered rocking chair in the "icy palace of crystal" that had been Grace Blanket's home (48). Benoit glimpses Grace, "walking slowly, as was her way, along the red road that disappeared into the hills" (49). On payment day in the autumn, everyone half-expects to see her sitting on the steps of her house as they drive by or at the pay table to sign for her annuity when her name is called (53, 59). "[T]ime heals all wounds, but time did not heal those who mourned the loss of Grace. Everyone missed her, and even if time could knit the wounds of sorrow, no scar tissue had woven itself across the gaping loss" (87). Her rusting bed frame continues to stand in her flower garden, just as she left it, even though Leticia and Benoit have boarded up her house.

The body of Grace Blanket, buried in the Christian cemetery with its angels and lambs, mysteriously vanishes. The still-living body of John Stink, buried standing and facing east in the older Indian burial grounds, climbs out of his coffin with the aid of his devoted dogs. He rolls away the stones covering his tomb just as the large stone blocking the tomb of Christ rolled away. His emergence from the grave is described as the "miraculous return" of a "resurrected" being (106).

It is not at all clear at this point in the story whether Stink exists as ghost or mortal. Together, the death of Grace Blanket and the burial of John Stink represent a resurrected Christ figure, which suggest that a transcendence of the evils besetting the Osage will require a communal response.

The day that Grace dies an unexpected storm comes up; the day Stink dies a drunk John Thomas runs through the town, weeping, screaming, and yelling that he knows who killed Grace Blanket. The day that Grace is buried it rains buckets; the day that John Stink is buried a fire (sparked by the eagle hunters' pipes) blazes out of control. The sign of the Blankets is water; Lila Blanket is a river prophet. The fire burns "like a torn, ragged edge of red cloth" not unlike the red babushka that Stink customarily wears on his head (104). Grace dies in the wet summer; John Stink "dies" in the fiery autumn.

Hogan's character John Stink is based on a real-life individual. Stink, or *Ho-To-Mo-I'n*, Roars-as-He-Walks, contracted scrofula as a child.¹² His people believed he carried the evil spirit because of the repugnant oozing and scent of his diseased flesh, so he became a hermit. John Stink has "no use for money, no concept of it even" (168). This proves to be a sturdy defense because there is no reason to kill such an amenable old man. His "death," however, proves the best defense for his life and fortune because while he remains "legally" dead he enjoys complete protection from all marriage schemes.

Whereas Grace actually dies and her body vanishes, Stink only seems to die and his body continually appears on the public streets. Floyd and his son, Ben, are the first to encounter the "ghost" of John Stink. Time did not heal those who mourned the loss of Grace and it did not heal those who mourned John Stink because his ghost continually parades through their lives. Everyone misses Grace, but no one can miss Stink, because he refuses to move on to the hereafter. Interestingly enough, the Osage believe that Stink is dead and that his ghost is wandering the streets of Watona, while the Euroamericans never entertain this idea. The Native Americans believe that Stink's ghost must be visible only to Indians because the Euroamericans do not make room for the ghost to pass. The first Euroamerican to perceive Stink's ghost is Dr. Benjamin Black, who believes that the man he sees is living, but that it must be someone posing as Stink. The Euroamericans believe that Stink is alive, or else they would have laid claim to his estate. Hale pays his girlfriend, China, to marry Stink because Stink's total disregard for his own wealth indicates that he would not protest the looting of his fortune. This plot fails because the county clerk adheres to the reality of John Stink's death certificate over the fact of the living man.

John Stink's life (and death) continually intersects with Nola

Blanket's. His first appearance in the novel is to comfort her grandmother, Lila, when Grace is sacrificed to the town of Watona for the sake of the Hill Indians. As the fire dies down on the day that John Stink is entombed, a flood of crickets "like a spreading dark stain of blood" march up the Graycloud staircase to swarm over Nola's body (105). This experience causes Nola's fear and sorrow to "come undone" and her father's touch allows it to drop away (105-06). She sleeps peacefully with her eyes closed for the first time since Grace's murder. Nola is "startled back to life" and regains her voice the day that Stink is buried (118). He attends the wedding of Nola Blanket and Will Forrest, which is marked by a fiery meteor shower. He is present at the attempted murder of her adoptive mother Belle, which is foiled by the flaming rock from the sky, Star-Looking.

After her mother's death Nola becomes the richest Indian in the territory. She assumes a heroic status at the Indian school because she alone articulates the anger and defiance that the others fear to express and is described as a "holy terror" (130). When she gives her legal guardian, Mr. Forrest, a direct command, he obeys her without understanding why. After Grace dies, sacred runners from the hills arrive to guard Nola. All this represents an overwhelming display of power and strength, but its presence implies its very necessity because of the strong danger that threatens Nola. Nola's four watchers represent an impressive force that is not a commodity in the marketplace. This is true also of John Stink's humbler and devoted circle of mongrels. Nola Blanket marries a Euroamerican whom she never fully trusts because he will inherit her headright if she dies. John Stink's life was safe enough even if he had married China because she could not inherit from him.

Willard John Forrest genuinely loves thirteen-year old Nola, but it is the love of a boy, not a man. He lacks legitimate work of his own and the courage to announce their engagement to her family. As presents he gives her a sharp-toothed monkey with a rhinestone collar which imitates her in every way and a brilliantly colored tropical parrot. These exotic animals do not belong in Oklahoma; his choice of enslaved and foreign animals which resemble her shows immature, colonial judgment. Nola has no deep faith in his love; she can not be sure that he is not "crooked" and she wonders how he earns his money, but once she agrees to marry him her nightmares end because she realizes that at that time she is worth more to him alive than dead. However, during her pregnancy her fear escalates until she believes that he will eventually murder her.

Nola Blanket experiences the full gamut of violations to dark wealth. Her mother's death causes her to lose her color; overnight Nola becomes "ash-pale" just as the earth at the site of the explosion

of Sara's house becomes covered with gray ash (31). She sleeps for months with her eyes open, as if her eyes are replicas of the gaping earth that has been torn open. She becomes temporarily mute. She is assigned a guardian, Mr. Forrest, who squanders her inheritance. She marries a man without believing that he loves her to ensure her own safety, weeping most nights before the wedding. Even his father believes that Will has married a paycheck rather than for love. Finally, after witnessing Hale's trial, and about a year after Grace's murder, she rejects the white world and her husband, Will, along with it. Unable to discern his love and innocence because of the tremendous fear generated by the past year of killing, broken by anger and fear, she shoots him, although she loves him. The relationship between Will and Nola begins on a rainy day that quickly evolves into Tornado Nola. It rains on the day that Grace is shot and on the day she is buried; a year later another misty, rainy day accompanies Nola's murder of her husband.

Nola is compared to an apple because the Blanket women do not inhabit the place of Eve. They fulfill the role of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, an irresistible icon of power based on moral differentiation. The power to contain both good and evil suggests the ability to control the fluid and transformative space between them. Nola transmutes her suffering into a celebration, having the grandest wedding ever seen in those parts. She salvages a strand of pearls from her mother's dead body. She transforms her marriage of necessity into a beautiful baby. Her daughter, Moses, is the first of the family to carry Euroamerican blood. Interestingly, she is named both after the patriarchal head of Nola's adoptive family and after the biblical leader responsible for the emancipation and exodus of his people from slavery in a foreign culture. Finally, when trapped by a rock Nola discovers oil in the creek on Belle's land.

The inside of the county courthouse is decorated with paintings of naked Indian women, one of them riding a buffalo, offering grain and meat to white men. A variation of this theme appears on Nola's wedding cake: "an Indian maiden, a cowboy, and a model of the Eiffel tower that looked more like an oil derrick" (183). The symbolism can not be more poignantly clear. The main route to the possession of dark wealth is through a dark and wealthy Indian woman. When Nola cuts the cake, the Indian maiden topples off and falls to the floor. Or does Hogan hint that she might have jumped? Perhaps she leaps to elude those who would seek to label her as a natural resource or a commodity.

Set against the walking dead signified by John Stink and the exploitation of Osage women represented by the Blankets, is the Graycloud family. Diminutive Belle Graycloud is at least part

Chickasaw and a "giant on the inside" (13). Where the sleeping Grace had been surrounded by domestic red roses and wild irises, Belle sleeps in an herb garden encircled by a court of "reverent" animals (10). Belle uses herbs to heal, a knowledge she learned from Sam Billy, blesses corn fields, and continually champions the animals, such as the bears, the eagles, and the bats. In return her bees avenge the attack by Jess Gold. The day that includes the events of John Stink's burial, the discovery of John Thomas' body, and the raging fire, is also the day that Belle ceases to speak to her daughter Louise, who returns home that night "drunk and giddy" (106) and who has consistently rejected everything Indian, and "didn't trouble herself with the new laws . . . even when they affected her own children" (35). Functioning as the arbiter of right and wrong, Belle does not address Louise again until the following spring after she and Moses have been arrested for protecting the bats.

John Stink no sooner emerges from the grave than Belle Graycloud moves into the "holy cave" of her root cellar to devise a plan of action (118). On the night of the explosion that kills Sara Blanket, Belle prays with the aid of a burning sacred heart candle, a cross, and an eagle prayer feather. When she retreats to the cellar after the confrontation with the eagle hunters she takes the sacred heart of Jesus candle, a bundle of cedar and sage, a vial of holy water from the sacred spring, and an eagle prayer feather. Belle mixes and uses all forms of prayer and blessing. She stays there until nearly winter when she emerges to urge Lettie to accept the sheriff's courtship as an avenue for aiding the imprisoned Benoit.

Unlike the semi-mythic and symbolic Blanket women represented by water and roses and John Stink represented by fire, the Grayclouds represent the dark wealth of food and family. It is no coincidence that Belle's holy cave contains vegetables. Moses and Belle are mixed-bloods who run a working farm. Instead of utilizing their oil, like Grace, or ignoring it, like Stink, they endeavor to hide the oil in their creek. But in the explosive conclusion, their house is dynamited and Moses' twin sister, Ruth, is shot by her husband. However, even though their house and past life blaze, Hogan suggests that their continuing survival represents a major victory in the face of terrible odds. This survival testifies to the great strength of their dark and growing wealth.

NOTES

¹John Joseph Mathews (775) has more to say regarding the meaning of the term "the Osage."

²For example, Terry Wilson contributes that "[w]hile the rougher elements bootlegged whiskey, robbed members of the tribe of their cash, grazed cattle without permits, and squatted illegally on reservation land, other men devised a plenitude of subtler schemes to take advantage of the Osages" (66).

³For an account of the Reign of Terror, or the Osage oil murders in the 1920s, read Bill Burchardt's article. Louis Burns (561-67) also provides some interesting information. Hogan's character John Hale represents William K. Hale, a Texas rancher who became wealthy in the Osage and was tried and convicted for some of the oil murders.

⁴Quantification assists commodification because it is much simpler to place a price on a particular quantity than on a particular quality.

⁵Terry Wilson notes that the "Osages achieved a greater notoriety than other oil-rich tribes because the whole tribe shared equally rather than a lucky few whose allotments happened to coincide with the locations where producing wells were drilled, as was the case elsewhere in Oklahoma. Also, the Burbank field [west side of the reservation], an especially productive area, was developed in the 1920s, a period of high prices for oil and natural gas, after the other tribes' holdings had already been exploited" (127).

⁶Although Dawes was apparently speaking of the Cherokee tribe, his critique of Indian principles of communal ownership as he observed it in Indian Territory in the 1880s applies to the Osage as well.

⁷I borrow this term from D'Arcy McNickle (78).

⁸Allotment in 1906 created the following situation:

for the future the number of allotments would stay constant at 2,229 [originally 926 full-bloods and 1,303 mixed-bloods or adopted persons]. There had been no minimum blood quantum established as a criterion for enrollment, and non-Indians could also inherit allotment shares. The headrights could be divided among heirs and subdivided in later generations, and an individual might hold multiple shares through inheritances from spouse and family. Perhaps most significant for the economic, social and political future of the tribe was the fact that Osages born after the roll was closed would not share in the tribe's income, although they were recognized as members of the tribe. Thus, as time passed, there came to be a have-not division of the tribe with no allotment-derived income . . . as well as the original allottees and their allotted descendants or heirs, some holding multiple headrights. (Wilson 93)

⁹Burns contributes that "the Osages were considered to be well off by 1890 and by 1900 they were described as the wealthiest people in the world" (553). This preceded the oil boom, which began to take off in 1906. "On the eve of allotment . . . income from grazing and farming leases, interest payments on the money obtained from the sale of the Kansas reservation, and royalties from oil and gas production had combined to make them the envy of

other Indians and their white neighbors. An average Osage family by 1917 enjoyed a yearly income ranging from \$5,000 to \$10,000, while a number of families had much more. And the postwar decade would witness an outpouring of wealth completely overshadowing the comfortable prosperity of the tribe between 1880 and 1917" (Wilson 99-100).

¹⁰While it is true that the Osage especially loved their fast and shiny cars in the same way that they had quickly taken to horses when they first became available in North America, the entire country embraced automobiles with abandon. The pervasive American love affair with the car has been too well documented to require further comment.

¹¹"Blanket Indian" was a common referent for the stereotype of the uncivilized, slow, and stubborn fullbloods who stubbornly resisted assimilation. See Mathews (772) and Wilson (22-23) for more information.

¹²Scrofula is a form of tuberculosis characterized by swollen glands and skin lesions which produces an odor of decay, one of the many diseases the American Indians contracted after contact with Euroamericans. As was the case for lepers, scrofula victims in the past frequently bore the stigma of moral contamination.

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FORUM

ASAIL Sessions at the 1994 MLA Conference in San Diego

The Association for the Study of American Indian Literatures will be sponsoring two sessions at this year's MLA conference in San Diego. They are:

Session 20: Return to Native Languages (Tuesday 27 December, 3:30-4:45 p.m., Solama Room, San Diego Marriott)

Presiding: Fred H. White, UCLA

1. "Ojibwe Language Renewal," Jillian M. Berkland, UCLA
2. "Reclaiming Language: Reclaiming Identity," Jeanne Breinig, U of Washington

Session 501: American Indian Literature in the Curriculum: Strategies and Resources (12 noon-1:15 p.m., 1B, San Diego Convention Center)

Presiding: Kathryn W. Shanley, Cornell U

Speakers: A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff, U of Illinois, Chicago;
James K. Ruppert, U of Alaska, Fairbanks;
Kathryn W. Shanley;
Brian Swann, Cooper Union.

Calls for Papers

SPECIAL ISSUE OF *SAIL*

As announced in a previous issue of *SAIL*, we are still planning a special issue on Contemporary American Indian Poetry; the submission deadline has been extended to 15 November 1994. Manuscripts should follow the current MLA format; please submit two copies (and WordPerfect 5.1 disk if possible) to the Guest Editor of the issue:

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REVIEWS

Grandmothers of the Light: A Medicine Woman's Sourcebook. *Paula Gunn Allen. Boston: Beacon, 1991. Cloth, ISBN 0-8070-8102-7. 246 pages.*

Following her seminal feminist study of American Indian culture, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*, and her acclaimed edition of stories, *Spider Woman's Granddaughters: Traditional Tales and Contemporary Writing by Native American Women*, Paula Gunn Allen has another strong, woman-centered book in *Grandmothers of the Light*.

To call Allen an author, as of *The Sacred Hoop*, or an editor, as of *Spider Woman's Granddaughters*, seems too academic a misnomer for her role in this book. In the feminist and Native American traditions, she has, in her own words, "rendered" these stories. She explains that the book

. . . contains myths, not necessarily as recorded or told, but as I understand them. Rendering works from the tribal ritual tradition aims to enable readers unfamiliar with those traditions to comprehend implicit as well as explicit meanings of the myth. To facilitate this process, I wrote the narratives with as much an eye to the meaning implicit in the social, environmental, and ritual contexts in which the myths are embedded as to their purely metaphysical content. Short of glossing virtually every word—and even that wouldn't be particularly efficacious—rendering the myths in this larger context seemed

the wisest course. (xiv-xv)

It is not my intent, therefore, to analyze the "scholarship" in this review, but rather to give a sense of Allen's renderings.

Most of the stories here will be familiar to readers who know something about American Indian stories and/or goddess stories—as "What Is Wakan," a rendering of the myth of White Buffalo Calf Woman of the Lakota, and "A New Wrinkle," a rendering of the Keres tale of Spider Grandmother, will be. Yet Allen, through her evocative use of language as invocation (she is, after all, also a poet and novelist, a storyteller herself) gives all of these stories "new wrinkles." Listen to this passage from the Spider Grandmother story, the story itself a web of words, creation chants:

Ic'sts'ity [one of the two sisters whom Spider sang into being] began to sing a new chant: way-a-hiyo, way-a-hiyo, way-a-hiyo, way-a way-ay-o. She sang and sang, thinking to her bundle, and around them as she sang swirling, whirling globes of light began to form. (36)

The collection begins with a section of these creation stories, which Allen titles "Cosmogyny: The Goddesses." In her preface to the book, she defines the term *cosmogyny* as "an ordered universe arranged in harmony with gynocratic principles" (xiii-xiv). Thus, the book opens with a section of stories that reveal the universe in harmony with the "gynocratic values" of "peace, tolerance, sharing, relationship, balance, harmony, and just distribution of goods" (xiv).

The second section of the book, titled "Ritual Magic and Aspects of the Goddesses," moves from myth to ritual or, as Allen explains, from noun to verb (8). Defining ritual tradition as "the great body of articulated experiential knowledge that deals with the features of the universe of power" (8), Allen writes: "Myths can be seen as reports or recipes for ritual practice, and rituals can be seen as enactments of myth. But either seen separately from the other is seen falsely" (8).

So, of course, the three sections of the book are not to be analyzed or even read separately, and this fact points to one of my limitations in writing this review. Since one of the central figures of both the female and Native American worlds is the circle, one must read (and write about) the book in a circular manner, for,

Many times the stories weave back and forth between the everyday and the supernatural without explanation, confusing the logical mind and compelling linear thought processes to chase their own tails, which of course is a major spiritual purpose behind the tradition's narrative form. (5)

But to continue with a linear analysis, the third section of the book, "Myth, Magic, and Medicine in the Modern World," is testimony to the present and future uses of the myths and rituals of the past. This last section's stories "testify to the pertinence today of the ways of power. They indicate that relations between human women and supernaturals are as viable in the present time as in days gone by" (xvi). But since I have presented the stories as following a linear past-present-future chronology, I should reiterate that the stories do not end, that all time is all-present. This is the paragraph that closes but does not end "Someday Soon," the final story:

It is said that at the time of the beginning, the Goddess will return in the fullness of her being. It is said that the Mother of All and Everything, the Grandmother of the Sun and the Dawn, will return to her children and with her will come harmony, peace, and the healing of the world. It is said that time is coming. Soon. (201)

It is usually a taboo to disclose a book's ending in a review, but here I have broken no taboo, since this is, in a sense, also the book's opening. The only taboo here, in fact, is not in disclosing but in disbelieving. Paula Gunn Allen continually renders to the reader a way of reading the book that is a way of believing:

. . . the stories in this collection are not to be taken primarily as metaphors for instinctual patterns deeply embedded in the human psyche as Jung would have it, or as meta models of the structure of the human mind as Levi-Strauss claimed. Though they function on a number of levels of significance, as is the nature of all literature, they are factual accounts. (6-7)

Later, she reiterates, and I wouldn't dare not allow her the last word:

Notice the land, the vastness around you, and say there are no goddesses, no gods. Say that the holy people are imaginary substitutes for hidden human instinctual drives. Go on, I dare you. Say it. (218)

Sandra L. Sprayberry

The Lightning Within: An Anthology of Contemporary American Indian Fiction. Ed. Alan Velie. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1991. Cloth, ISBN 0-8032-4659-5; paper, ISBN 0-8032-9557-x. 163 pages.

Anthologies are vexing. Governed on all sides by complicated processes of selection and exclusion, anthologies gain weight, change their minds, or lose currency to the extent that their makers and consumers recognize their own political, historical, and cultural investment in the act, and in the art, of making and consuming. Much more than pedagogical conveniences or unnatural history museums, anthologies are now more than ever tenable as occasions for constructive critical discussion of what we teach and how we implement change—provided, of course, that we have the time, the inclination, and the employment opportunity to do so. Maybe, as recent such discussions indicate, only one thing is really clear: a good anthology remains hard to define and harder still to find.

For better and, I think, for worse, Alan Velie's *The Lightning Within* offers a refreshing alternative to what Kenneth Warren describes as "the biblical weight and size of anthologies"—the two-volume, ten-pound, 5500-page colossi that often seem both to represent the "palpable weight of a tradition" and to regret that they could not be heavier still (Kenneth Warren, "The Problem of Anthologies, or Making the Dead Wince" in "Forum: What Do We Need to Teach?" *American Literature* June 1993: 341). In startling contrast, Velie's *Anthology of Contemporary American Indian Fiction* gathers together but seven writers and nine writings, and the book weighs in at what is, by other "contemporary" standards, an Ultra Slimfast 163 pages. Editorial intrusions are kept to an extreme minimum; Velie's introduction, which opens with the sentence "American Indians have been composing narratives for thousands of years," comprises fewer than five hundred words. Headnotes introduce each of the seven writers and these, with the exceptions of those devoted to Momaday and Vizenor, are shorter still. And, while it proposes the worthwhile intention of

both introducing and celebrating contemporary American Indian fiction, the anthology makes only slight gestures toward suggestions for further reading.

Now, friends and fellow members of ASAIL, you will probably do all right without lengthier editorial commentaries and bibliographies. You will already know something about the seven writers featured in this anthology—Momaday, Welch, Silko, Vizenor, Simon Ortiz, Erdrich, and Dorris—and in fact it's likely that you're familiar with most if not all of the stories Velie collects, since all but Vizenor's "Luminous Thighs" are excerpted from major works such as *House Made of Dawn*, *Storyteller*, and *Love Medicine*. To my reading, the selections are all powerful and all beautiful; the stories are well chosen both for their diverse particular merits and for the ways they work together. (A good anthology is not exactly a ceremony, of course, but can be understood as a form of community.) Many of them look unflinchingly at contemporary on- and off-reservation life, detailing problems involving (for example) poverty, alcoholism, racism, and sexual abuse while also, importantly, affirming real and various strengths—literary strengths, yes, and also cultural strengths, spiritual strengths, the survival and maintenance of family, community, and storytelling.

At the same time, the stories collectively demonstrate that simple binary-driven understandings of Indians and of Indian-white relations just won't do. Again, for *SAIL* readers this will not come as revolutionary news, but those readers who genuinely seek and need an introduction to contemporary American Indian fiction (and, by extension, contemporary American Indian culture) will learn a great deal from these nine stories. Dorris's Rayona, a mixed-blood African-American and Native American living in the American Northwest, comes from a very contemporary sort of broken home; she sleeps, she tells us, in her estranged mother's old bedroom, under her mom's pictures of Elvis Presley, Jackie Kennedy, and Connie Francis. She flips through old copies of *Seventeen* magazine while her Aunt Ida watches *As the World Turns* and *The People's Court* downstairs. Rayona meets up with very contemporary sorts of cruel teenagers, and ends up defiantly happy in the wake of the inept white priest's sexual assault. James Welch's *White Man's Dog*, in contrast, comes from an earlier Northwest, where his Blackfeet people are still sovereign and whites the likes of Father Tom are still more outside than inside their lives. Welch describes the courtship, marriage, and sexual passions of *White Man's Dog* and *Red Paint* in the context of a wealth of family relationships and friendships, as well as a breathtaking and very highly-charged mythic realm where Raven-People and Wolverine-People and receptive Blackfeet smoke, talk, and enjoy mutually

courteous relationships. In general, whites in these stories—with the cheerful exception of Silko's Captain Pratt—typically believe themselves superior to Indians, but their racism turns up in many different (and often self-delusory) packages. Dorris's Father Tom, for example, doesn't understand nearly as much as he so self-assuredly thinks; to both old and young Indian men, Father Tom is a laughing-stock, and Rayona immediately pegs him too: "He is a real jerk, a dork" (140). But, as Rayona learns over time, he is a real jerk with just enough power to be annoying if not actively dangerous. And just such modulations and transitions and mixtures—of, for example, comic deadpan, wariness, boredom in the face of fatuously peppy Christians, and lyric expressions of both teen angst and love medicine, both Wolverine song and bad 1970s disco—may very well teach new readers of contemporary American Indian fiction most of all.

And yet, even in liking the anthology as a collection of good stories, I found that the same question inevitably recurred throughout my reading: Why is this book so short? I mean, *can* contemporary American Indian fiction be introduced and celebrated in a book that's only 163 pages long? Velie tells us in his introduction that "[t]hese writers have gained some critical attention . . . but by and large they are still not well known to most readers. It is the purpose of this book to address that problem by providing a selection of some of the best pieces of contemporary Indian fiction to serve as an introduction to the principal Indian novelists and short-story writers of the past twenty years." I would like Velie to tell us more about the critical and aesthetic standards that inform his sense of "the best." I would like to see a bibliography at the end of this anthology, simply because the stories Velie gathers together are so good; it's a shame that the book does not end by building bridges toward further reading and imagining and learning. Velie does say, in his introduction, that "[r]eaders who enjoy the authors included here will want to seek out other works by them. I hope, too, that these readers will also move on to other sorts of Indian writing—the drama of Hanay Geigomah, the political and philosophical writings of Vine Deloria, and the poetry of Rayna Green, Diane Burns, and Paula Gunn Allen, to name just a few examples" (x). I agree. But why not name more than "just a few examples," including suggestions for listening to American Indian stories told orally? (Even the end of a millennium will not persuade me to cede the place of oral storytelling!)

Finally, though, I cautiously recommend this anthology. I think that *The Lightning Within* can be useful for, among others, high school and college teachers who are comfortable with the idea that, compared to the colossi, less can be more. Spare and reticent as Velie's anthology can be, it still brings together a nice range of contemporary

American Indian fiction. It can also help generate discussion and greater understanding of the wonderful varieties of contemporary American Indian fiction as well as the no-less wonderful connections between seven Native American writers who can now, thanks to Velie, be reinterpreted and reimagined as a working community. Short in length, *The Lightning Within* is generous and challenging in spirit.

Eric Anderson

The Things That Were Said of Them. *Told by Asatchaq. Tr. from the Inupiaq by Tukummiq and Tom Lowenstein.* Berkeley: U of California P, 1992. ISBN 0-520-0659-7.

The Tikigaq people of Point Hope, Alaska, tell the story of the mythic protoshaman Tulinjigraq, who spears a whale that no one can kill. When the whale dives, Tulinjigraq sings an *avataqsiun* (drag-float song) to make it rise. On reaching the water's surface, the whale is transformed into the peninsula upon and from which the Tikigagmiut build homes and launch whaling expeditions that are a reflection and continuation of this first hunt.

The premise of a living, interactive harmony between the worlds of myth and the here-and-now is fundamental to many Native American belief systems. The lower worlds of the Navajo story of the Emergence are portrayed as a realm of creation, connected by geography and symbol to the Earth-Surface World of the *Dinetah*; and as hero tales are reenacted in Navajo healing ceremonies, so order is restored to the cosmos in a celebration of the bond between myth and life. Similarly, raiding expeditions of the pre-twentieth-century Tohono O'Odham were preceded by narrative oratory recounting the tale of the first war party of myth, and it would not be overly satirical to suggest that the ancient lights in the night sky participate in astrophysical ceremonies that grant the modern European psyche an affirmative glimpse of the mythic past articulated in its sciences.

The story of the shamanic creation of the Tikigaq peninsula is an appropriate beginning to British poet Tom Lowenstein's collection of Tikigaq lore, entitled *The Things That Were Said of Them*. The whale

and the pursuit of whaling were central to the Tikigaq culture of old, providing not only economic sustenance but also societal, ritual, and spiritual focus. The Whale Who Becomes Land is the mythic expression of the essential and existential in Tikigaq life—a metaphor in Euro-American literary parlance, but far more. The *inua* (resident spirit) of the primal whale lives in the mud and gravel topography of Tikigaq, and if the interaction between the Tikigagmiut and the *inua* of their homeland has diminished with Americanization, Christianization, and loss of tradition, it survives in the oral literature passed on to Lowenstein by the Tikigaq loremaster, Asatchaq.

Twenty-one of the twenty-four myths, shaman tales, and histories that comprise Lowenstein's collection were spoken by Asatchaq (Jimmie Killiguvik) in Tikigaq during the spring and winter of 1976. Born in a time when Tikigaq society was threatened by starvation, disease, and the disappearance of game (the bowhead whale had been hunted to near extinction to satisfy the baleen markets in Europe and the United States), Asatchaq lived to see the passing of a way of life that had been succumbing slowly to the pressures of contact since the Nineteenth Century. His stories are the chronicle of a culture in transition, and it is the *anjatkuq*—the Tikigagmiut shaman—whose evolution, from the trickster/creator of myth to the powerful spiritual and political leader of the post-contact period, mirrors this transition within the context of a cosmology in which the mythic, the historical, and the immediate are inextricably joined.

The first of Asatchaq's shaman tales are firmly set in the myth-time, where "things were opposite to how they are today" (5). Men hunt by the moon because there is no daylight, and people walk on their hands instead of their feet. Distinctions and barriers between spirits, people, and animals are vague, and primal tricksters wield shaman-magic to create and set precedent for the world that will be. Tulunjigraq follows the feat of harpooning the first whale by assuming his raven's guise (Tulunjigraq translates "something like a raven") to steal daylight, "thus ensuring that light and darkness are balanced in the newly made world" (5). The trickster shaman Alinjnaq deceives his sister into committing incest and, to hide his shame, transforms himself into the Moon Spirit. In times of poor hunting, tribal shamans visit the moon in spirit journeys to petition Alinjnaq for the release of the game over which he has charge, and Tikigaq women stand on their iglus to welcome the new moons of fall and spring with bowls of consecrated water. If they show sufficient power, the water reaches Alinjnaq by way of the sky hole that connects the earth to the moon and he drops whale effigies made of lamp-black into the raised bowls of the supplicants, thus ensuring a successful hunt.

The questing tricksters of legend offer a mythic and narrative

bridge between the trickster/transformer exemplified in Tulunjigraq and Alinjnaq and the great Tikigaq shamans who are their spiritual and historical progeny. These picaresque wanderers are clearly human and their landscape closer to a "recognizably socialized world" (45) than the realm of myth. Kinnaq (Crazy Man) "lives in a world of failure and hallucination" (34). His adventures are characterized by the hilarious, frantic ribaldry found in Paul Radin's translation of the Winnebago trickster cycle (*The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology* [New York: Philosophical Library, 1956]), and the punishment he receives for taunting two old women whom he finds sewing in an iglu is eloquently, and frighteningly, contemporary. Kinnaq's unlikely counterpart is the wandering shaman Ukunjniq, who is described as a "tikigaq man," although his time is very much that of legend. Ukunjniq "roam[s] the world in search of spiritual challenges" (21), and his confrontations with beings of the spirit world define shamanic practice for the Tikigagmiut who are soon to come.

Asatchaq's narrative continues with accounts of "shamanic gestes," still legend but firmly rooted in the everyday realities of a culture that will survive intact well into the Twentieth Century. The whale-hunting shaman Qipugaluatchiaq takes a caribou woman for a wife. She becomes human but returns to her original identity on jumping into the fire she builds to cremate their dead son. Both mother and son escape inland in spirit form and Qipugaluatchiaq lives to take a spirit journey through the sea, where he directs the body of a whale toward his mortal family who are waiting on the shore. In another tale, a child-shaman is initiated by whaling spirits and is later killed by his rivals. Stories of trading journeys, shamanic displays of power, and revenge killings are told, all with an attention to specifics of Tikigaq culture and village life that suggests a shift from mythical to historical reality.

The ancestor histories and modern shaman stories that complete Asatchaq's narrative are called *uquluktuaqs* ("the things that were said of them"). They differ from *unipkaaqs* (myths, legends, folktales) not in their veracity, for both are believed to be true, but in definable lineages and a proximity of the events described to the storyteller's time. An *uquluktuaq* can cover events up to five generations in the past—the intensely descriptive tale of the feud of Nigliq and Sunyuk takes place in the Nineteenth Century. As Atatchaq's *uquluktuaqs* approach the modern era, the role of the shaman in Tikigaq society is revealed in detail. Always adaptive, occasionally a charlatan or a venal and ruthless autocrat, the shaman called the North Wind that would bring prey to Tikigaq whalers or made spirit journeys to the underwater iglu of the sea goddess to ensure the arrival of sea beasts for hunting. Masiin, regarded as Tikigaq's last shaman, was said to have used his power to kill Joseph Stalin while on a spirit journey over Russia:

"That's a bad man . . . so I killed him" (197). A notable exception to the shaman's benevolent role of provider and spiritual intermediary was the turn-of-the-century Tikigaq "chief" Atanjauraq. He possessed both a shaman's powers and the influence of wealth amassed in commerce with the Whites of Jabbertown, a trading village on the Tikiraq peninsula so named because of the many languages spoken there. His oppression of the Tikigaqmiut led to his murder while "sleeping off his liquor" (173)—a suitably didactic ending for a shaman who embodied the worst in the mythic trickster.

Print-oriented cultures are often hesitant to recognize authorship in literatures that are spoken rather than set in stone, disk, or paper, and only very recently have texts transcribed from Native American oral traditions gained acceptance into the canonic mythos of comparative literature. Asatchaq is the author of the stories he tells, a fact recognized by ethnographer Tom Lowenstein on the jacket and title page, where his name stands below those of Asatchaq and principal translator Tukummiq. Lowenstein's concession is not a shallow gesture. His respect for the literature he transcribes and the culture that is its source shines in the wealth of contextual material in his introduction, and in a lean, hypnotic translation that strives to communicate the oratory stylistics of the storyteller as well as narrative content. Yet Lowenstein reminds us that the audience of *The Things That Were Said of Them* "starts with Tikigaq" (ix), where shamanism lives in memory and the Tikigaqmiut continue to live on the back of the whale.

Larry Ellis

wanisinwak iskwêsisak awasisasinahikanis: Two Little Girls Lost in the Bush: A Cree Story for Children. Told by Nêhiyaw/Glecia Bear. Fifth House/U of Toronto P, 1991. Cloth, ISBN 0-920079-77-6. 40 pages.

This story was told by Nêhiyaw/Glecia Bear to Freda Ahenakew and is part of a larger collection of Cree women's life experiences. Ahenakew recorded the story on tape and it was translated by herself and H. C. Wolfart.

The introduction personalizes the work. Ahenakew says, "This story was told to me by my aunt, and it is a true story" (1). Ahenakew's observations provide a rare insight into life on an Indian reserve in northern Saskatchewan, Canada, in the early 1900s. She explains how children were taught to survive and she shows how strong Nêhiyaw, the heroine of the story, was. She was only eleven years old and still loved to play, but her concern was for her younger sister during their ordeal in the bush. Ahenakew also mentions culturally pertinent material regarding attitudes toward the owl for uninitiated readers and conveys, aptly, the attitudes of people on the reserve when the two girls were lost.

The top half of each page contains the Cree story and the bottom half contains the English translation. The book is in hard cover and is well bound with a tantalizing cover picture. This is unusual in an "ethnic" book and indicates the seriousness with which rejuvenation of Native languages is being taken in Canada. Fifth House is to be congratulated on the fine quality of this book.

The book, however, is not without its problems. It is obviously intended for young readers, those learning the Cree language or those being introduced to their own literature in print form. Problems with regional terminology and translation exist and will continue to exist until some form of standardization occurs in the Algonkian languages. To ensure acceptance, perhaps Aboriginal writers should consult scholars from within the culture to ensure that a holistic, accurate perspective is gained in translation. This is particularly important when the work is intended for educational purposes; otherwise confusion and frustration with learning the language will prevail.

Translators and editors must begin this process of standardization in order that Aboriginal writers may reach larger audiences. First Nations stories, told by elders, are an essential part of culture and language acquisition but they must go beyond just a retelling. Oral narratives must instruct, enlighten, and entertain just as other literatures attempt to do. *wanisinwak iskwêsisak* appears to do this.

There are inconsistencies, however, in the Cree and English versions that may lead to confusion on the part of bilingual readers. *wanisinwak iskwêsisak* simply means "girls lost" whereas the English translation has been embellished to call the book *Two Little Girls Lost in the Bush*. This mistranslation may lead one who is attempting to learn the language to conclude that the words *two*, *little*, and *bush* are implied in the Cree title, which they are not. Another aspect that detracts from the overall effectiveness of the book for Cree readers is the improper use of, or lack of, prefixes and suffixes. The term used to describe communion, for example, could be succinct by the use of an appropriate prefix such as *kische* or *achák*.

Other elements in the book that pose problems for Cree readers are the use of non-Cree words and improper terminology. This may lead students of the language to believe that new words are not accommodated in the Cree language, which is incorrect. An example of the former is *nipâpâ* which should be *notawe*. To improve terminology, *ê-wî-atiseskisit* could be *sehtapowayw* and *minahhiwak* could be *seta kwanatik*. Although the terminology in the text is understood it is lacking in complete description.

Understandably, the translators had to work with the story as Glecta Bear told it and had to make decisions regarding translation. They have a responsibility, however, to provide sound educational materials for classroom use if this is their purpose. If Aboriginal literatures are to be utilized as instructional tools more effort must be made to publish work reflecting sound pedagogical strategies and good scholarship.

The English version flows in typical oral narrative style with many digressions as Glecta Bear recalls changes since her childhood. For children who are used to oral narrative and the stories told by elders the style will be interesting and familiar. The excitement of events is portrayed well by the storyteller and is retained by the translators. An example of superb storytelling occurs when Glecta Bear tells about the men finding them in the bush:

Oh, and it was not long before shots were fired all over,
when he had fired his shots, shooting was now heard just
everywhere, shots all over. (28)

Outstanding illustrations by Jerry Whitehead, a Saskatchewan Cree artist, are found in abundance. The pictures are brightly colored with meticulous detail, true to the details of the story. They are appropriately placed and will greatly assist young readers in mastering the story, whether in Cree or English. The one exception is a very effective picture of the lost cow peeking through a two-inch leafy square in the middle of the page. Whereas the image of the lost cow is delightful and will charm many a young reader, the difficulty of picking up the correct line to read on the right side of the picture creates yet another obstacle for the young reader.

This story is engaging and keeps readers, young and old, engrossed to the end. We can look forward to Freda Ahenakew's book of Cree women's life experiences, but unless there is more consistency in translation they will be of limited use to Cree teachers in the classroom.

Agnes Grant
Lavina Gillespie

The Bingo Palace. Louise Erdrich. New York: Harper, 1994. Cloth, ISBN 0-06-017080-8. 274 pages.

For a while, Louise Erdrich had quite a rhythm going—a new novel every two years. She's made us wait this time for four years. Actually, as far as her series of North Dakota novels goes, the wait has been six years. The long wait is over now, however, and we finally have the last installment of Louise Erdrich's quartet of novels. Only this is not the story originally expected. That is not to say that the novel is a disappointment—far from it.

The reason I say that this is not the expected close to the quartet is that Erdrich and her husband/collaborator, Michael Dorris, have been saying for years that the fourth book would pick up where *The Beet Queen* (Holt, 1986) leaves off by continuing Jude Miller's story. Jude Miller, however, is not to be found in *The Bingo Palace*. Nor, with the exception of Russell Kashpaw and Fleur Pillager, are any of *The Beet Queen* characters found here. They also said that the novel would deal with the missiles stored in North Dakota. Perhaps the ending of the cold war influenced the direction of the novel—there are no missiles here either.

Nevertheless, this is not an entirely different story from the one Erdrich and Dorris discussed. They had said that the fourth novel would be called "American Horse," the title of one of Erdrich's 1983 short stories. Although Erdrich chose to use a different title, she does include "American Horse" in the novel. Those readers who are familiar with the story will recognize it (in slightly altered form) as chapter fifteen of *The Bingo Palace*, "Redford's Luck." Erdrich also uses a piece of the story in the chapter called "Shawnee Dancing."

Obviously, Erdrich's vision changed as the novel was taking shape. Although *The Bingo Palace* is related to *The Beet Queen*, it is no more so than are *Tracks* (Holt, 1988) and *Love Medicine* (Holt, 1984; 1993). In fact, *Tracks*, *Love Medicine*, and *The Bingo Palace* work so closely together that they lock together in a tight circle, pushing *The Beet Queen*, with its setting in town and its mostly Euroamerican characters, to the side. I think the time has come to drop the notion of a quartet.

It seems safe to say that the four novels are part of a continuing series and that the three closely related novels are a trilogy within that series. Surely *The Beet Queen* cycle will continue later.

In spite of the close interrelation, each of Erdrich's novels is unique. *The Bingo Palace* is no exception. Structurally, the novel is different from the others. Erdrich includes more chapters (twenty-seven) in this novel than she does in the others. The chapters in the other novels generally tend to be long; the chapters in *The Bingo Palace* vary from less than three pages to over twenty pages, thus creating a pleasing variance in rhythm.

Each novel also has a unique arrangement of narrative voices. *The Bingo Palace* contains three points of view. Thirteen chapters have an omniscient narrator. Lipsha Morrissey, in ten chapters, provides the only first-person *singular* voice in the novel. I stress singular, because, in four chapters (including the first and the last), Erdrich creates a first-person plural voice—a chorus.

Erdrich's choral voice is an intriguing innovation. This chorus is not omniscient. The viewpoint is based on gossip and experience. This is the voice of the older members of the community, the residents of the Senior Citizens Center. Yet it includes neither Marie Kashpaw nor Lulu Lamartine.

This voice, however, seems also to be the voice of the collaborators, Erdrich and Dorris, describing the creative process:

Some of us tried to resist, yet were pulled in just the same. We were curious to know more, even though we'd never grasp the whole of it. The story comes around, pushing at our brains, and soon we are trying to ravel back to the beginning, trying to put families into order and make sense of things. But we start with one person, and soon another and another follows, and still another, until we are lost in the connections. (5)

At the same time, Erdrich, whether intentionally or unintentionally, provides a voice for her readers as well. This chorus seems to include the readers who have followed the generations of Erdrich's mythic world. As readers, we are as much a part of this world as the residents of the Senior Citizens Center. In reading *Tracks*, we are there when Fleur Pillager gives birth to Lulu Nanapush and when Pauline Puyat gives birth to Marie Lazarre. Reading *Love Medicine*, we watch them grow and have babies of their own. We have seen and we have heard and we too have formed opinions.

This novel demands reader participation. By giving this voice to the reader, Erdrich draws the reader into the novel in a very intimate way. The reader is part of the chorus when it states, "We don't know

how it will work out, come to pass, which is why we watch so hard, all of us alike, one arguing voice" (6).

Understanding is, in more ways than one, of concern in this novel. While the characters in the novel strive for understanding, the reader is allowed a greater understanding of events which occur in the other novels. Erdrich frequently alludes to events that take place in the earlier novels—much more often than she does in the other novels. These allusions provide new or deeper understanding of those events. For instance, in explaining Albertine Johnson's relationship with her mother, Erdrich alludes to the time in *Love Medicine* when Albertine sleeps with Henry Lamartine:

She [Albertine] never dared fold herself against her mother, never dared to grab her tight, but only swept her lips against the porous, fine skin of her cheek, touched her work-tough fingers. Even that hurt, and once, in bed with a man she hated, paralyzed with what she'd done, Albertine had realized that the desperation with which she gave in to his touch had been no more than a child's wish to crawl closer to the side of her mother. (209)

The understanding which Albertine gains from the experience with Henry Junior allows her to break the cycle of pain and begin to heal her life. Lipsha Morrissey describes this cycle of pain:

Pain comes to us from deep back, from where it grew in the human body. Pain sucks more pain into it, we don't know why. It lives, and we harbor its weight. When the worst comes, we will not act the opposite. We will do what we were taught, we who learnt our lessons in the dead light. We pass them on. We hurt, and hurt others, in a circular motion. (217)

This circularity is the driving force behind Erdrich's series. It is continuity. When something happens to disrupt that continuity, destructive cycles are set into motion and will continue until the cycle is broken. In *Tracks* the society is disrupted, knocked off-track. In *Love Medicine* Marie Kashpaw and Lulu Lamartine work to restore the old ways of the tribe, but too many children have been born into a more recent legacy of chaos and pain. Now in *The Bingo Palace* the task of those children is to gain understanding so that the cycle can be broken.

With the primary voice in the novel being Lipsha Morrissey's, this is a more overtly philosophical novel than the ones before it. Lipsha is a thinker, a seeker of the truth, albeit, at times, something of a bumbler. The chorus had thought that Lipsha would make something of himself once he learned who he was (at the end of *Love Medicine*).

However, this is not the case. Lipsha still can't seem to find his place in the world—he has knowledge now but not understanding.

Obviously, a few years have passed since the story left off in *Love Medicine*. After an undisclosed lapse of time (Erdrich does not provide dates in this novel as she does in the others) Lipsha returns to the reservation, where he belongs "without a place to fit" (11). On his return, Lipsha attends a dance and immediately falls in love with a beautiful jingle dancer, Shawnee Ray Toose. Lipsha explains that Shawnee "is the best of our past, our present, our hope of a future" (13).

Unfortunately, that future is threatened by Lipsha and the two other people who want to use Shawnee Ray to satisfy their own needs. Lyman Lamartine, the father of Shawnee's son, Redford, wants to marry Shawnee (although he arrives at that conclusion a bit late). And Lipsha must compete not only with Lyman for Shawnee's affection but also with Zelda Kashpaw, who wants to hold on to Shawnee as a substitute for her own daughter, Albertine.

The competition for Shawnee is further complicated by the tangled family relationships and personal histories of the three. All of these characters who are competing for Shawnee's affections are Nector Kashpaw's children. Lipsha is Nector's adopted son. Lyman is Nector's illegitimate son whom Nector never recognizes as such. Zelda is Nector's daughter who finds him burning down his lover's house. As the story unfolds, each of the three comes to possess Nector's sacred pipe. Each one's reaction to the pipe reflects his or her relationship to Nector. Lipsha loves it, but is careless of it, unsure of himself. Lyman yearns to own the pipe because it was his father's pipe. He considers it an asset. Yet when he tries to make money from it, he loses it. Zelda, on the other hand, avoids the pipe; she doesn't want to look at it.

Each of the three is bound by something from the past, locked in his or her own destructive cycle. Lipsha suffers from an almost unbearable longing for a mother (which is why he wants Shawnee—he wants her to mother him). His own mother tried to kill him when he was an infant. Lipsha's mother June was wild and irresponsible for reasons of her own. By far, the worst secrets are in Lipsha's past. Lipsha follows almost helplessly in his mother's path until, like Albertine, he gains understanding and breaks the cycle. Sad, but true, Lipsha realizes that:

... people, they'll leave you, sure. There's no return to what was and no way back. There's just emptiness all around, and you in it, like singing up from the bottom of a well, like nothing else, until you harm yourself, until

you are a mad dog biting yourself for sympathy. Because there is no relenting. There is no hand that falls. There is no woman reaching down to take you in her arms . . . An unknown path opens up before us, an empty trail shuts behind. Snow closes over our tracks, and then keeps moving like the tide. There is no trace where we were. Nor any arrows pointing to the place we're headed. We are the trackless beat, the invisible light, the thought without a word to speak. Poured water, struck match. Before the nothing, we are the moment. (259)

Lyman's problem is an over-developed sense of responsibility. He feels the need to take the place of his dead brother Henry and his father, Nector:

His [Lyman's] reflection was lodged at the bottom of the river where his brother Henry had jumped in and drowned. His face was composed of Kashpaw's face. Shawnee's wishes moved him, her religious interests sent him into the woods. Her hopes were his. Lyman's hands were strung with his mother's clever nerves. His feet were the size of his father's tracks—ambitions, chances, progress reports, and hope. He was everybody else's creature but his own. (148)

So wrapped up in what he ought to do, Lyman fails to consider his own life, his own needs. Finally, through a vision quest, he gains understanding. That understanding allows him to let go of the anchoring weight of the past and begin to live his own life.

Zelda's problem is a fear of love's power. Having seen what love did to her father, Nector, Zelda closes her heart:

To get even with him [Nector], Zelda would unmake him inside of herself. She never would be subject to love, never would be overtaken. Able to choose, to use her head and starve her heart, that was Zelda. She was capable of hovering in a blanket, in a room where her own breath rose and fell, a plume of longing, all night. She could exist in the dark cell of her body. She was capable of denying herself everything tender, unspoken, sweet, generous, and desperate. She could do it because she willed it. (244)

She cannot, however, maintain such rigid control forever—only for thirty years. Zelda's thirty years of severe repression end in a surprising and humorous manner.

The ending of the novel leaves the way open for yet another installment with the suggestion "that there is more to be told, more than

we know, more than can be caught in the sieve of our thinking" (274). Maybe there will be a quartet after all. But not necessarily. The ending seems an appropriate part of the cycle—as long as there is life, the continuum moves on. There can be no conclusion. The ending is not only satisfying in the context of the novel but also in the context of the trilogy. The trilogy begins and ends with Fleur Pillager.

As always, Erdrich presents truths—some ugly and some beautiful—with humor and grace. She leaves us with hope. She leaves us hungry for more.

Sarah Bennett

**The Business of Fancydancing. *Sherman Alexie.*
Brooklyn: Hanging Loose, 1992. Cloth, ISBN
*0-914610-24-4; paper, ISBN 0-914610-00-7. 84 pages.***

Part of the business of fancydancing consists of being Indian. And part of the business of being a contemporary Indian involves police harassment, commodity foods, HUD housing, basketball tournaments, powwows, alcohol, memories, and dreams. In the stories, sketches, and poems that comprise *The Business of Fancydancing*, Sherman Alexie (Spokane/Coeur d'Alene) makes a stunning debut by depicting the stark cultural landscape surrounding Wellpinit, Washington, "another reservation town of torn shacks and abandoned cars," a town filled with "Crazy Horse dreams, the kind that don't come true."

In Alexie's vision, the old Salish world diminishes with each generation. In "Grandmother," the speaker recalls childhood memories of this woman's "hands that smelled deep / roots buried in the earth"—hands which more recently have been occupied in "sifting through the dump / salvaging those parts of the world / neither useless nor useful." In "Morphine and Codeine," the speaker remembers his first experience taking mainstream medicine rather than Indian remedies. The narrator explains in "Distances" that "I do not speak my native tongue. Except that is, for the dirty words." In "Translated from the American," he speaks of his childhood shame over his inability to learn Salish.

Despite such a deficiency, his grandmother reminds him that "English was your foreign language." This cultural void suggested by the lack of a mother tongue resonates through several pieces of this collection. In Alexie's fictional world, unlike Louise Erdrich's or Leslie Marmon Silko's, little solace can be found in the old ways or in "the old stories / where the Indian never loses." Fancydancing becomes not so much an exercise in cultural pride as a surefire means of obtaining money: "Money is an Indian Boy who can fancydance / from powwow to powwow . . . / a credit card we / Indians get to use." For in this world, "Money / is a tool, putty to fill all the empty / spaces. . . ."

Despite the overt bleakness, the work as a whole speaks of the strength—and particularly the endurance—of Indian life. In "Gravity," the narrator comments that "every Indian has the blood of the tribal memory circling his heart." The reservation thus becomes a locus of strength, for "the Indian, no matter how far he travels away, must come back, repeating, forming the reverse exodus." Like other Native American writers, Alexie seizes upon Indian humor as a tool to deflect the pain of physical and emotional poverty. Moreover, some pieces speak of strategies of endurance, such as "thoughts of forgiveness" in "Artificial Respiration" or the flattering of a belligerent state trooper in "Traveling." Other pieces suggest the consequences of survival. For perhaps the humiliation of harassment in "Traveling" leads to the smugness of successfully sneaking liquor into a powwow in "No Drugs or Alcohol Allowed," complete with the ironic knowledge that "we won . . . but it was only Indians versus Indians," a hollow victory about which "no one / is developing a movie script." In particular, however, Alexie presents Crazy Horse, a visionary figure extending through past, present, and future, as a metaphor for Indian continuance, for in "War All the Time," the figure of Crazy Horse comments that "you can't stop a man / from trying to survive. . . ." Consequently, in various pieces, Crazy Horse returns from Viet Nam, selling his medals to buy beer. Crazy Horse hitchhikes a ride with the reservation taxi. He takes a job at the 7-11, "four dollars an hour, graveyard shift . . . / and all the Coke he can drink. . . ." Crazy Horse tries to sell blood to buy a ride home to the reservation, only to be told that "we've already taken too much of your blood / and you won't be eligible / to donate for another generation or two."

Alexie knits the disparate pieces of *The Business of Fancydancing* together. Recurring family names such as Boyd and WildShoe suggest an extended reservation kinship network. Characters such as Lester FallsApart, Seymour, the Professor, and Chief Victor, the narrator-speaker's father, reappear in various poems and stories. And images such as ashes, house fires, old blankets and new, blood, and car wrecks permeate the stories and poems, creating a matrix for the collection.

Because of these various linkings, it is tempting to read this work as an impressionistic portrait of Spokane reservation life by a single inhabitant, whom Alexie names as Chief Victor, Junior, in the final piece, "Gravity." Another unifying factor in *The Business of Fancy-dancing* is the constant interplay between the austere physical and cultural landscapes and the rich twists of imagination and vibrancy of language in which Alexie depicts them. This work signals the arrival of a tremendously gifted young writer.

Kristan Sarvé-Gorham

Full Moon on the Reservation. Gloria Bird.
Greenfield Center NY: The Greenfield Review P, 1993.
Paper, ISBN 0-912678-86-0. 67 pages.

Full Moon on the Reservation, Gloria Bird's first collection of poetry, is characterized by diversity in voice and in style. The book contains several prose poems, many poems that are clearly written in free verse, as well as some lineated in more or less regular stanzas. Although the identity of the speaker seems fairly consistent from poem to poem, this speaker places herself in a variety of circumstances and hence expresses various emotions. By arranging this collection as she has, Bird exploits tone to permit many poems to amplify—rather than merely repeat—each other.

One of the most haunting poems is "Predictions of Yard Rain," which is in its entirety:

Mother's banties roosted in brother's corn
no ordinary chickens, pretty hens
of spotted underthings. Mother dreamed
a temperamental yard of queens,
my brother envisioned the coming slaughter.

That banty invaded summer,
both wishes granted. Red and white speckled feathers,
blue wet axe, a miscellany of turning heads,
and the dirtier white friendly feathers

let us catch their chicks for pets, flattered us
our arrogant predictions of domestic bliss.

The success of this poem can be measured by the control demonstrated in its language. Relying on an understated tone, Bird enhances the efficacy of her images. We see the side effects of slaughter—"Red and white speckled feathers, / blue wet axe"—rather than the slaughter itself. Yet we paradoxically feel increased horror because we inevitably imagine the slaughter after what could, in other circumstances, have been a peaceful and dream-like image, the "Red and white speckled feathers." And given the context of this poem among the other poems in the collection, the absence of "domestic bliss" from the barnyard offers an implicit comment on human households, where "domestic bliss" is equally illusory.

"Bare Bone Winter" is the first of the prose poems in the collection, and it exemplifies the most critical characteristic of prose poetry, that is, interesting language. Through alliteration, assonance, and even rhyme, the words sometimes bang against, sometimes slide into each other. A woman is chopping wood, and her "sharpened axe slips down the grain" while her "neighbor's horses clip their hooves into crusted snow." Because the reader can't avoid being drawn into this language, the implicitly violent content becomes more eerie than it might otherwise be. Integrated into this act are memories of genocide that begin as "*a Trader is selling Indian finger bone in an old basket with pottery shards*" and move eventually to the more detached statement that "*After sixteen hundred miles, Joseph surrendered the Wallowas forever.*" Splitting wood for the woman becomes an act of the imagination so intense that the future becomes implicated in history as she burns her kindling, and "Bones scatter like the hand of winter over the land as mountainous as the woman's belly."

Unfortunately, not all of the poems in this collection permit vivid language or implication to convey the poem's significance. "Matriarchal Bloodlines," for example, is didactic and reductive. Simultaneously, and probably not coincidentally, its language is more abstract than the language in the poems I've discussed above, and its metaphors are more simply convenient than particularly telling. The poem begins:

My brother went to Nam for attention
having learned early to cheer on the cavalry,
the Wayne and Reagan cowboys driving Indians
through the valley of primal phallus.

True as this may be, the sentence does not transcend cliché, does not provide the reader with any particular visceral moment through which this truth can be accepted emotionally as well as intellectually. The poem continues by inflecting race with gender: "My other brothers

demand respect / from the couch of superior gender," but again, the statement is too easy, too expected. By the end of the poem, Bird seems to have lost control of the language:

. . . . I am sister to mercenaries
who kill from within, the spoils of war,
internalized oppression and stupid
show-offy pride.

I would much rather have seen the pride in action, have witnessed the details of an event that have led the speaker to these accusations, rather than simply be expected to trust the accusations themselves.

Poems with these flaws, though they are not predominant, do mar the power of the collection, as do the too-frequent direct references to writing poetry. *Full Moon on the Reservation* would have benefitted from more vigorous editing. Yet, if the collection as a whole does not live up to its strongest poems, those strong poems do promise that Gloria Bird will become a voice to be reckoned with.

Lynn Domina

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