

บทบาทของสัตว์และพืชในนวนิยายเรื่อง **Solar Storms** ของลินดา โฮแกน



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# The Roles of Animals and Plants in Linda Hogan's Solar Storms



สารนิพนธ์นี้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษาตามหลักสูตรปริญญาอักษรศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต

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ธรรมิกา แสงศรี : The Roles of Animals and Plants in Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms*. ( บทบาทของสัตว์และพืชในนวนิยายเรื่อง *Solar Storms* ของลินดา โฮแกน) อ.ที่ปรึกษาหลัก : รศ. ดร.คารินทร์ ประดิษฐ์ทัศนีย์

สารนิพนธ์ฉบับนี้ศึกษาบทบาทของสัตว์และพืชในนวนิยายเรื่อง *Solar Storms* (ค.ศ. 1995) ของ ลินดา โฮแกน สารนิพนธ์นี้วิเคราะห์ว่าชีวิตของสัตว์และพืชเกี่ยวข้องกับมนุษย์ในสถานการณ์อันเลวร้ายและการต่อสู้ดิ้นรนกับการล่าอาณานิคมของคนขาวตั้งแต่ยุคก่อนโคลัมบัสจนถึงยุคปัจจุบันอย่างไร สารนิพนธ์นี้ศึกษาวิเคราะห์การสร้างตัวละครสัตว์และพืชอันเป็นเอกลักษณ์ของโฮแกนในนวนิยายเล่มนี้ สารนิพนธ์ฉบับนี้นำเสนอความคิดที่ว่าโฮแกนนำเสนอตัวละครสัตว์และพืชเหล่านี้ในแบบที่ เป็นผู้กระทำที่มีความรู้สึก และมีคุณลักษณะที่ลึกลับ ล่วงล้ำ และสร้างสรรค์อันอยู่นอกเหนือความเข้าใจของมนุษย์ ยิ่งไปกว่านั้น สารนิพนธ์นี้ยังศึกษาบทบาทของตัวละครที่ไม่ใช่มนุษย์เหล่านี้ในการสร้างอัตลักษณ์และประวัติศาสตร์ของตัวละครชนพื้นเมือง นอกจากนี้ การปฏิสัมพันธ์ระหว่างมนุษย์และสัตว์กับพืชยังเผยให้เห็นถึงคุณลักษณะอันก่อความของสัตว์กับพืชที่ปลดปล่อยชนพื้นเมืองอเมริกันจากแนวคิดแบบทวิลักษณ์และการแบ่งลำดับชั้นของนักล่าอาณานิคมที่ครอบงำพวกเขาอยู่สุดท้ายนี้ เพื่อที่จะนำเสนอความสัมพันธ์อันใกล้ชิดระหว่างชาวพื้นเมืองอเมริกันและสัตว์กับพืช สารนิพนธ์ฉบับนี้จะมุ่งเน้นศึกษาประสบการณ์ของตัวละครเอกหญิงที่เกี่ยวข้องกับสัตว์และพืช รวมถึงเรื่องราวของชนพื้นเมืองที่เกี่ยวข้องกับสิ่งมีชีวิตที่ไม่ใช่มนุษย์เหล่านี้ เพื่อที่จะวิเคราะห์ว่าสัตว์และพืชช่วยตัวละครมนุษย์นี้เยียวยาจากบาดแผลทางจิตใจและเปลี่ยนแปลงตนเองจากเด็กผู้หญิงวัยรุ่นผู้ไร้รากไปเป็นผู้หญิงพื้นเมืองอเมริกันที่มีวุฒิภาวะและต่อสู้เพื่อชุมชนของเธอเองได้อย่างไร

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Thammika Sawaengsri : บทบาทของสัตว์และพืชในนวนิยายเรื่อง *Solar Storms* ของลินดา โฮแกน. Advisor: Assoc. Prof. DARIN PRADITTATSANEE, Ph.D.

This paper aims to examine the role of animals and plants in Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms* (1995). It investigates how the lives of animals and plants have been intertwined with the Native Americans in their plight and struggle against the whites' colonization from the pre-Columbian time to the present. It examines Hogan's unique characterization of animals and plants. This paper argues that Hogan portrays as sentient agents with mysterious, transgressive, and creative qualities that are incomprehensible to human beings. Furthermore, the paper also discusses the non-humans' roles in shaping the identity and history of the indigenous characters. In addition, the interactions between humans and non-humans also reveal the latter's disruptive qualities that liberate the Native Americans from the dualistic and hierarchical thinking imposed on them by the colonizers. Finally, to further examine the inextricable relationship between the Native Americans and the non-humans, this paper will focus on the female protagonist's experience with animals and plants as well as the native stories about these non-humans in order to discuss how they enable her to recover from her trauma and to transform herself from a rootless teenage girl into a mature Native American woman who fights for her community.



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## The Roles of Animals, and Plants in Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms*

Several feminists as well as postcolonial and animal studies scholars have pointed out that the dualistic thinking underlying in the patriarchal Western ideology validates the oppression of women, indigenous people, and animals. The self/other logic, which alienates humans from other species, men from women, and whites from non-whites, creates the hierarchical political structure which silences and exploits “the Other” as they are considered as lesser than men. According to Val Plumwood, Westerners “treat consciousness rather than embodiment as the basis of human identity” (qtd. in Greta Gaard 41). Those that exhibit less consciousness than the privileged group of humans’ are thus considered lesser beings. This notion creates the gap between humans and non-humans and justifies the unethical relationship in which the former exploits the latter. As long as humans continue to isolate themselves from nature and other species, environmental, social, and economical injustices will perpetuate.

To work against such a dominant view of human exemptionalism, it is necessary to re-examine our relationship with other species, animals or plants, as the first step. The prevailing idea is that we, humans, tend to look at these non-humans as existing for our benefits. In *Animal Rites: American Culture, The Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory*, Cary Wolfe, a prominent scholar in animal studies, calls for the need of ethical interspecies relationships. Wolfe states that humans should not take animals for granted “simply because of their species”; otherwise “the humanist discourse of species will always be available for use by some humans against other humans as well, to countenance violence against the social other



of whatever species — or gender, or race, or class, or sexual difference” (qtd. in Nandini Thiyagarajan 197). The same analogical association also applies to plants. The massive deforestation and the exploitation of plants suggest the underlying idea of speciesism. Thus, in order to lessen the injustice rooted in the dominant dualistic paradigm, our relationship with plants cannot be overlooked as well.

As Audre Lorde states, “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (qtd. in Greta Gaard 41), we thus need to reconsider our current paradigm and look for alternative tools to help us understand the natural world and our relationship with non-humans if we want to live in a more just and sustainable world. This paper joins in the growing academic works that advocate the Native American epistemologies as potential sources of rethinking our relationship with non-humans due to their holistic, non-binary approach and their continuity for many thousand years. Moreover, the Native Americans’ traditional practices towards non-humans create much less suffering compared to our modern treatment of plants and animals. Their deep bond with the non-humans offers new perspectives which are too valuable to be overlooked.

In *Solar Storms*, Linda Hogan depicts the shared suffering of the Native Americans, animals, and plants alike under colonization through the forms of fur trade and the construction of the James Bay Hydroelectric Power Project, which caused destructive impacts on the Native American lives along with the non-humans. Beavers were hunted almost to extinction. The dam construction project caused floods over the Native American communities, rerouted rivers, and radically changed the ecological system. At the same time, the ones benefiting from this destruction were the

corporations and the people who lived far from the devastated area. This narrative, which is based on real historical events, is an example of numerous environmental injustice practices that have been happening worldwide. These maltreatments suggest the hierarchical attitude of those who view indigenous people as lesser human beings and other species as existing for human benefits.

Tracing the colonial violence done to the Native Americans and their community from the past to the present, Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms* offers a new way to look at the natural world and our relationship with animals and plants. Not only does the novel with its deep history dismantle the Western patriarchal ideologies that oppressively lump indigenous people, women, animals together as subspecies but it also resituates humans as one of the species in an ecological community and at the same time celebrates female power and the ethical, reciprocal relationship that the Native American characters have with animals and plants. Hogan presents this deep bond with the natural world through the Native American thinking lens by emphasizing the significant entanglement among the three important aspects: corporeality, myth, and spirituality.

Told through the eyes of a seventeen-year-old narrator, Angel, whose maternal family are descended from the Elk Islanders and the Fat-Eaters of the north<sup>i</sup>, the story depicts the violence which colonialism has inflicted upon the Native American people and the environment from the past to the present. Angel recounts individual and communal experiences of the Native Americans under Western domination through her intergenerational family stories in *Adam's Rib*: from the colonial age which involved fur trade to the contemporary period that focuses on the project of the James

Bay hydroelectric dam. Separated from her community when she was five years old, Angel had lived in foster care and never stayed in any house long. After returning to Adam's Rib, Angel takes a journey to the north with her grandmothers. The four women all have different reasons for journeying. Dora-Rouge, Angel's great-great-grandmother, who came from the Fat-Eaters, wants to go back to die there. Agnes, Angel's great grandmother, wants to accompany her mother to her destination. Bush, Angel's step-grandmother, wants to protest against the hydroelectric dam construction project that will reroute old waterways and drown the land along with the forests and animal habitats. Angel joins the journey because she wants to see her mother, Hannah, who has suffered beyond repair from the consequences of colonization. After the arduous journey, the Native American women join the protest against the construction of the dam that is going to alter and destroy their land once again.

It can be seen that *Solar Storms* highlights the resistance of the Native Americans against the colonization that brings about cultural destruction along with environmental degradation towards the end of the novel. The narrative of *Solar Storms* is so rich that critics use various approaches to investigate its multiple layers of meanings. It is worthy of note that these critics tend to focus on the psychological connection between the Native Americans and the natural world and how their mental and physical well-being depends on nature. This issue is clearly discussed in Laura Castor's "Claiming Place in Wor(l)ds: Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms*." and Irene S. Vernon's "We Were Those Who Walked out of Bullets and Hunger': Representation of Trauma and Healing in *Solar Storms*." Castor discusses empathy that is developed from the land while Vernon explores the collective and personal trauma that is interconnected with the place. Both articles help better the understanding of the

Native Americans' psychological connection with the natural world and the land's healing qualities and also foreground my knowledge about the significance of place not only in the novel but also in the Native American culture.

Particularly, an article that inspires me to explore how the novel presents the crossing of human vs non-human boundaries and the Native American worldview that disrupts the West's dualistic thinking is Ned Schaumberg's "Living, Land-Broken Waters: Epistemological Resistance in *Solar Storms*". Schaumberg clearly demonstrates how the novel employs water as a metaphor that disrupts binary oppositions. He emphasizes the influence of water on the lives of the Native Americans by exploring water's physical and symbolic challenges. Interestingly, Schaumberg discusses how the whites' dualistic thinking has been disrupted physically and linguistically by the Native American worldview and how the boundaries imposed by the whites can be crossed. Through learning from water, Angel can eventually decolonize herself.

Not only does Schaumberg's article invite me to explore the disruptive qualities of non-human nature but it also fascinates me with its clear demonstration of many layers of meaning in water as a character which is separate and distinct from the land. This view of the water leads me to consider animals and plants that are interspersed throughout the novel as characters with their own unique features. No critic has examined them as distinct characters in the novel before.

Existing criticisms that touch upon the issues of the relationship of humans, animals, and plants deal with them in two perspectives: as part of the environmental degradation that also destroys the mental well-being of the Native Americans and as

another example to criticize the capitalist system and the utilitarian value of the settlers. For example, Vernon argues that the balance in the relationship between the Native Americans and animals is necessary for their physical and mental health and that the French trapper Beauregard's maltreatment of the last glacier bear also symbolizes the way the settlers mistreat the Native Americans. Like Vernon, Desiree Hellegers, in her article "From Poisson Road to Poison Road: Mapping the Toxic Trail of Windigo Capital in Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms*", also links the shared faith between the Native Americans and animals and points out that they are on the same status of being disposable and profitable. Hellegers also illustrates how Hogan conceptualizes animals and plants as natural resources under the patriarchal and capitalist system. This conceptualization of the non-humans as lucrative resources is also well-explored in Matthew Chelf's thesis, *Protest, the Older Ways, and the Environmental Justice*, which focuses on the communal activist collaboration of women for environmental justice.

The above mentioned critical works shed some light on the presence of animals in this complex novel. However, the animals' and plants' relationships with humans in *Solar Storms* have never been thoroughly examined before even though their presence and roles are prevalent in the lives of the Native American characters. In *Solar Storms*, Hogan presents how the lives of animals and plants are intertwined with humans since the pre-Columbian time and how essential their roles are in shaping the personal and cultural identity and the history of the Indigenous characters. Furthermore, not only do their stories and their relationship with the human characters illustrate the intergenerational history, identity, and epistemology of the Native Americans but the interactions between humans and non-humans also reveal the

latter's disruptive qualities that subvert the colonizers' dualistic and hierarchical mentality of exploitation and control.

To further examine the beneficial and reciprocal relationship between the Native Americans with the non-humans, this paper will focus on Angel's experience with animals and plants as well as native stories about these non-human characters in order to discuss how they enable her to connect herself with the past and the present. Through her recognition of the importance of the relationship which humans have with non-humans, Angel transforms herself from a rootless teenage girl stuck in between Anglo-American and indigenous cultures into a mature Native American woman who fights for her community.

Thus, arguing that the animals and plants play significant roles in *Solar Storms*, this paper seeks to discuss how these non-human characters help the Native Americans escape the imperialistic attempts to dominate them. It will examine the characterization of the animals and plants, the representation of their relationship with humans, as well as Angel's healing process, her reintegration into her tribal community, and her participation in the Native Americans' protest against dam construction. Lastly, the paper will also argue how *Solar Storms* reconceptualizes our relationships with non-human nature.

### The Characterization of Animals and Plants

This section examines how Hogan characterizes the animals and plants in *Solar Storms*. The non-anthropocentric characterization of non-human characters in the novel counters the mainstream literary presentations in significant ways. Hogan demonstrates that in the Native Americans' worldview, the existence of the non-humans consists of three layers of reality: physical, mythical, and spiritual. Given their multi-dimensional existence, Hogan presents these non-human characters as neither part of the setting nor passive beings parroting human speech but rather sentient agents with mysterious, transgressive, and creative qualities that are often incomprehensible to human beings. Hogan's non-human characters are superior to humans due to their mystery, their special abilities, and their essential role in the world. *Solar Storms* emphasizes the power of animals and plants and at the same time highlights human limits.

To understand the multiple dimensions of the non-human characters' existence, one needs to keep in mind that the Native Americans see the world differently from the whites. To the Native Americans, the world is non-binary and, more importantly, all things are interrelated. The physical, mythical, and spiritual planes are inextricably intertwined. What materializes in physical reality is also embedded with mythical stories and spiritual value. The word "mythical" is related to the indigenous storytelling that explains the universe and the world and also guides their behaviors. By the phrase "spiritual value", I mean that they see every element of nature as embedded with mysterious force which is beyond humans' five senses of perception. They tend to see the world in a spiritual light as Angel describes their unique worldview in the following passage:

The people at Adam's Rib believed everything was alive, that we were surrounded by the faces and lovings of gods. The world, as described by Dora-Rouge, was a dense soup of love, creation all around us, full and intelligent. Even the shadows light threw down had meaning, had stories and depth. They fell across the land, and they were filled with whatever had walked there, animal or man, and with the birds that flew above. (81)

This vibrant imagery of the world can be described as animism. Everything is "alive" and possesses spirits, which are sacred and loving as they all are referred to as "gods". Everything, "[e]ven the shadows light threw down", is whole and filled with intrinsic value as it has its own "stories and depth". Interestingly, although they live close to nature and even in the wilderness, the Native American characters view the world as benevolent even to the degree that they feel a sense of gratitude. The image of the world as "a dense soup of love" indicates the loving, nurturing and even healing power and abundance of nature. The "soup" also suggests the oneness and harmonious relationship of all beings. The Native Americans thus see the world as a place where humans and non-humans live in balance.

It is thus not surprising if their worldview is alien to Westerners and most humans in the contemporary world. They have a different system of knowledge after all. In *Solar Storms*, Hogan emphasizes that the Native American way of acquiring knowledge depends more on intuition and less on logic and empirical methods on which Western cultures rely. The intuition that the Native Americans possess and pass on from generations to generations allows them to connect with the natural world and communicate with non-humans regardless of time and place, collapsing the European



notions of chronological time and fixed physical space. Due to their intuition, the indigenous people believe that they can travel and communicate through the three entangled dimensions of reality freely.

The indigenous worldview thus presents a different way in which the Native Americans look at non-humans. In *Solar Storms*, Hogan presents animals as existing with three planes of reality: physical, mythical, and spiritual. Beavers, in the physical plane, are animals that make dams in the waterways and so give shape to the land in the region, but they also appear as mythical Beaver in the Native American creation story. Tulik, one of the leaders in the dam protest in the north, tells Angel and Aurora that Beaver makes the world habitable for all other living things: “Beaver took down trees from the sky; they brought up pebbles and clay from somewhere beneath the vast waters. They broke the ice that had shaped itself over the water. They swam through it and they made some land” (239). The mythical “Beaver” represents the multitude of all beavers as Tulik emphasizes that “[t]hey were the ones” (238). It is also noticeable that the actual beaver in physical reality and Beaver in the creation myths share the power to shape the land. Moreover, when Bush, Angel’s step-grandmother, assembles the bones of beavers, she does it respectfully by acknowledging their existence in the spiritual plane.

Beaver’s power to shape the land indicates their creative quality that humans do not possess. Hogan emphasizes the animals’ creative ability in the Beaver creation myths. The myths highlight the role of beavers as “the true makers of [the] land” (123). Angel remarks that “[i]t was through [beavers’] dams that the geographies had been laid, meadows created, through their creation that young trees grew, that deer

came, and moose” (123). Their intervention in the natural world is significant since “[a]ll things had once depended on them” (123). The myths also point out that the habitable and abundant world is not a miracle that just happens, but the world needs the non-humans in shaping and maintaining its balance for all forms of life. The non-humans’ creative ability, thus, makes them indispensable to humans and the biosphere.

When referring to animals and plants, the Native Americans recognize and respect the non-humans’ personhood just as they do humans’. In this way, Hogan’s use of anthropomorphism to characterize the animals and plants in *Solar Storms* is different from the traditional use of this literary device to make animals represent humans. Conventionally, Western writers employ anthropomorphism in anthropocentric ways, making animals and plants act and speak like humans for the latter’s interest. This kind of use is mostly interspersed throughout children’s literature and moral fables. Tua Korhonen states in his chapter “Anthropomorphism and the Aesopic Animal Fables” in a book entitled *Animals and their Relation to Gods, Humans, and Things in the Ancient World* that: “lions, foxes and other animals in fables are described as being reasoning, acting and even talking like humans, that is, as humanized or anthropomorphized,” and so “[t]he general impression is that the main function of different animal species is to mirror fixed human character types” (211). Korhonen notes that like George Orwell’s political novel *Animal Farm*, “[f]ables seem to picture an artificial animal kingdom that mirrors human social structures,” and that “although animals may be the protagonists in animal fables, the actual animal seems to be absent” (211-212). Furthermore, Zoe Jaques, the author of *Children's Literature and the Posthuman*, contends in her analysis of trees that the

personification of plants evokes the idea of “tree-as-servant, hierarchically inscribed under man” (qtd. in L.Guanio-Uluru 128). In these literary works, humans use animals and plants to speak for them.

Diverging from the anthropocentrically personified animal and plant characters in most literary texts, *Solar Storms* recognizes their unique personhood and presents them as sentient, intelligent agents who are capable of interspecies communication. Plants and animals in the story have feelings and do not want to be destroyed. Through Angel’s narrative, they express their vengeful desires towards those that have destroyed the natural world. Early when she stays with Bush, her in-law grandmother, on Fur Island, Angel notices the “hungry, reaching vines that wanted to turn everything back to its origins ... and reclaim the island for themselves” (73). Moreover, Angel emphasizes the fish’s ability to feel when she retorts LaRue, a French Métis character who insists that fish “don’t feel anything” (83). She asks if fish cannot feel his presence, then why they have to keep quiet when fishing. Another instance which reveals the non-humans’ capacity to think and feel is in the last glacier bear that later becomes Agnes’ coat. The Frenchman Beauregard tortured the bear so much that it “was ruined in its heart” (46). It let boys “poke it and call it names” (46). When Agnes came to its rescue, the bear trusted her. The bear did not fight her back when Agnes was going to kill it with a knife to liberate it from suffering, but “[i]ts eyes were grateful” (47). Its ability to recognize Agnes’s compassion and its trust indicate its intelligence. The bear even communicated its gratitude, friendship, and attempted to comfort the crying Agnes by “putting a paw on Agnes” and “stroking” her (47). The non-humans in *Solar Storms*, thus, can form a reciprocal, emotional bond with other species.

Particularly, Hogan highlights the non-humans' intelligence in the mythical character of Wolverine. Wolverine, a being that represents a multitude of wolverines, is presented as superior to humans in terms of intelligence. According to the Native Americans' story that Bush tells Angel, Wolverine tricked two white trappers, Ding and Dong, and stole the animals from their spring traps. The Native Americans believe that Wolverine "knew everything about" humans and what they think (253), and so he knows how to steal valuable things from them. Furthermore, the fact that no one ever sees Wolverine but he usually knows the whereabouts of a human affirms his superior cleverness.

Interestingly, not only does Hogan illustrate that animals in *Solar Storms* are intelligent, sentient beings but she also highlights that their personhood is different from humans. The non-humans in this novel have their own lives and even their own culture. For instance, Husk, Agnes's lover who is interested in science, describes the unique life and complex community of frogs on Fur Island that is in sync with the biosphere. Husk tells Angel that the frogs "slept through years of drought, buried in the ground, until the time was right for their emergence", and when the rain comes, they will appear again from the mud (64-5). As Husk explains, the frogs' sounds are like drums and "they were conceived by rain" (64). Corresponding to Husk's portrayal of the frogs, Chelf argues that the frogs lead lives "with its own culture that syncs their intelligence to the rhythm of rain" and drought, and that "[t]he drums of the frogs celebrates the natural cycle of life" (19-20). They live in balance with the natural world in their own way, and their lives neither represent nor reflect humans' lives.

Moreover, Hogan characterizes animals and plants as mysterious, ambiguous, and even transgressive. Wolverine, the trickster, is a kind of mystery beyond human comprehension. Some say that “Wolverine had things mixed up, too,” and that “[a]t times it was said he was a human returned to his animal shape,” but “[a]t other times, he was animal inhabiting a strange, two-legged body, wearing human skin” (253). That he is a witch in disguise is also another assumption. Since we cannot determine what Wolverine's gender is and whether he is a human or a non-human, Wolverine becomes a figure that transgresses the species and gender boundaries constructed in Western ideology. In addition, Hogan's representation of the non-human characters as ambiguous suggests the Native Americans' respect for other species and acceptance of their mysterious differences.

Furthermore, Hogan emphasizes the magnitude of the mystery of the non-humans through their special wisdom and the power that humans cannot measure. This point can be seen in the birds that know about humans and hold the power to judge humans. In one story, which Angel heard from her foremothers, birds can fly to the moon and when they are back to the earth, “they told pitiful stories about” poor human creatures, “wingless fool who had no choice but to stay behind and freeze” (124). Since humans cannot reach the moon, which signifies the mysterious realm the birds are familiar with, the birds express their contempt towards the “wingless” creatures who are restrained by their limited view and wisdom. Furthermore, Angel remarks that the Native Americans' lives “are witnessed by the birds, by dragonflies, by trees and spiders” and they are also judged “even by the alive galaxy in deep space” (80). Emphasized by the image of “the alive galaxy in the deep space” (80) that signifies the magnitude of the universe's mystery, this idea throws humans out of

the center of the universe. Hogan also invites us to imagine how birds can tell stories about humans from their mysterious view which is in sync with the rhythm of the natural world. Since humans are inferior to the birds in terms of vision and wisdom, they are subject to the birds' judgment.

Ultimately, the most beneficial and important quality of the non-human characters in this novel is that they live according to the ecological rhythm and they also exist to maintain the balance of the natural world. Thus, Wolverine, the trickster who is a protector of the natural laws, possesses power to punish people who violate the rules. For instance, LaRue treats fish cruelly, thrashing them when they are alive. This act shows his disrespect towards animals and the bond between humans and animals, so lightning and Wolverine seek him out in order to punish him and "take away his luck in hunting" (82), and so LaRue cannot catch any animal by himself.

Apart from being a law keeper, Wolverine is also able to restore abundance and the state of balance to the natural world. In one story about cannibals that Agnes tells Angel, an evil creature appears with a malicious intention "to devour humans" and Wolverine comes to help them:

Once, it was said, a man and a woman floated up from the depths of water in a boat made of human skin. They appeared on a path of light, came over the horizon. It was an old, old story. They wanted to devour humans. The woman gave birth to twins that were war and starvation. ... Wolverine, they say, was the one who saved them. He sprang the human woman from the trap and he made two skin bags of the murderous infants called hunger and war, and filled them with berries and meat and offered this to the humans. (186)

As a protector of the laws of nature, Wolverine drives away and punishes people who do not respect other creatures and thus break a strand of the web of interconnectedness. His special ability to spring traps and outwit humans, comes into play again in this story. Like Beaver, Wolverine possesses the power of creation and renewal, as he can transform “war and hunger” into abundance, celebrating life over destruction. By driving away the cannibals who spoil the ecosystem and bringing back the abundance, Wolverine restores the balance of the natural world. This story of Wolverine presents him as a hero and its ability to resume the harmonious and plentiful state of nature suggests the non-humans’ indispensable place in the biosphere.

To conclude, Hogan’s use of anthropomorphism to characterize the non-humans highlights their benevolence, their differences, and their superiority to humans. According to John Simons, the major characteristic of a “good” anthropomorphism is “its ability to ‘show how the non-human experience differs from the humans’ and thus produce insightful questions of the human-animal divide” (qtd. in Korhonen 219). With her non-anthropocentric characterization and successful anthropomorphism, Hogan invites readers to reconceptualize their notion of the relationship between humans and non-humans.

### The Relationship between Humans and Non-humans

Unlike most historical novels that tend to focus only on humans and dismiss the existence of the non-human world, Hogan's *Solar Storms* connects sociopolitical and ecological aspects, recounting the intertwined lives of the dispossessed peoples and the non-humans under the settlers' systemic, colonialist exploitation and invites readers to imagine humans' ethical relationship with the non-humans through the Native Americans' worldview. The interspersed presence of animals and plants throughout the novel shows how these non-humans are inextricably tied into the construction of postcolonial identity and subjectivity of Angel and her Native American community. This section not only examines the settlers' idea of human exceptionalism which leads to the systemic exploitation of the Native Americans and the non-humans but also elucidates the multispecies kinship between the Native American women and animals as well as plants that can be found in the in-between space where the human world, the animal world, and the plant realm interact.

In *Solar Storms*, Hogan presents the intergenerational devastation done to the North American tribal peoples and the non-humans by the white settlers, from the colonial period of the fur trade to the on-going James Bay hydroelectric construction project in the present. Influenced by Western thinking that promotes speciesism, the settlers radically differentiated and distanced themselves from other species and thought that humans, especially white males, were superior to the non-humans and other humans who were categorized as more connected to nature such as women and the indigenous people. This notion of exceptionalism constructs the colonialist identity and validates the whites' attempt to have mastery over nature, the non-humans and the Native American people. In contrast to the colonizers', the Native



Americans' kinship with the non-humans emphasizes nondifferentiation, interspecies communication, and the indeterminate state of beings.

To understand the settlers' violent and prolonged exploitation of the non-humans and the Native Americans, one needs to take into account the whites' alienation from the natural world. The settlers' physical and mental distance from nature induces their fear and distrust of the wilderness. Angel points out their intention to shut down their vision from the natural world as their houses are "designed and built by Christian-minded, sky-worshipping people who did not want to look out windows at the threatening miles of frozen lake on one side of them and, on the other, at the dense, dark forest with its wolves" (27). The colonizers also fear "the voices of animals singing at night" (86). Overwhelmed by their fear of the unknown, they came to the conclusion that the dense environments are "threatening" and "full of demons" (86). As Angel states, with this attitude, the whites forgot the "wild" and lost their connection with the natural world (86).

Considering the wilderness as hell-like, the white settlers thought that the evils in the forests could be purged by the force of Christianity, as they believe that "only their church and their god could drive the demons away" (86). Here, the novel implies the Christian settlers' animosity towards the natural world and suggests that Christianity is a factor that influences the Western hierarchical concept of human alienation from nature. This underlying hierarchical idea can be traced back to the Bible, which contains humans' differentiation from non-humans. The Bible contends that humans were created in God's image and were granted dominion over animals.

Consequently, the Christian settlers are not able to see beyond their presumptions and are blind to other different aspects of the wilderness.

The settlers' alienation from nature came from not only Christian ideologies but also Western philosophy. More specifically, 17th-century French thinker René Descartes formulates the theory of body-mind dualism and privileges humans as conscious beings with cognitive abilities. For Descartes, animals neither feel pain nor have rational faculties, thereby being comparable to machines. In the novel, LaRue, who deals with taxidermy trade, subscribes to this kind of Western thinking. He tells Angel that the fish they catch and skin alive "don't feel anything" as "[t]hey don't have nervous systems" (83). This assumption results in LaRue's and the settlers' brutality towards the animals and also hinders them from discerning the multi-layered existence of the non-humans.

The settlers' logic of human exceptionalism justifies their exploitation of the natural world. Since they consider the non-humans as being devoid of agency or intrinsic value and existing as material resources to benefit humans, the settlers use them as they please. The fur trade and deforestation exemplify the settlers' massive destruction of the whole ecosystem for economic goals. When Angel first came to Adam's Rib, she conjured up in her mind the images of the damages done to this place:

[The waterways] had been crossed many times before me . . . there were the French trappers and traders who emptied the land of beaver and fox. Their boats carried precious tons of fur to the trading post at LeDoux . . . The British passed through this north, as did the Norwegians and Swedes, and

there had been logjams, some of them so high and thick they'd stanching the flow of water out from the lake and down the Otter River as it grew too thin for its fish to survive. (21)

Referring to the long history of the colonial degradation of the land, Angel's narrative reveals the settlers' depletion of the natural world through over-trapping and logging. Their view of non-humans as natural resources transformed the animals and trees into "tons of fur" and "logjams" respectively. These Europeans thus colonized the land and took dominion over non-human beings, reducing them to quantifiable and lucrative commodities.

The European logic of body-mind alienation also contributes to patriarchal society. Hogan mostly presents the European characters as men with toxic masculinity as they use violence, tricks, and military strategies to have control over nature and the indigenous people, especially the women in order to achieve their materialistic aims. During the fur trade period, the European trappers used indigenous women to serve as guides in forests and to satisfy their sexual desires before leaving them when the forests and the women were depleted. Moreover, the European trappers did not care about the ecosystem. They only had eyes for money and could use any means to acquire it. The trappers used poison to eliminate wild animals for their convenience: "the remaining stray wolves and fox were poisoned to make more room for the European settlers and [their] pigs and cattle" (25). Hogan shows the result of the patriarchal violence done to the Native American community through Angel's maternal lines. Her grandmother, Loretta, came from Elk Island where people, forced by starvation, ate poisoned carcasses left by the European trappers and died: "the

people who became so hungry they ate the poisoned carcasses of deer that the settlers left out for the wolves” (37). Loretta was the only survival of her tribe; however, the smell of cyanide was deeply ingrained in her body and she became mentally ill since then. Her trauma has been passed down to Hannah, Angel’s mother. Hannah, like her mother, has been used by men. Hannah used to live “with a trapper, a man who took in troubled young girls on the pretext of helping them” (109).

The fur trade and the logging were illustrations for the early stage in the history of the settlers’ colonial expansion. The settlers’ attempt to colonize the land and the natives not only appears overtly as hunting and logging but also manifests itself through subtler forms, such as mapmaking, taxidermy, and dam construction. Mapmaking is the settlers’ intent to define the land and construct the knowledge about it to further assist them in colonizing and enslaving the indigenous people. LaRue’s ancient map that Bush uses during the journey to the north features “at the top” an image of a sinking boat in which “Indian people chained together as slaves for the far continent” (131). Furthermore, the fanciful and exotic images of dangers on the waterways indicate the Europeans’ attitude towards the wilderness as a threatening space to be conquered: “[t]here were water monsters, including a horned serpent with a tail” and “in the far-right corner, the hand of a drowning person reached out from the mud” (131).

Similar to mapmaking, taxidermy illustrates the settlers’ attempt to categorize non-humans under the Western frame of empirical knowledge. It collects data from the natural world and translates it in a scientific and quantifiable manner. Taxidermy trade transforms the dead animals into commodities, thereby dismissing their intrinsic

value and benefiting from their economic value. The Native Americans are also forced to participate in this trade which disgraces animals they respect due to the limited means of fending for themselves. At Adam's Rib, LaRue who adopts the settler's materialistic and violent attitude makes his living by being "a dealer in bones, pinned butterflies, hides, traps, and firearms" (28). Bush also assembles animals' bones for LaRue who will sell them "to museums and schools" (63).

Apart from cartography and taxidermy, *Solar Storms* depicts how the whites' exploitation of nature continues in the present era in the form of dam building, which is even more damaging due to their technological advancement. The land has been scarred and degraded previously, and hence "empty and useless" (58) in the eyes of the colonizers. Even though many thousand species of animals and plants and the Native American communities are still present, they are invisible to the whites. Building dams and turning water power into electricity is the whites' method of maximizing natural resources. The dam will reroute the river course, and unavoidable flood will be all over the areas where the Natives and animals live. In the present day, the whites also use legal tools to dispossess the peoples of their land. The colonial legacy is carried on with the power of corporates in the forms of the BEEVCO hydroelectric dam project.

In contrast to the colonizers' tendency to alienate themselves from non-humans, Hogan accentuates the Native Americans' beliefs in the reciprocal and interdependent relationships between humans and nature in order to survive as a whole community. To understand the deeply intertwined lives of humans and non-humans in the Native American worldview, we need to look at their storytelling in

which animal characters are active agents. One of the most important creation myths in the novel is about the ancient pact that Beaver, the maker of the land, made with humans. The two species gave “their words” that “[t]hey would help each other” (239). Beaver would provide “fish and waterfowl and animals” while humans “would take care of the world and speak with the gods and all creation” (239). This myth establishes the mutual obligation of both sides and has guided their behavior since the creation. The pact provides the humans with subsistence and at the same time demands their care and respect for the native world. Thus, Hogan highlights the role of humans as the caretakers of nature and indicates that they have to live in symbiosis with other creatures.

Hogan further emphasizes the role of humans as caretakers of the natural world, especially women, in the story of Eho, who is “the old woman keeper of animals” (229). This story that Dora-Rouge tells Angel illuminates the humans’ roles as caretakers and protectors of the animals, highlighting the idea of interspecies partnership and the fluid state of being that collapses differentiation among species:

She [Eho] had been sent down to the mother of water to bargain for all life, ...  
 She was the woman who fell in love with a whale in the heart of water and did not want to return to the human worlds. She knew and could command water. She drifted to where the world was composed long ago in dark creation. Because of her, the animals and other lives were spared, but in the end, Eho could not remain in water or with the whale of her loving. Soon, back on land, she died. Now men and women were to be the caretakers of the animals, that was what the Great Spirit said, according to Dora-Rouge. (229)

This passage indicates the intimacy of the two species, showing that both are equal members of the same community of life and similarly subject to the laws of nature. The fact that Eho is a woman falling in love with a whale indicates her special affinity with animals. The setting of “dark creation” implies that this intimate bond between female humans and animals has existed since the beginning of everything. The story also highlights Eho’s slippery state of beings and establishes her as a mythological figure who can travel freely between the human world and the animal realm, as she is able to communicate and “bargain” with non-humans. Giving up one’s life in order to save the community indicates the high degree of effort needed in preserving the peaceful balance of the natural world. Eho’s death is also her individual sacrifice for the greater good of the ecological community. Furthermore, this story implies the idea that the later generations of the Native Americans have to carry on Eho’s duty, as “[n]ow men and women were to be the caretakers” and hold communal values in order to preserve the fragile interconnected ecosystem and to ensure the survival of the community. This myth thus significantly shapes the Native Americans’ worldview and their treatment of animals and also strongly indicates women’s leadership and special link with animals, debunking the Western patriarchal ideology and speciesism.

The fluidity of a state of being is also presented in the actual world especially through the Native American female characters. Angel’s grandmothers, Agnes and Bush, not only perceive themselves as no different from animals and plants but also possess an indeterminate identity between humans/non-humans. Agnes’s identity is almost one with her glacier bear. In their first meeting, Angel describes Agnes who wears her bear coat as looking like “a hungry animal” (23). Agnes has formed her maternal bond with the last blue bear as “[f]irst thing every morning Agnes brushed

the fur, rocking it in the chair... . [L]ike it was a baby” (47- 48). Agnes’s intimate act of mothering extends beyond species. Moreover, Bush can think and move like an animal. When Angel sees Bush on Fur Island, the narrator thinks of her quiet grandmother as resembling wild animals more than humans: “[a]t first when I saw her, I thought she was a deer, thin and brown, smelling the direction of wind” (67). Thus, Bush and Agnes are also in-between figures. Significantly, they help bridge the different worlds of two species.

Ultimately, *Solar Storms* highlights the ideas of the indeterminate identity of humans and non-humans. Together, humans, animals, and plants constitute one whole identity. Therefore, the settlers' colonization that destroys the ecological communities of the Native Americans and decimates a number of animal and plant species brings about the disintegration of their identity as presented in Adam’s Rib community and the intergenerational trauma of Angel’s family.

The communities at Adam’s Rib and the story of the marginalized people represent the consequences of colonization. The variety of people from different native tribes at Adam’s Rib indicates the disintegration of the First Nations after the arrival of the Europeans. Angel describes the Abandoned Ones as “an ill-sorted group”; some have “Cree ancestors, some [are] Anishnabe, a few came from the Fat-Eaters farther north”, and “Bush [is] a Chickasaw from Oklahoma” (28). There are even the whites who were left by their society. The land at Adam’s Rib had been “worn out”, forests were gone, and many species of animals and plants went extinct (27). Thus, people whose lives had essentially depended on the land for thousands of years have been forced to live in harsh conditions, especially women, old people and



children. The fur trade caused many species almost to extinction and so the men at Adam's Rib were forced to go further north and abandon their communities. Since the land was depleted, the left-behind people have difficulty fending for themselves and others. For example, Loretta "was sold into sickness and prostitution" (119). This impoverished condition caused by men has forced many women to commodify their bodies in order to make their living. Many of them were sexually exploited and tortured, including Loretta and Hannah, both of whom were driven to prostitution.

Furthermore, *Solar Storms* highlights the native women's particular association with animals and plants as they all are the most damaged victims of colonization. The native women at Adam's Rib "call themselves the Abandoned Ones" "as if they too were used-up animals" (28), suggesting the plight they share with the non-human world. Both non-humans and women are all subjugated and reduced to mere bodies for the colonizers' material interest: animals for their fur, plants for their trunks, and the native women for sex. Their intrinsic value is disregarded. Throughout the novel, Hogan presents the images of dead bodies of animals, the deforested woods, along with the tortured bodies of the Native American women in order to highlight the similar conditions of these beings under the colonial and patriarchal structure.

Not only are the people at Adams' Rib physically damaged but their psyche is also fragmented. The Native Americans are used like animals and plants and become "inarticulate souls, silent spirits, and despairing hearts" (181). The metaphor of cyanide which passes down through Angel's maternal bloodline underscores the prolonged oppression of humans and non-humans and its devastating effects on

humans' psyche. Here, Hogan draws a parallel between Angel's familial "blood-deep" history and the communal history (40). The Native American people and non-humans have been similarly "poisoned" by the settlers for many generations (70). Both Loretta and Hannah internalize the violence they receive and pass on to their daughter. Mentally deranged, Hannah becomes a mother who abuses her own daughter, tortures Bush's dog to death, and even molests a child. As Bush remarks, "whatever [Hannha] is now, it wasn't human", but Hannah is definitely "dangerous" and "there [is] no thawing" (12-13) for Hannah's "frozen heart" (249). The incurable mental state of Hannah who is a victim of all kinds of violence and disruption emphasizes the atrocities the colonizers have done to the lands and the people.

Drawing a parallel between the disruption in her family and the tribal community's broken bond with the natural world, Angel emphasizes that between her and Bush "there had once been a bond, something like the ancient pact land had made with water, or the agreement humans once made with animals" (22). Due to those bonds that "lay broken" (22), Angel knows very little about her childhood. Seeking to discover her life story beyond what has been written "on paper stored in file cabinets" (22) by the white government, Angel returns to her kins at Adam's Rib.

At the beginning of her stay at Adam's Rib, Angel suffers from self-alienation. Having been separated from her family and her tribe since she was five and put in "a series of foster homes" in the white world (26), this indigenous girl describes herself as "a rootless teenager" (25), suggesting her lack of a sense of stable identity. Since she has very little memory about her childhood, Angel thinks that she has "never really existed" (74). Having felt that her existence "[is] nothing more than emptiness

covered with skin” (74), Angel cannot see herself beyond her material existence. She tries to cover her facial scars, which was caused by her mother, with her hair. Despite wearing “the tough look” (26), Angel feels empty and lost. She lacks self-esteem and was used to self-prostitution, “offer[ing] [her]self to any boy or man who would take [her]” (54). This unstable self is also the cause of her insomnia and her emotional turmoil as she admits that she has “inhabited permanently” (27) in “the rooms of anger and fear” (54). Furthermore, the self-alienation is also linked to her distance from nature. Like the whites, she has limited perception when it comes to the wilderness. On her arrival at Adam’s Rib, she feels threatened by the surrounding trees as she “was certain that dark eyes on their trunks looked at [her]” (22).

Not only does Angel only have a limited worldview that bars her from examining her inner self but she also has “little courage” to confront the past (24), a necessary link to one’s identity. The girl cannot bear to look at her facial scars in a mirror. She admits that the wounds, which are also a physical manifestation of the intergenerational trauma of her family and her tribe, “shaped [her] life” (25). It is because of the scars that distance Angel from others as she had “moved out of houses, ... as if [she] were running from ugliness or pain” (51). She thinks that she is too ugly and her past is too painful to bear. When Frenchie, a neighbor, unwittingly asks her about the origin of the scar, Angel’s frustration with her unresolved trauma and her lack of courage to face it cause the girl to hit into pieces the mirror that reflects her scarred face.

The night when she breaks the mirror is the first time that she is forced to confront her vulnerability and significantly leads to the beginning of her healing

process with the help from animals and plants. The blue bear coat with its power of healing and connecting people to the mysterious realm of knowledge helps Angel in her early stage of self-discovery. Agnes, whose identity is almost the one with the last glacier bear and whose strength comes from her parental bond with it, covers Angel with her bear coat, giving Angel a sense of protection and security. The bear coat possesses healing power and Angel feels “relieved” (54). The bear coat also serves to connect the girl with the indigenous way of seeing the world as Angel subsequently “be[gins] to form a kind of knowing at Adam’s Rib” (54). Significantly, after putting on the bear coat, Angel enters into the boundless realm of knowledge, a space of cyclical time as it connects the past and the present. That night Angel dreams that she “fell over the edge of land, fell out of order and knowing into a world dark and primal, seething, and alive as creation, like the beginning of life” (54). As she is more acutely aware of the mystery of the natural world, Angel is gradually getting closer to her new beginning through the tribal way of knowing.

Not soon after that, Angel begins to see that the Western logic of alienation falsely represents who she is. She starts realizing that her real self is not what words can entirely define as she feels that “if we had no separate words for inside and out and there were no boundaries between them, no walls, no skin, you would see me” (54). Without words and masks, she is composed of natural elements and these are always in a flowing state of being, as she alternates between “fire”, “water”, and “earth” (54). By extension, she is not different from other non-humans. Being able to see beyond superficial boundaries and “deeper than her skin”, she realizes that she is “beautiful as the wolf” (54). Her perception of her own beauty is now associated with the non-humans.

When she begins to confront herself and gets a glimpse of a new epistemology at Adam's Rib, Angel can locate her place in the natural world and starts piecing her past together on Fur Island thanks to the help of plants and the guidance of Bush who is more like an animal than a human. When arriving at Fur Island, Angel still feels in conflict with nature since she fears its uncontrollable force. When she first comes into her bedroom and notices "[o]ne of the vines" that "[comes] through the window like a dark green hand", Angel instantly "put[s] it out and close[s] the uncurtained window" (70). Angel admits that she fears the plant just "like the missionaries" do due to the way in which it "resist[ed] human effort to control it" (71). She recognizes its agency but perceives it as an evil force. At the same time, Bush gradually tells Angel about her past and Hannah bit by bit, keeping Angel on Fur Island and letting the girl take her time to recreate her own story. After staying there for a while, Angel starts understanding the process of her remaking through the images of animals as she is "[reweaving]" herself "the way spiderwebs on the floating island chang[s] every night" with new stories from Bush. Angel also "imagines [herself], along with the parts and fragments of stories, ... trying to move, toward wholeness—a leg, an arm, a putting together, the way Bush put together the animal bones" (85).

Although Angel has always been alienated from the natural world before returning to Adam's Rib, she has the latent potential to perceive beyond the boundaries. Even when living in the white world, Angel has subconsciously longed for the connection with the non-humans, especially plants, and she has been able to perceive the beauty of nature. Agnes tells her that "[w]hen [Angel] w[as] a baby, all [she] wanted to do was look at plants" (43). Angel as a child would "[listen] to them and they leaned forward to tell [her] things" (43). This memory indicates the deep

bond the Native Americans have with plants, the bond that becomes “cell-deep” (137) and can be passed down to the later generations.

Many critics have pointed out that since this island is with few distractions, it helps Angel discover that she is a part of the natural world. I specifically argue that plants in particular play a vital role in this self-discovery process as they reach Angel who shuts herself out from the natural world and try to pull her back into them. With Angel’s special bond with plants, they are her ultimate helpers. The vines outside her bedroom want Angel to open the window since her first day of arrival and to encounter the natural images that will lead to her ecological awareness. As Angel becomes more familiar with the reaching vines in her bedroom, she stops closing the window. “With the windows wide open, [she] live[s] inside water” and realizes that she is one with the natural element as “[t]here was no separation between [them]” (78). Angel, who is now able to “look deeper” under surface (85), intuitively knows about the interconnectedness of things through the cycle of water, which “had passed through old forests” and “had journey through human lives”, and recognizes that “[s]ome of it was the blood of [her] ancestors” (78). Furthermore, in the next morning when she encounters the image of the harmonious interactions of tundra swans and the land, Angel describes that the swans’ “voices see[m] to wake the land itself, which at that moment lived only for the great, beautiful birds” (78). This captivating image also indicates that humans, another species of animals, are not privileged in this world, but they are part of a larger whole. Angel comes to realize “that [she] was part of the same equation as birds and rain” (79).

After Angel has become physically and mentally stronger during her stay on Fur Island, she joins her grandmother in the journey to the north in order to see her mother. During her journey in the wilderness, she has learned about the Native American way of knowing through dreaming. The indigenous people's ability to communicate with non-humans also comes from their intuitive connection with the natural force. According to the Native American worldview, dreams are not created by human minds, but "[t]he roots of dreaming" perhaps are "in the heart, or in another place without words" (171). The Native Americans believe that "there [is] a place inside the human that spoke with land, that entered dreaming" (164). The duality of mind and body does not exist in gaining knowledge from the world. The indigenous hunters in the past could locate their prey through their dreams of "hunger maps" (164), which, unlike the white maps, are embedded in their body that connects with the earth, and these maps can be summoned in their dreams.

In addition to their ability to communicate with non-humans through their dreams, the Native Americans also speak the ancient non-verbal language with animals and plants. "For tens of thousands of years", Angel claims, the Native Americans "[have known] the languages of earth, water, and trees", and they have communicated with animals (334). This language has become lost to most contemporary Native Americans. Angel implies that to be able to communicate with non-humans again, one must first listen to nature like the older people who "were more silent in those days", and "[t]hey listened" and "heard" (196), such as Bush and Agnes who live in their traditional way.

During the journey, plants not only lead Angel back to the natural world but also shape her identity and help her discover her potential as a plant dreamer. The relationship between plants and Angel is reciprocal and the girl's identity becomes merged with plants'. In the following passage, the vegetables first come into Angel's subconscious realm, awaken her latent potential, and reconnect her with them and the Native American mysterious way of knowing:

For my own part in this dreaming, as soon as I left time, ... , plants began to cross my restless sleep in abundance. A tendril reached through darkness, a first sharp leaf came up from the rich ground of my sleeping, opened upward from the place in my body that knew absolute truth. It wasn't a seed that had been planted there, not a cultivated growing, but a wild one, one that had been there all along, waiting. .... I knew how they breathed at night, and that they were linked to us in that breath. It was the oldest bond of survival. .... Somewhere in my past, I had lost the knowing of this opening light of life, the taking up of minerals from dark ground, the magnitude of thickets and brush. Now I found it once again. Sleep changed me. I remembered things I'd forgotten, how a hundred years ago, leaves reached toward sunlight, plants bent into currents of water. (170-1)

Dreaming is a major through which that the indigenous people gain their essential knowledge as they can enter the mysterious realm where the physical plane of reality and chronological time collapse. In this particular scene, plants channel into Angel's way of knowing both mind and body. The "wild" plants, which have been waiting, enter into her dream and awaken other vegetal elements in her body to communicate



with her. This entrance reminds Angel that she and plants have been connected through breath, and this connection, “the oldest bond of survival”, is linked with the survival of humans and plants. They must communicate and help each other. The plants stir Angel’s “cell-deep” memory of the creation. Like her ancestors, now Angel is able to travel across time and space into the mythical realm of “a hundred years ago” and to ground her identity in plants, thereby crossing the demarcation between humans and plants. She remembers in detail her deep bond with plants and their botanical characteristics of “taking up of minerals from dark ground, the magnitude of thickets and brush” as if she were plants herself. Rebonding herself with plants, Angel also comes to live in the rhythm of nature and is able to retrieve the lost non-verbal language humans used to speak with nature. Dora-Rouge remarks that Angel legitimately becomes a plant dreamer through blood: “I [knew] there’d be another plant dreamer in my family someday” (170). Being able to connect herself biologically, mythically, and spiritually with plants, Angel successfully recreates her personal identity as a Native American woman.

While plants help Angel discover her potential as a plant dreamer and highlight the legitimacy of her Native American bloodline, animals help recreate her subjectivity as an organic member of a larger communal whole in a web of interconnectedness. The journey in the wilderness that catapults her out of linear time heightens her ecological sensitivities and shapes her identity to be more like an animal. Angel remarks that “[n]ew senses [come] to [her]” and “[she] was equal to other animals, hearing as they heard, moving as they moved, seeing as they saw” (172). She starts to see her harmonious collaboration with her grandmothers as constituting “like one animal” as “[they] heard inside each other in a tribal way”

(177). Also, when Angel encounters the petroglyph of fish painted under water, she remembers “being fish” (179) and that they come from the same source, which is the “natal waters” of Mother Nature: “I saw this world as that which gave birth to fish, the great natal waters parting to make way as birds left the sea and opened their wings in air” (81). By traveling back into the place of origin, “the natal waters” (179), Angel becomes cognizant of this interrelatedness of all beings. Furthermore, she observes that her matriarchal family line is similar to a tree as she invokes an arboreal imagery of a rhizome and likens it to her family: “a root and we were like a tree family, aspens or birch, connected to one another underground, the older trees feeding the young, sending offshoots, growing. I watched and listened. It was an old world in which I began to bloom. Their stories called me home” (48). This image emphasizes the relatedness of individuals in a tribal family and also indicates Angel’s awareness of the ties between herself and her family heritage.

Angel’s success in remaking herself helps break the family loop of perpetual intergenerational trauma and increases her ability to connect with others in her community. Nonetheless, breaking the loop of trauma means not forgetting the past, but accepting it. After Angel has completed the excursion to the north that has transformed her, she no longer hates or holds anger towards Hannah. Angel is now able to understand that her mother is a victim of the colonial legacy. Angel can finally confront and accept her past wholeheartedly as she states that Hannah’s “desperation and loneliness was [Angel’s] beginning” and that her own mother “ha[s] been [her] poison, [her] life, [her] sweetness and pain, [her] beauty and homeliness” (251). She comes to see Hannah’s death and manages to bury her with “grief and compassion” (251). Furthermore, Hogan emphasizes Angel’s maturity when Angel takes home

Aurora, her baby sister who is left alone when Hannah has gone, and decides to raise her.

Having been able to come to terms with herself, to reconnect with her family, and to discover her potential, Angel can reintegrate into the Native American community. In their Native American community, they need one another and “everyone had a gift, each person a specialty of one kind or another ” (262). For example, “Tulik [knows] the land and where to gather herbs, mosses, and spices” while “Dora-Rouge [knows] the mixtures, the amounts and proportions of things” (263). Together at the Fat-Eaters’, they “formed something like a single organism” (263). With her special ability to communicate with medicinal plants through dreams, Angel is no longer a rootless teenager who used to feel worthless. When Agnes becomes sick, that night herbs, “redroot” and “wolfsbane” appear in Angel’s dream (188-9). She can perform her duty as a valuable plant dreamer who possesses knowledge to heal people and preserve the ancient wisdom of her community.

### The Solidarity of Animals, Plants, and the Native Americans

According to the Native American myth, animals and plants have helped humans because of the pact that Beaver made with them since the time of creation. This mutual obligation has helped the community survive as a whole before it was shattered by colonization. Nonetheless, the non-humans seek to return “to the old ways” (17) by cooperating with the Native American people. According to Dora-Rouge, “[t]he mosquitoes [remember] all the letting of blood” (175). The reaching vines outside Angel’s bedroom window “[want] to turn everything back to its origins” and “reclaim the island” (73). They also tell their stories to human people as Angel hears “the lonely, sad songs coming through trees and up from the banks of their destruction” (176) during her excursion to the north.

This section illustrates the role of animal and plant characters that possess “boundary-breaking” potential and argues that the nonhumans function as collaborative agents in the Native Americans’ resistance against the whites’ oppression from the past to the present. While the Native American characters fight through their activism, animals and plants help counter Western cartography and provide the indigenous people with strategies to overcome their colonization. Characterizing animals and plants with disruptive qualities, Hogan subverts colonial discourse and simultaneously debunks the European myths of fixed boundaries and of human arrogance.

Many critics have pointed out how the land of waterscape defies the whites’ logic. In her article “Native Waterscapes In The Northern Borderlands: Restoring Traditional Environmental Knowledge In Linda Hogan’s *Solar Storms*”, Anna M.

Brígido-Corachán argues that Western cartography “ha[s] traditionally obscured the multivocal depth of historical experiences in Native territories” and points out that Angel characterizes the land of waterways as “defiant” and “tricky” (44). I further argue that animals and plants play a significant role in helping characterize the land as “defiant” (123) and thus counter the whites’ cartography. To explain, as part of the land, the beavers are “the true makers” of this “defiant” land, which “destroyed other human missions and desires” (123). The beavers’ “maps”, which are always changing, contain “the story of the beaver people”, contrasting with the settlers’ false maps that exclude “the people or animal lives or the clay of land, the water, the carnage” (123), which are the stories that the settlers perpetually try to erase. Furthermore, peat islands, partially formed by decomposed vegetable matter, can float around “here and there” (66). Together they form organic and mystical entities that escape the whites’ attempt to control and fix them with Western reductionist tools, such as mapmaking. Animals and plants make the land slippery frontier, thereby blurring the boundaries that the Westerners attempted to create since the early period of colonization. Furthermore, this disruptive potential of the non-humans also hints that the Western ideology and culture cannot dominate the truths that the Native Americans, who have always been engaging with the flux of nature, have accumulated for many thousands of years.

The most vibrant animal character in the novel is the trickster Wolverine who possesses not only the mysterious power to elude the whites’ attempt at humans/animals classification but also the ability to trap humans who disobey the natural laws. During Angel’s stay at Fur Island, the first story Bush tells about Wolverine is the two white trappers, Ding and Dong, who accused each other of

stealing the other's trapped animals. They fought, and the one was killed while the other fled to the north. Bush tells Angel that it was Wolverine who sprang their traps to trick them into fighting. As Christine T. Jespersen contends in her article, "Unmapping Adventure: Sewing Resistance in Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms*", the two trappers' ignorance of the real cause of the sprung trap and their failure "to shift viewpoints" resulted in "their losses" (288). LaRue is one example of those punished by Wolverine for their acts of drawing the human/animal divisive line, using animals for lucrative purposes, and refusing to follow the laws of nature. His luck in hunting is taken away and so he cannot catch any animals like the two transgressors. Furthermore, as Jespersen argues, the fact that "Wolverine springs traps when humans impose false categorization sundering humans from animals calls attention to his role in undoing mind traps, disassembling artificial distinctions between humans and nature, and forcefully reminding humans of reciprocal obligation" (288).

More importantly, the non-humans' disruptive qualities and the strategies that they use establish them as collaborative agents in the Native Americans' fight against the colonizers. Ultimately, Wolverine gives Angel strategies to fight against the colonizers. The stories about this mysterious figure supply her with directions that she and her tribe could take in their protest. From one story about Wolverine mischievously spoiling human food, Angel later understands Wolverine's will to drive away those that disrespect natural laws and attempt to control nature for their selfish goals. When she realizes that "Wolverine wanted the people to leave, he wanted to starve them out of his territory, his world," "like thunder following the lightning, a plan sprang to [her] mind" (322). Like Wolverine, Angel decides to

“starve out the soldiers and police” (322). Wolverine, thus, gives Angel the strategy. Imitating the Trickster, Angel stealthily goes into the soldiers’ kitchen and steals their food. In a way, it can be interpreted that Wolverine transgresses time and space and the boundary of the mythical realm to exercise his power through Angel to drive out people who violate the natural laws.

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At the end of *Solar Storms*, even though the Native Americans have won the court case over BEEVCO, the dam construction project has caused a lot of damages to the community. Many animals and plants are “drowned” and some that survive are “confused” due to the flood (337). Nonetheless, the native people are still hopeful and persistent in their endeavor to help the animals and plants, their kins and members of the community. In the novel’s last chapter, Hogan suggests that a sustainable community can happen in the future if we can reshape our perspective towards the non-humans. Even LaRue can redeem himself. Although having made money from taxidermy and fought militarily during the protest, LaRue gradually opens himself up to other species and even tries to save the “bushes” on a peat island. It can also be interpreted that plants come to help transform LaRue. He has to travel with the peat island with bushes before coming back to be a new man with empathy who cries when he learns that an “animal had been killed” (339). Moreover, he can recognize the beauty of other species, when he thinks that his “reflection” “[is] too ugly for a wolverine” (350). The future of the community and the Native American way to persist thus lie in believing in the redeemability of humans and the importance of recognition of kinship among the communal members. Angel emphasizes the latter in

the ending: “[o]lder creatures are remembered in the blood. ... We are tree. We are frog in amber” (351).

#### Note

I acknowledge that by suggesting that Hogan’s characters and the fictional communities in *Solar Storms* represent the Native American communities in the past and the present, my paper risks being accused of simplifying or reducing the diverse cultures and history of the various Native American tribes in North America. However, I argue that Hogan’s portrayal of the shared characteristics of the indigenous communities in *Solar Storms* and my analysis of this novel can be regarded as deploying what Gayatri Spivak, the prominent postcolonial theorist, calls ‘strategic essentialism’. In Spivak’s *In Other Worlds*, she contends that: “[r]eading the work of Subaltern Studies from within but against the grain, I would suggest that elements in their text would warrant a reading of the project to retrieve the subaltern consciousness as the attempt to undo a massive historiographic metalepsis and 'situate' the effect of the subject as subaltern. I would read it, then, as a strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest” (281). As a Chickasaw writer who seeks to counter the ongoing oppression of the marginalized indigenous groups, Hogan deliberately presents the Native American characters in the novel with certain collective essentialist qualities in order to achieve her political ends. This political strategy creates a shared sense from the colonial unjust practices from the past that still continues to the present among the Native Americans and encourages their spirit of defiance. Furthermore, when I state “the Native Americans” in my paper, I mean the Native Americans that are represented by Angel and the other Native American characters in the novel.



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