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TALKING BACK TO HISTORY: LEANNE HOWE, LINDA HOGAN, AND LOUIS  
OWENS'S REWRITING OF THE SOUTHEASTERN NATIVE PAST THROUGH  
FICTION

A Thesis

presented in partial fulfillment of requirements

for the degree of Master of Arts

in the Department of Southern Studies

The University of Mississippi

by

KIMBERLEE KAITLYN HODGES

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## ABSTRACT

For years, non-Native anthropologists and historians have endeavored to unravel the inner-workings of Native American culture through close examinations of archeological evidence, Euro-American historical record, and oral histories. Consequently, in an attempt to reclaim and re-appropriate these pasts are the stories written by Native American authors and novelists such as LeAnne Howe (Choctaw), Louis Owens (Choctaw), and Linda Hogan (Chickasaw). Through their writings, one is able to more fully understand the history of Southeastern Native American tribes as they are given insight into what was and is most valued by Native American people to this day such as kinship, spirituality, and the their quest for identity.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As a student of Native American History since my first semester of Graduate School, creating this thesis has been a uniquely rewarding experience for me. So many people have assisted me along the way, and acknowledging their help here is the least I can do to show my gratitude. First and foremost, I thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Robbie Ethridge, as well as the other members of my thesis committee, Dr. Katie McKee and Dr. Ted Ownby, for their invaluable guidance and advice. I also wish to thank Dr. Annette Trefzer and Dr. Mikaela Adams for their help while writing my thesis. I also would like to thank my Undergraduate Minor Advisor Dr. Molly McGehee for leading me to the Southern Studies program at the University of Mississippi while at Presbyterian College.

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## INTRODUCTION

### **Native Authors' Attempt to Reclaim their History Through Fiction**

Far from the traditional narrative told by historians about the history of America as beginning with the arrival of Europeans is the story of its Indigenous peoples. Although ignored by some, their history is and should be a critical part of the American narrative because, by all accounts, their presence and the struggles that occurred between Native Americans and Euro-Americans invaders have shaped the course of American history. In recent years, historians have made great strides toward bringing Natives into the American narrative. In addition, Native scholars and writers have offered a Native perspective on that narrative. In this thesis, I explore how three Native authors, Leanne Howe, Linda Hogan, and Louis Owens use the past in their work to present a Native perspective on history. Although their writing is fictional the Native past and how it is represented throughout history looms large as each attempts to reevaluate and re-appropriate the history of their people through the emphasis each of them places on spirituality, family and kinship ties, the environment, and the ever-present question of identity, showing that the themes of loss and deprivation so often believed to be emblematic of Native history can be preempted by themes of strength and resilience in the face of an ever-changing world.

While taking a class entitled "Indians on the Southern Frontier" my first year of graduate school, I developed a profound interest in the history of Native Americans and

ultimately how their story is told throughout histories mostly written by white Euro-Americans. Although I knew Native American history to be problematic, I never realized just how problematic those histories could be until I decided to undertake a thesis that combines Native history and literature in an effort to illuminate the voices of the people who's history is often being studied by and sometimes exploited by outsiders. By first discussing the methodologies associated with writing and researching Native history and the mistakes often made by both Native and non-Native researchers, I wish to assert the problems that researchers are constantly dealing with when they study a living, breathing people who have felt the intense grasp of American imperialism. Although these mistakes are often not intentional, their effects are far reaching, ultimately feeding into the stereotypes associated with Native Americans both past and present and promoting ideologies that strive to illuminate differences rather than similarities. One of the many problems of imperialism itself is that those on the winning side often do not question whether the costs and consequences of imperialism were worth its gains. Stereotypical images, such as the "noble savage" and "wild Indian," are not only offensive but they also perpetuate ideas of white superiority. Therefore, the purpose of this discussion is to inform readers of the problems of writing Native history in addition to the solutions more indigenous methodologies offer in researching and writing the history of Native Americans.

Following this discussion, the first chapter gives an overview of the history of Southeastern Native Americans starting with their arrival into North America across the Baring Strait and ending with their removal from the American South during the Age of Andrew Jackson. This section also prepares readers for the chapters that are to come



by establishing a baseline of knowledge concerning the history of Native Americans. It also presents the history which Howe, Hogan, and Owens set out to reassess and re-appropriate by putting their own stamp on it.

The third chapter addresses the most well-known work of Choctaw author Leanne Howe, *Shell Shaker*. Not only does this novel follow in the pattern of assessing how the past of her people (the Choctaws) affects the present but also figures prominently into the common themes of spirituality, kinship, and identity through its story centered around the Billy family throughout the generations from the 1730s to the 1990s. By depicting the characters themselves to be present reincarnations of their ancestors, Howe sets the stage for them to ultimately correct the wrongs committed generations ago prior to the forcible removal of the Choctaws from their homelands in Mississippi.

Although the next two books to be examined follow suit with their prevailing themes, they are far more environmentalist because of the political agendas of their authors. Therefore, the fourth chapter, dealing with Linda Hogan's *Power*, asserts the importance of the environment within its themes of spirituality, kinship, and identity because it is ultimately a hurricane, a product of the environment, that sets the plot in motion. Although the hurricane's effects are far-reaching, it is the characters' (particularly the main characters of Ama and Omishito) responses to the hurricane that sets them on a spiral of self-evaluation and discovery, as they learn more about themselves and the history of their people, the Taiga. (The Taiga are an invented Florida tribe whose history is based off of the history of the "real" Southeastern Indian tribes).

The final work I discuss is Louis Owens's *Wolf Song* because of Owens's own Southeastern Indian ancestry. As in *Power*, the main character, Tom, is a staunch environmentalist, struggling with questions of personal and cultural identity amidst an ever-changing world in the mountains of Washington state. Although the setting of the novel is far removed from the American Southeast, the problems that occur in *Wolf Song* concerning deforestation echo those that took place in the Southeastern portion of the United States. Tom asserts his "Nativeness" by relying on the ideas of spirituality and kinship to fight whites in what he considers to be the last frontier.

#### What to Consider When Writing about Native American History

These questions are related to the topic at hand, the writing and the rewriting of history by Native American novelists (Howe, Hogan, and Owens) because each is in effect trying to reclaim and ultimately assert ownership over not only their own personal and tribal history but the history of Native Americans as a whole through their somewhat loose interpretations of Native American history. By writing their own versions of history, each of these authors, is attempting to counteract outsiders' claim to Native history. Therefore, one must first discuss the problems and concerns of writing Native history.

Writing Native American history is complex in a number of ways. Not only is it difficult to study and write Native American history because of the paucity of reliable sources but it is often difficult to discuss because, for the most part, Native history has been written by outsiders. Although history itself is not owned by anyone, it is necessary to acknowledge the consequences of outsiders writing the history of a living, breathing population and about a people who are tired of being studied and their history being exploited or misrepresented.

Therefore, it is useful to understand what Natives have to say about the writing of their history by those both inside and outside of their communities. In addition, adding a Native perspective means that when writing their history, non-Native researchers can become aware of the possible implications of their research on the descendant communities who are often skeptical of outsider research because of its ability to not only portray them in a negative light but also because of its exploitative potential. Embedded in this issue of exploitation is the question: Can history be owned and interpreted best by those whom it is about? Or can it simply be practiced by anyone interested in the subject matter as long as they follow the standards of scholarship?

#### Problems for Non-Indigenous Researchers

Quite possibly one of the best works discussing the challenges of studying Natives is *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* by Linda Tahiwai Smith. This work describes the mistakes most often made by those wishing to research indigenes. Smith, being of New Zealand indigenous decent, discusses in detail the problems associated with studying marginalized people. According to Smith, at the root of the problem is the term “research” which is “inextricably linked to European Imperialism and Colonialism, [...] stir[ing] up silence, conjur[ing] up bad memories, [and] rais[ing] a smile that is both knowing and distrustful” (Smith 1). Therefore, the research and the writing of history has become a very traumatic experience for Natives because of its connection to colonialism (Duran et al 60). Because Natives knew nothing of Western science and research prior to the arrival of Europeans, for them its practice, at its heart, is linked to exploitations committed by those outside of their communities, most often European invaders. Consequently, history is colonial research, and “colonial

research, it is argued, contains incontestable evidence of the manipulative ability of research to prove and perpetuate the dominance of one race over another” (Chilisa 52). Therefore, for many Natives, Western research has become just another way in which outsiders are attempting to invade and ultimately control the way they are represented in science and history. In history, Western scholarship has had a profound effect on how Natives were represented to both Euro-Americans and ultimately Natives themselves (Smith 1). These representations, until recently, were stereotypical representations as either the wild Indian or the noble savage. Such representations not only anger Natives but tend to make them distrustful of researchers from outside their communities. On this note, Smith describes the feelings of those most harmed by the misrepresentation of their history when she says,

“It galls us that Western researchers and intellectuals can assume to know all that is possible to know of us, on the basis of their brief encounters with some of us. It appalls us that the West can desire, extract and claim ownership of our ways of knowing, our imagery, the things we create and produce, and then simultaneously reject the people who created and developed those ideas and seek to deny them further opportunities to be creators of their own culture” (1).

Through this quotation, Smith articulates the frustration experienced by members of native groups in response to the exploitation of research by outsiders as well as the desire to own and lay claim to their tribes’ history. This, though, takes us back to the question of whether it is possible for one group to truly own and possess their peoples’ history or if history itself can and should be owned. My opinion on this matter is that history cannot be owned yet should be practiced with a high level of consciousness,

knowing their writing has the ability not only help but also harm the people it concerns.

Central to this discussion is a careful analysis of the legacies of colonial imperialism for modern Natives, because for many Natives research itself is a byproduct of colonialism in its worst form, exemplifying the taking of their culture in order to gain both knowledge and material success. Colonialism's effects are not only a physical but a mental exploitation that often results in the harm of the people who are being researched. In fact, many researchers point out that the effects of colonialism can still be seen today in Native communities and families, effects such as "symptomatology of alcoholism, poverty, learned helplessness and dependence, violence, and the breakdown of values that correlate with healthy living" (Duran et al 61). As a result, many Natives feel the conducting of research on their history should be secondary to helping improve their current situation and are understandably less willing to work with researchers who are most concerned with the past (colonialism itself) rather than the present (the effects of colonialism). Although not all tribes experienced the same amount of trauma stemming from colonialism, "The problems that [Native] communities face today are a result, at least in part, of not being given the time and resources to resolve the trauma" perpetuated by those in positions of power, specifically colonial governments (Duran et al 62).

Not only is research about Native people problematic because of its association with colonialism, but it is also problematic because of its tendency to group people from very different backgrounds together simply because of their racial and ethnic similarities. This is especially visible in researchers' constant reference to Natives,

indigenes, or indigenous peoples, often using such terms to refer to the first peoples of every continent. Although almost all Natives have been the subjects of colonization, they are by no means culturally similar. Therefore, for many, this association is insulting because, as researchers should know, each group is different and each primarily identifies with their individual group rather than with a sense of pan-Indianism.

Consequently, according to Smith, “The term ‘indigenous’ is problematic in that it appears to collectivize many distinct populations whose experiences under imperialism have been vastly different,” and grouping them into a collective “other” (6).

However, in the hands of Natives, such as those involved in the American Indian Movement (AIM), the term “indigenous” allows for people from different tribes and backgrounds to unite under a single cause, for example, AIM formed to achieve social justice for Native Americans living in North America. According to Smith, AIM allowed for the unity of all colonized people to be heard collectively on the world stage, enabling people of different cultures and backgrounds to come together for the greater good, “transcending their own colonized contexts and experiences, in order to learn, share, plan, organize and struggle collectively for self-determination on the global and local stages in the face of adversity and the effects of colonial imperialism (7). Regardless, such self-identification is rare amidst less politically active Natives.

Another problem with Non-Native research is the tendency to “otherize” the people being researched. “In a very real sense, research has been an encounter between the West [Europeans] and the Other [Natives],” and, as we all know, many Western writers and historians tend to look upon Natives as different and even occasionally as inferior to Westerners (Smith 8). “Otherizing” essentially divides the

world into “two types of people: the colonizers and the colonized, Western and non-Western, advanced and primitive, civilized and savage, indigenous and non-Indigenous, industrial and non-industrial, literate and non-literate” (Shoemaker x). Hence, a researcher’s objectivity is compromised. According to Chilisa, “these constructions privilege the first world and subjugate the various knowledge formations originating in former colonies,” allowing for researchers to legitimize the perpetuated stereotypes associated with Natives (74). These dichotomies have been at play since European arrival on colonial shores, and they are especially visible in some histories written by non-indigenous scholars, particularly American and European scholars from the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Only in modern scholarship has there been a tremendous reaction against “otherizing” with the works of numerous historians and anthropologists leading the way toward a more enlightened interpretation of Native history and scholarship; however, there is still a long way to go.

#### Problems for Indigenous Researchers

Not only do non-Native researchers face particular problems when studying Native history, but it is also quite difficult for those inside a Native community. For many insiders, bringing up the past can be difficult simply because it is the past and the present is oftentimes more pressing. This is because “taking apart the story, revealing underlying texts and giving voice to things that are often known intuitively does not help people improve their current conditions” (Smith 3). Modern Native communities struggle with far more than conceptualizing the past, such as the problems caused by their dispossession in current society, leaving them uneducated and poverty-stricken. Although the problems of the past are important, in many cases those of the present are

more pressing because their effects determine the livelihood of an entire current population.

In addition, many find it problematic that indigenous researchers are often insiders hired by people outside of their community and thus are accountable to outsiders for the research they conduct and making them abide by the criteria of Euro-American research styles rather than indigenous ones (Smith 5). Their insider status and ability to communicate with the outsiders combine to make them very desirable researchers for those outside the tribe not wishing to conduct the research themselves and those wishing to gain an “inside perspective.” Unfortunately, conducting such research can sometimes make them seem like traitors to their own people, especially if they are not able to somehow retain their own indigenusness while working for outsiders as well as provide the least biased representation of their people as humanly possible, knowing that it is impossible to provide a completely objective perspective. Accordingly, “Indigenous researchers work within a set of ‘insider’ dynamics and it takes considerable sensitivity, skill, maturity, experience, and knowledge to work these issues through” (Smith 10).

Still, as Smith and others have addressed, research itself comes from and for the most part is still practiced in a Western tradition. According to Donald Fixico (a member of the Seminole tribe in Oklahoma), although

“one perspective is just as valid as another in solving problems and responding to questions, [...] the American mainstream does not typically hear or begin to understand different points of view for fear of their authority being challenged” (xii).



Therefore, although many Westerners are ready and willing to hear the opinions of non-Westerners concerning the writing of their individual history, they are oftentimes unable to accept those opinions as valid because the acceptance of such opinions would challenge Western knowledge. For Fixico, because Native American thinking is different, their history should be handled and written about differently. Native Americans view history and the past as continuous and circular rather than linear, so their history should be written and interpreted using this mindset, utilizing Indigenous ways of knowing. Instead of relying on Western thought patterns and ways of knowing (written records in particular), Native American history should be written based on Native American rather than Western standards or rather a fusion of the two when discussing Native American-Western interactions.

Greatly influenced by Smith and desirous to take her work a step farther is Native Margaret Kovach's work *Indigenous Methodologies*. According to Kovach, the public's interest in Indigenous studies for the non-Native "has to do with a generation seeking ways to understand the world without harming it" and of those wishing to understand the parts of history left out of the traditional narratives, specifically oral traditions (11). However, because "research is deeply associated with Western systems" and "the appropriateness of bringing an oral based knowledge system into an academic world that has only recently become open to it" (Kovach 12). Because early Native American tribes did not have a writing system, most knowledge of the past is based on oral traditions and storytelling, relaying knowledge of their social system, traditions, and so on. Oral traditions, though, have not been taken seriously by the academy until recently. As a result, "Colonial [or Western] history has disrupted the ability of Indigenous people

to uphold knowledge by cultural methodologies [storytelling]” because it often requires history to be written down in order for it to be deemed reliable and ultimately legitimized (Kovach 12). Consequently, because Indigenous history operates very differently from that of Western history, through its oral traditions and cyclical understanding of the past, it is impossible to expect their history to fit precisely into Western methodology, written records, and understandings of reality. What is needed is a methodology all their own, an Indigenous methodology. Accordingly, if Native methodologies are used in writing Native history, this will help legitimize Native methodologies and ways of knowing. If these changes are made, Indigenous research will become (for lack of a better term) more Indigenous based, setting the stage for changes that have been years in the making (Kovach 13).

#### Difficulties of Writing Oral Histories

Because Native cultures are rooted in oral traditions, many non-Native researchers neglect to consult with such sources because these traditions are not considered reliable narratives of the past. Rather oral traditions illuminate social mores and cultural traditions. However, oral records then are crucial toward understanding other aspects of Native life, rather than the objective history. In fact, according to Angela Cavendar Wilson in her essay, “Grandmother to Granddaughter: Generations of Oral History in a Dakota Family,” “The stories handed down from grandmother to granddaughter are rooted in a deep sense of kinship responsibility, a responsibility that relays a culture, an identity, and a sense of belonging essential to my life” (27). Therefore, not only do oral traditions relay stories to the outside world but also build Native identity. Oral traditions help young Native people to feel a sense of belonging

within their community and the world itself. Using Euro-American written sources as objective representations of the past is outright foolish if they are used as the only way of knowing because by so doing, one fails to get a deeper and fuller understanding of Native life.

Not only do many researchers fail to acknowledge the benefits of oral history itself, but they also often ignore Native perspectives because of the difficulty associated in acquiring these narratives (Mihe-suah 3). Collecting oral traditions should be a necessity for any responsible researcher regardless of the difficulties often associated with doing so. For example, the problems encountered when the non-Native researcher attempts to collect oral traditions include: researchers' inability to understand the stories, the unwillingness of tribes to have their stories published, and intentional omission of parts of the stories for the sake of keeping their traditions private (as mentioned earlier). Still, it is the responsibility of the researcher to represent Natives as who they are, free from assumptions and stereotypes, using all available data equally instead of favoring Western sources because of their accessibility.

Today more than ever, researchers are forced to consider the implications of their research, learning the correct ways to represent the histories of a people who have for years been misrepresented throughout America's history as well as becoming wary of making those same mistakes. These are the problems authors such as Howe, Hogan, and Owens are forced to contend with when writing their novels, desiring to represent their people the best they can and resisting the patterns of stereotyping as they re-assess and re-appropriate Native history through their fictional works and of which I am

forced to contend with when writing about the history of Southeastern Indians and how it is represented.

## **1. SOUTHEASTERN NATIVE AMERICAN HISTORY: THE PALEO PERIOD TO REMOVAL**

Knowing Southeastern Indian history is crucial to understanding the writings of contemporary Native authors because history is frequently reflected in indigenous art and writing. The writings of Linda Hogan, Leanne Howe, and Lewis Owens are filled with references to the history of Native Americans and, as I will argue, are often a reaction against the ways their histories are represented in the mainstream American historical narrative. Thus, much of their writing attempts to rewrite history in a more Native perspective, exploring themes of spirituality, kinship, and identity. Therefore, before delving into their writing, I will first provide an overview of the history of the Native South.

### **The Paleo Period**

Studied mainly by anthropologists, the early history of Native Americans is divided into several different periods prior to European arrival and conquest. The first period, the Paleo Period, lasted from 12,000- 10,000 BP. At this time, Ice Age glaciers formed at the North and South Poles causing the temperature to drop and ice sheets to form, covering from Canada to Illinois (Hudson 36). This is the first-known time that humans migrated into North and South America following the migrations of woolly mammoths, giant bison, and sloths by crossing over the Bering Straight (a land bridge that connected Siberia to Alaska) (Hudson 36, Perdue and Green 3). The earliest

people of this period documented by archaeologists were the Clovis: “Identified by the unique design of spear points and found widely in North America, Clovis represents a hunting culture that exploited Pleistocene animals, especially bison and mammoths” (Perdue and Green 4).

The fauna of this period included mastodons, mammoths, bison, horses, and camels (Hudson 39). The people were nomadic hunter-gatherers who did not grow their own food. Instead, they lived off the land, moving from place to place depending on its available food (Perdue and Green 4).

Archaeologists speculate that their social organization was also fairly simple with no chiefs or ruling elites. Each citizen had an equal say in tribal decision-making. By the end of the Ice Age, however, over 3,500 species of plant and animal life had become extinct due to overhunting, habitat destruction, and temperature change (Hudson 41, Purdue and Green 4). Sustaining the Clovis way of life was no longer possible.

#### The Archaic Period

The next period in Native American history is the Archaic Period which lasted from 10,000 to 3,000 BP. Following the end of the Ice Age, the glaciers melted and retreated to their current positions. As a result, people were forced to adapt to this change in the environment by hunting turkey and deer rather than the big game they were once accustomed to hunting.

“Instead of a primary reliance on hunting large animals, the Archaic tradition was [...] based on the gathering of vegetable foods, particularly acorns and hickory nuts, fishing, and the hunting and trapping of woodland animals” (Hudson 44).

Because of this change in livelihood, their lives were more sedentary than those of the Paleo-Indians; living near rivers was especially important in the area that would become the Southern United States because food was plentiful near the many water sources running through that area (Hudson 44). As a result, their diet often included fish and shellfish, a variety of nuts, and deer. Consequently, “The deer was obviously the most important game animal, and it continued to be most important throughout the entirety of Southeastern Prehistory” (Hudson 47).

Their technology too became more advanced, from Clovis points and war clubs to a early form of axes and spear throwers. In addition, the first evidences of pottery dates to this period (Hudson 44). “To summarize, the Archaic tradition represents the successful adaptation of the people of the Southeast to the warmer weather and forest flora and fauna that marked the close of the Pleistocene” (Hudson 54).

### The Woodland Period

Following the Archaic Period is the Woodland Period. Compared to earlier periods, archaeologists know much more about the Woodland Period. At this time, people began growing food, making pottery, and building large earthen mounds (Hudson 56). With farming came a more labor-intensive lifestyle which required people to stay in one place for an extended period of time rather than engaging in seasonal migrations (Hudson 59). “It was during the Woodland tradition that the Indians first began to show a decided preference for living near the flood plains of rivers. It was in the flood plains that all of the native seed-bearing plants thrived” (Hudson 62). In America, farming originated in the Mississippi River valley and spread outward with the domestication of gourds, sunflowers, and plants similar to turnips. In the years following,

around 2,000 BP, the practice of growing corn and tobacco spread to North America from MesoAmerica (Hudson 62). With the arrival of corn, farming in North America was gradually transitioned. Soon, corn, beans, and squash became staple crops for those living during the Woodland Period, making up approximately 80% of foodstuffs. These crops would remain crucial to future generations.

While they still hunted wild game and gathered wild plant foods to supplement their diet, farming became the primary source of food for Native Americans at this time (Hudson 63). As a result, food storage became a priority as people looked for ways to store enough food to last them throughout the winter and in times of drought. Food was often stored in bell-shaped underground pits where it was safe from animals and in a climate-controlled environment. People across the American South began making pottery “tempered with crushed rock or grit instead of vegetable fibers” to store foodstuffs as well as containers for cooking and eating (Hudson 63). New stone tools, such as hoes, emerged to assist people in their farming endeavors. The bow and arrow was also invented at this time. Although these tools did not replace spears and spear throwers, they did make hunting far more efficient.

Mound building, particularly for burying the dead, became a huge practice in Native American life during the Woodland Period. “Hopewell people [Southeastern Mound Builders] built elaborate earthen works, some of them enclosing as many as eighty acres with earthen embankments as high as twelve feet” (Hudson 72). Hopewell people also often constructed large effigy mounds for burying two or more individuals. These mortuary practices indicate a complex social organization and social hierarchy. . Those belonging to a high social class had many things buried with them, including



intricate pieces of artwork, “fresh water pearls, pan pipes, ear spools, effigy platform pipes, and pottery” (Hudson 73). At the end of this period, mounds stopped being built and many villages split into small communities, hinting that there must have been a traumatic event causing change in the social order (Hudson 77).

### The Mississippian Period

The Mississippian Period, which lasted from 1,000- 300 BP marks an important transformation in Native life (Purdue and Green 9). During this period, Southern Native American groups built large earthen mounds starting with the building of Cahokia. In fact,

“Perhaps the most characteristic feature of the Mississippian tradition was the building of flat-topped, pyramidal earthen mounds that served as the foundations for temples or mortuaries, chief’s houses, and other important buildings” (Hudson 78).

### Chiefdom Organization

Social organization during the Mississippian Period revolved around a hierarchical social structure with a centralized political authority (Hudson 95). The highest of the elite, the “Chief” (sometimes referred to as “Mico” in the Muscogee language) and his or her extended kin group “were [believed to be] related to supernatural beings, which gave them religious sanction for their status, prestige, and political authority” (Ethridge 2010 14). People lived under the rule of that chief for protection. He brought organization and control (Purdue and Green 9). Because most elites were not farmers, they relied upon the labor of their people to feed them and their families while also being a part of extended trade networks with other chiefdoms

(Ethridge 15). One of the many responsibilities of the chief was to safely store food for his people (Hudson 223). Religious leadership rested in the hands of one individual of the elite lineage who also was often believed to be of divine origin (Hudson 209). The elites often conducted ceremonies and held public council meetings atop the chief's mound (Hudson 218, Perdue and Green 9).

The chiefdoms existed in a defined territory, specifically on river floodplains, and consisted of a central town with several villages built up and down the river valley (Perdue and Green 10). The central town, which contained most of the earthworks, was the home to the chief and his family while the outlying villages were occupied by common farmers (Ethridge 14, Perdue and Green 9). In some cases, the town councils of the smaller villages would make decisions affecting their community and report back to the chief while still others were completely controlled by the ruling family (Hudson 223). Therefore, in many cases, the chief was not a dictator of sorts, but sought help from family members as well as members of other elite families (Hudson 14). Three of the most well known communities to rise to prominence and then fall to invaders were Cahokia, Moundville, and Etowah (Hudson 85).

Warfare was common among these chiefdoms. To defend against enemies, fences or barricades along with buffer zones were constructed surrounding the central towns (Ethridge, 2010 44). Although there was not a standing army, chiefs could raise one with ease (Ethridge, 2010 50). Men were trained in warfare since childhood and volunteered to serve when the need arose (Ethridge, 2010 44). During warfare itself, the men organized themselves into regiments similar to those in today's military, practicing both formal and guerilla warfare. Often times, a man's status came from his exploits in

war, making adult men incredibly ready and willing to fight (Ethridge, 2010 49). As a result, Mississippian Indian men were supreme warriors (Ethridge, 2010 53).

### Economy

The Mississippian economy was centered around farming and peoples relied upon intensive agricultural practices. They farmed corn alongside beans and squash, moving far beyond simple gardening (Hudson 80, Perdue and Green 9). Nevertheless, members of these chiefdoms still hunted, fished, and gathered nuts and berries to supplement their diet (Ethridge, 15). By practicing slash and burn agriculture, the women were able to farm the same land for many years; however, once the soil was overused, they were forced to farm another location resulting in a high person to land ratio. The practice of multi-crop farming, especially planting beans, squash, and corn alongside one another, helped the soil last longer.

The chiefly elite also controlled the trade of exotic goods. They built extensive trade networks across the South. Some of the best artwork was made from these exotic materials such as shell and copper (Ethridge, 2010 18). However, there was no specific class of craftsmen and the artwork was most likely made by both commoners and elites. The making of effigy jars, dead head ornament vessels, and human and animal effigy pipes was common. These artifacts were the property of the elites who used these prestige items “to mediate arguments, garner allies, give succor to villages who found themselves low on resources, and otherwise maintain control and order over the towns and villages in the chiefdom” (Ethridge, 2010 16).

Although trade occurred often during this period, it was complicated by the extensive language diversity (Perdue and Green 15). Although some groups may have

spoken languages from the same family, they were often very different sounding. Algonquin was spoken by groups mostly along the eastern coast. Muskogean was spoken by tribes in the deep South. Iroquois languages were also spoken. What helped these linguistically diverse people engage in trade was the creation of a lingua franca (called the Mobile Trade Jargon) to facilitate interaction among tribes. This lingua franca evolved from Muskogean and spread throughout the South, allowing people of different backgrounds to communicate with one another. Like the rest of Native language families in the South, however, it was strictly oral- not written. Because there was no written language, elders became repositories of knowledge and carried the history of their people throughout the generations. Therefore, history was often passed down through origin stories.

### Kinship

Kinship in Mississippian cultures was of utmost importance. This was the most salient of social structures. Unlike European cultures, kinship was traced through the mother's line of descent across the South, meaning that children were only considered "blood related" or descended from the mother's side of the family (Ethridge, 2010 47, Hudson 185). Not only did this help prevent ambiguities concerning clan relations but it also gave women an important place in society because they were responsible for continuing their family line. On this note, Hudson states, "Women were influential rather than powerful" (187).

Accordingly, a husband's closest affiliation was with his sister and a wife's was with her brother (Hudson 190). In many cases, people lived together in nuclear family units (husband, wife, and children). Yet these nuclear families often interacted with their

larger kinship groups daily and in times of crisis (Hudson 192). Labor was also divided along gender lines. Women were responsible for household maintenance, farming, gathering, calling men to war and vengeance, lobbying for the interests of their family in political meetings, and ultimately all private and domestic affairs (Perdue and Green 10). They also made baskets, home furnishings, and clothing while owning their own homes and everything in them. Men were responsible for handling public affairs, town politics, and the ball game. Their primary jobs were soldiering and hunting (Perdue and Green 11). Men gained status from their exploits in war, specifically their ability to hold their own in hand-to-hand combat. Their ranking varied from the unranked warrior to the great warrior and they often were called by their warrior title rather than their real name. Men also often held the positions of dance leader and/or prophet. Dance leaders ensured purity and balance before and after battle.

As a clan member, one was obligated to everyone in the clan, which shaped relationships, responsibilities, and interactions (Hudson 193). In fact, clan members were responsible to one another in all circumstances, including exacting vengeance if a clan member was injured or killed (Perdue and Green 13). Blood revenge meant that when a clan member was killed or wounded, his clan was obligated to avenge him/her by demanding the same be done to a member of the guilty clan (Perdue and Green 13). Blood revenge did not always involve harming the one responsible, however, because bargains could be struck (Perdue and Green 13). Sometimes, clans would negotiate on who would become the victim of blood revenge instead of simply killing or injuring the guilty party. Once the compromise was made and balance was restored between the clans, the problem was over, not escalating to more deaths. For clan members, blood

revenge reinstated balance and order in the cosmos (what was necessary according to their religion).

### Belief System

The nature of Mississippian religious beliefs were rooted in the need for order within the cosmos (Ethridge, 2010 20, Hudson 121). For them, the cosmos included: the Upper World, This World, and the Under World, where this world connected the upper to the underworld and was “a great, flat island resting rather precariously on the surface of the waters, suspended from the vault of the sky by four chords at each of the cardinal directions” (Hudson 122). The Under World was the opposite of the This World and the site of chaos, whereas the Upper World was the site of complete order. For them, the Upper World epitomized perfection, order, and purity (Hudson 123).

“Creatures of the Upper World were much larger than those in This World, and although the Upper World had many of the same features that were found in This World, such as chiefs, councils, and town houses, the beings of the Upper World were not subject to all the rules that limited ordinary people in their behavior” (Hudson 127).

The deities of the Upper World included: the moon, the sun, the lightning bolt, and thunder (Hudson 125). Of these, the sun and moon were most important. Fire came from the sun and was sacred (Hudson 126).

According to Southern Native belief systems, this world was once a part of the upper world but became impure causing the creatures of the upper world to leave and to in turn leave behind inferior images of themselves (Hudson 123). Humans and animals were responsible for the impurity and disorder that came about in this world. As

a result, they were constantly trying to restore balance and order in everything they did—particularly in blood revenge (as mentioned earlier). The three non-spiritual beings of this world were: humans, animals, and plants. Humans and animals were constantly in opposition while plants were considered friends to animals because they gave themselves as food and medicine to humans (Ethridge, 2010 22, Hudson 128). Diseases were caused by animals, with each animal responsible for a different disease (Hudson 172). Animals and plants could also access the Upper and Under world and travel freely between the three worlds. As a result, certain animals were deemed sacred and were not killed by humans, in particular rattlesnakes and falcons (Hudson 129). The iconography of This World included sun circles, square grounds, and mounds. Also emblematic of This World was the existence of polar opposites: male/female, animal/plant, death/life, war/peace, farming/hunting, water/fire, and finally Upper World/Under World. To counteract these opposites and restore order, the people conducted multiple rituals to restore purity and balance through activities such as drinking black drink and celebrating the Green Corn ceremony (a yearly festival with brought about purification and renewal, rendering the world rebalanced) (Hudson 173).

The Under World was a watery place entered through caves, rivers, and streams and was by all accounts the opposite of the This World. It epitomized disorder and change (Hudson 125). The creatures of the Under World included giant versions of snakes and fish, and the Piasa (Underwater Panther and lord of the Under World) (Ethridge, 2010 22). In addition, “The Under World was peopled by cannibals, ghosts, man-killer witches, monsters, and various thunder spirits” (Hudson 127).

At the heart of all creation stories were beliefs about the Upper and Under Worlds. According to these stories, Upper World beings created This World and the heroes of the Upper World such as the Thunder Boys and Falcon Warrior played a part in the happenings of This World (Ethridge, 2010 21, Hudson 129). Embedded in many of these stories were prescribed roles for both males and females, particularly in the Cherokee story of First Man (Lucky Hunter) and First Woman (Corn Woman) (Ethridge, 2010 23). Lucky Hunter was the ideal male, while Corn Woman was the ideal female. Accordingly, men were to be brave, cunning, smart, and good warriors and women were to be homemakers, family heads, and excellent farmers. These mythical ancestors were often worshipped by their descendants. “The two were the central icons of elite ancestor veneration and their statues were kept in ossuaries atop the mounds” (Ethridge, 2010 23)

#### The DeSoto Expedition and the End of the Mississippian World

In the sixteenth century, the first Europeans (Spanish) arrived on American soil. This was the first and the last time Europeans would ever see the Mississippian world (Ethridge, 2010 12). The first 80 years of colonization in the American South caused widespread social and political upheaval for the Mississippian chiefdoms. This destruction is described best by Robbie Ethridge’s theory of the Mississippian Shatter Zone. Not only did explorers bring with them old world diseases but they also brought with them capitalism which in and of itself facilitated many changes for Native Americans. The first explorer’s foray into the American South was driven by a desire to find and exploit America’s natural resources- particularly, gold. The first of these expeditions to touch the American South was the DeSoto expedition. Although it failed



to establish a colony, the DeSoto expedition did have far-reaching consequences for Native American groups throughout the South (Ethridge, 2010 60). Landing at Tampa Bay, DeSoto readied his troops for a march through the interior of the American South. Although he failed to find gold, he did explore most of the Southeast and almost all of the Mississippian world. Although his expedition was successful at its start, it soon turned disastrous when his troops outwore their welcome with Native groups by demanding more and more food, women, and slaves (Ethridge, 2010 38). Soto endured several Native revolts but the horses brought by the Spanish made DeSoto's calvary difficult to defeat.

Although it is not true of all chiefdoms, information regarding these intruders sometimes traveled between tribes, making them more ready for the possible invaders. One tribe who heard about and was more prepared for his arrival was the chiefdom of Coosa. Although members of this chiefdom were prepared, they were not able to completely destroy DeSoto and his men. Consequently, the goal for Natives was to keep pushing the expedition along, not wanting to house them for long. Although Coosa could have easily defeated DeSoto and his men, they did not, possibly because they were involved in what was to come- the Mabila conspiracy. Led by Tuscaloosa, the attack at Mabila caught DeSoto and his men off guard. By all accounts, the Spanish were outnumbered, causing them to lose a lot of their men, horses, and supplies (Ethridge, 2010 67). Following this attack, the expedition headed north to Chicaza.

Upon entrance into Chicaza, DeSoto was confronted by warriors and the chief yet there was no battle and he decided to winter there and regroup following the disaster at Mabila (Ethridge, 2010 30). By using DeSoto, Chicaza was able to gain

authority with other chiefdoms (Ethridge, 2010 39). Unfortunately, this friendly relationship did not last long and like everywhere else DeSoto and his men stayed, they soon wore out their welcome with the people of Chicaza as food stuffs began to run low (Ethridge, 2010 38). Leaving Chicaza he then heads to Quizquiz but first has to go through a large buffer zone and demands supplies from the Chicaza. As a result, the Chicaza attacked DeSoto's expedition and do considerable damage to their army. A follow-up attack was planned to destroy what was left of the Spanish army but it never occurred. Desperate for food, DeSoto and his men ransacked the countryside after the attack. Upon his arrival to Quizquiz, DeSoto died, leaving his men to fend for themselves. They were chased out of every polity they entered thereafter. Eventually, the survivors made it to New Spain, ending the expedition.

The effects of the DeSoto expedition were widespread. Indian chiefdoms such as Chicaza and Coosa fell apart and their people went in many different directions (Ethridge, 2010 61). Additionally, many chiefdoms on the Southern coast and along the Mississippi River fell apart while the chiefdoms in central Alabama continued to function. As a result, these central chiefdoms were forced to take in refugees from the destroyed chiefdoms (Ethridge, 2010 61).

In addition to the political instability DeSoto brought, his expedition also brought with it old world diseases from Europe, specifically smallpox (Ethridge, 2010 88). Because Native Americans were so isolated from the rest of the world, their immunities had not been built up to defend against these epidemics, resulting in a 25-30% loss of life from disease. In addition, the political instability evinced by the collapse of chiefdoms and violence brought by European arrival with guns contributed to a total of 90% loss of

life. As a result, many civilizations could not defend their foodstuffs and lost the strong leadership they once had.

## The Historic Period

### Spanish Settlement

Following the DeSoto expedition, the Spanish colonized Florida by instituting a religious strategy (the mission system) to colonize the natives. The first of their settlements, St. Augustine, was founded by Pedro Menendez de Avilles. This settlement became their launching point for further exploration of the Florida colony. Building Le Castillo de San Marcos, the Spanish established military and religious occupation of the colony and used it as a model for future missions that they established in North Florida and along the Florida coast. In addition, some Spanish established ranches in central florida and farms in North Florida and South Georgia. In Florida, the mission system was securely established. In the mission system, Natives were forced into labor for the Spanish and made up the lower echelon of society. Requiring people to work in the Spanish fields interrupted traditional Indian labor systems, breeding much contempt and resentment among the natives and causing numerous labor revolts.

Trade in Spanish Florida was widespread although there were very few military units. Instead, trade was often facilitated by friars willing to trade with local micos, however, the sale of guns was prohibited. In fact, the Spanish were most concerned with religious conversion.

### English and French Settlement

Europeans also brought to America a capitalist trade economy which, according to Ethridge, is part of what created the Mississippian Shatter Zone (2010 89). With the

settling of Jamestown, many Europeans began to buy and steal Native Americans from their homes to sell to planters in the West Indies. In the South, the Westos were particularly skilled slave traders, raiding villages and trading their captives to Europeans in exchange for guns and they held a monopoly on the Southern trade for about thirty years (Ethridge, 2010 114). Such actions caused the intensification of the slave trade, causing many Native Americans to either flee or join the slave traders. With the spread of the slave trade came the spread of a capitalist exchange economy, which led to the fall of chiefdoms in the American interior (Ethridge, 2010 116). With the spread of the slave trade, Mississippian chiefdoms fell, one by one.

By trading guns for slaves, the British were successful at pitting Native chiefdoms against one another. Because the system of slavery was already in place due to the practice of Natives taking war captives, it was easy for Europeans to exploit (Ethridge, 2010 151). Yet, while some groups fell due to the spread of the slave trade, others became bigger with the added population of fleeing refugees (Braund 5, Ethridge, 2010 162).

Eventually, slavery spread into Spanish Florida as the English destroyed the mission system and started raiding Native groups in Florida's interior (Ethridge, 2010 216). Finally, by 1715, there were not many people left to enslave from smaller Native groups (particularly those involved in the mission system of Spanish Florida) because it was far more difficult to raid large coalescent societies (Ethridge, 2010 210). In a way, the Indian slave trade failed due to its brutality because eventually all the Native slaves either died of disease or torture or were shipped to the West Indies, forcing traders to

turn their attention to another continent's population to turn into slaves: Africa (Ethridge, 2010 235).

With the end of the slave trade and because they were now dependent on Europeans to obtain guns, Native Americans had to find another item worth trading to Europeans: deerskins. At the beginning of the deerskin trade, Native Americans held the balance of power by controlling who they traded with and having the know-how to hunt and skin the hides (Braund 4). Thus, Indians soon learned how to leverage their advantage and to pit one European power against the other, developing a system of play-off politics, manipulating Europeans to do as they wished. They traded deerskins in exchange for sewing materials, smoking implements, firearms, woodworking and metal tools, cloth, and blankets (Ethridge, 2010 233). Cloth was a particularly popular item because it was already manufactured, whereas making cloth from scratch was very time consuming. It also was lightweight and dried easily compared to animal hides or furs. Guns were still the item most in demand (Braund 66). By far the most hazardous trade good at this time was alcohol. Many became addicted to its consumption, causing much chaos throughout Indian towns. Trading jewelry and glass beads was also popular and the ownership of such items became indicative of social status among Natives. As time went on, horses too became a very popular trade good and greatly improved the South's infrastructure because of the transportation they provided. In sum, during the slave trade, Indians had become a part of the global trade network and with the deerskin trade, they now became major players in it (Braund 63). In many cases, European traders fanned throughout the South and married into Indian society, allowing

them to move easily back and forth between Indian country and the larger European settlements.

Due to the changes brought by the deerskin trade, Indian's acquisition of food and thus gender roles changed greatly. Hunting practices changed dramatically because Indians were no longer hunting simply for survival (Braund 65). Although women were still responsible for growing crops, they now were responsible for tanning and curing deer hides as well, making them more dependent on men to hunt and kill, rather than operating in a completely separate sphere as they once had (Braund 68). Around the 1790s, however, the population of deer began to crash and deer themselves came close to extinction. The number of deer in demand had led to ecologically damaging hunting practices by killing deer from virtually all stages of life. As the deerskin trade deteriorated, the only thing left to trade was land causing all Indian tribes to lose the leverage they once held (Ethridge, 2003 195).

#### The Rise of the Plantation Era

Following the collapse of the deerskin trade and the American Revolution, a cash crop economy emerged in the Southeast. More importantly, Southern Indians could no longer engage in the play-off system. They now faced the the Americans and the pressures for American expansion (Ethridge, 2003 195). Following the failure of the deerskin trade, many native groups tried ranching (Ethridge, 2003 158). However, around 1810, following ten to twenty years of commercial ranching, it too failed and the American pressure for land became overwhelming.

Because of these economic changes, Indian governments underwent a “process of an economic and social transformation” (Saunt 167). Politics became centered

around the town rather than the polity with power held by town councils, leaving no centralized authority (Saunt 179). For protection, towns often combined to form larger entities (Creeks, Choctaws, Chickasaws, Cherokees, Seminoles) and met once a year to discuss political matters, especially when confronted with the prospects of United States expansion. Although each group was led by their town council, there was no central governing power among the towns. The only exception was Cherokees who organized themselves into a central body. Kinship ties and town affiliations glued them together. This segmentation served dual purposes: to pull them together and tear them apart. Because of this segmentation, Americans are ultimately able to control and exploit Native groups, feeling there was no place for Native Americans in their new nation unless they were willing to give up their Native cultures (Ethridge, 2003 185). Many Americans, including Benjamin Hawkins (US agent to the Creeks) fought hard for the Plan for Civilization (a plan designed to assimilate Native Americans into American society) (Ethridge, 2003 197, Saunt 139). Besides assimilation, many Americans also pushed for either removal or extermination of which all 3 eventually occurred. Assimilation was the first to be tried and carried with it several innate flaws. It was not only designed to get Indian land but it was never willing to give Indians full rights within white society, making it less appealing to Native groups. It also failed because the federal government was unwilling to enforce its practice as well as prevent states from encroaching upon Native land. This situation greatly divided Natives, in some cases along racial and political lines. The richer mixed-bloods were willing to assimilate while the poorer full-bloods were not. Such a split caused great tensions within tribes, specifically the Creeks which resulted in a bloody Creek Civil War in 1813-1814

(Redstick War). With the defeat of the traditionalist Red Sticks, the mixed blood elites came to control society and politics. These mixed-bloods, such as those that belonged to the Vann family described in Tiya Miles's *House on a Diamond Hill*, were desirous to become cotton planters similar to the white antebellum elite and went so far as to own African slaves (Smith 25).

Once land began to be sold, there was no stopping it especially when cotton became the major cash crop for planters. Because of the success cotton brought white planters, some Native Americans too became cotton planters, yet by this point, assimilation was not enough. Americans simply wanted Indian land and were willing to do anything to acquire it, especially with the invention of the cotton gin, which allowed planters to grow and process far more cotton than was ever before possible. By selling land and negotiating treaties, Indians were giving up their property in exchange for yearly payments (annuities), knowing that if they did not sell, they would be forcibly removed because of the pressing need for land by Georgia, Tennessee, and Alabama citizens and the unwillingness of the state to stop them (Ethridge, 2003 199).

Unfortunately, these payments were very slow to come and sometimes never came at all. Because land was ultimately owned by the tribe, everyone felt they were entitled to the annuity and would charge everything on their annuity credits. Because tribes did not have the political machinery to control spending, they soon became involved in a cycle of debt and people were not able to make their own income (Ethridges, 2003 202-203). Through this system, land became a commodity and although land belonged to the tribe, individuals would often sell their rights to that land in exchange for money.



Eventually, every piece of land sold became a national issue and violence between Indians and settlers became common, especially in the Creek and Seminole Wars.

### Indian Removal

With the election of Andrew Jackson in 1820, Removal became imminent. The removal of the Cherokee was particularly disheartening and is known today as the Trail of Tears. Because the Cherokee participated in conscious assimilation and were willing to operate on American terms according to the Plan for Civilization, their Removal was especially dirty (Smith 14-17). Prior to Removal, the Cherokee implemented a government similar to that of the United States with both a constitution and a bicameral legislature. With Sequoyah's invention of the Cherokee syllabary, they too had their own written language and even newspaper (*The Cherokee Phoenix*) (Smith 35). In addition, many Cherokee became slaveholders and adopted premises of white supremacy (Smith 31). Despite their efforts to conform to American ideals of "civilization," they too, like other Southeastern Indian tribes, were removed to the west.

The reasoning behind Removal was simple. States wanted Native land and were not going to stop until they had it. Georgia, in particular, was desperate for Indian lands and claimed they had jurisdiction over it. Although the Cherokees took this matter to the Supreme Court and won their case in *Worcester v. Georgia*, the Georgia government, with the support of President Andrew Jackson, eventually defied the Supreme Court decision and by signing the Treaty of New Echota with members of the Treaty Party (mixed-blood elites such as the Ridges and Boudinot) allowing for forcible removal (Smith 151). Although members of the Treaty Party were not representatives of the Cherokee government, the signing of the treaty was all Georgia and Jackson needed to

remove them from their land., Approximately 4,000 Cherokee died en route to Oklahoma (Smith 217). It was the same for other Southeastern Indian groups. All were forcibly removed to what they viewed to be a foreign land, thousands of miles away from home. The only group who left voluntarily were the Chickasaw who knew removal was imminent after watching the forcible relocation of the Choctaws. Such is the story of Southern Native American tribes living in the South prior to removal and the history of which many Native authors either defend or rewrite when they depict stories of the past coming back to haunt the present.

### Conclusion

Through this brief overview of Southeastern Native American history and how it is recorded, I intend to provide a knowledge base of which connections can be drawn to the writings of Howe, Hogan, and Owens in order to illustrate the histories their writings are combatting and attempting to rectify. These histories are those of which their writing alludes to, raising questions of how and ultimately if this history can successfully be rewritten by Native authors and historians.

By setting a baseline of knowledge, I also hope to give readers who may be outside the discipline of Native American Studies an opportunity to compare what is written about Southeastern Native Americans by outsiders such as these to that that is written by Natives themselves (Howe, Hogan, and Owens), references the questions that are raised in the introduction such as: can history be owned and is it written best by those of which it is about. Although Howe, Hogan, and Owens' writing is of a completely different academic discipline, I feel their voices are crucial to understanding how Natives feel about the writing of their history by mostly non-Native historians such as those

mentioned in this chapter, showing what their writing is first and foremost reacting against.

## 2. LEANNE HOWE'S DISCUSSION OF THE NATIVE PAST IN *SHELL SHAKER*

Leanne Howe, a renowned Choctaw poet, novelist, and documentary filmmaker writes about historic Native American themes and how those histories can affect the present lives of her Native American characters. Her works include: *Shell Shaker*, *Miko Kings*, *Evidence of Red*, *Indian Country Diaries: Spiral of Fire*, *Playing Pastime: American Indian Fast-Pitch Softball*, and *Survival*. She has also written numerous articles, authored a book chapter on Choctaw history, contributed two important essays on her theory of "tribalography," and collaborated on literary criticism projects with Craig Howe, Harvey Markowitz, and Dean Rader.

Although Howe's works are numerous, I will only discuss *Shell Shaker* because of its strong relationship to the Native past and because of Howe's strong insistence on re-appropriating this past. According to literary critic Elvira Pulitano, in *Shell Shaker* "The past fuses historical eras, past conundrums surfacing up constantly to be re-experienced and solved at last at the end of the twentieth century" (30). In accordance, throughout *Shell Shaker*, Leanne Howe's writing seamlessly travels from past to present, starting in 1738 and ending in the early 1990s, telling the story of the Billy family and following the struggles of the Choctaw people. Accordingly,

"the novel deals with two parallel stories that converge in the present, one about the eighteenth-century murder of Choctaw warrior Red Shoes, and the other about the 1991 murder of corrupt Chief Redford McAlester, illustrat[ing] how

history continues to impact the present-day Choctaw characters and how those characters exemplify the process of decolonization” (Hollrah 73).

*Shell Shaker* opens with the story of Shakbatina, ancestor of the Billy family and shell shaker “peacekeeper” for the Choctaws of the eighteenth century, sacrificing herself in exchange for the life of her daughter Anoleta who is accused of murdering a member of a nearby village. Following Shakbatina’s sacrifice, the novel then travels to the events following the murder of Redford McAlester by one of her descendants, Auda Billy. Like Shakbatina, Susan, Auda’s mother, claims responsibility for the murder while at the same time calling into action the rest of her family: daughters Tema and Adair, Uncle Isaac, and family friends Delores and Dovey Love. As these characters attempt to uncover the events that led up to the murder the plot is set in motion for discovering the true identity of the former chief McAlester (an “osano” or bloodsucker) as well as righting the wrongs that led up to Shakbatina’s murder long ago and restoring order within their community.

Through this narrative, Howe illustrates how the past is never too far away and how past history and culture affects the present as well as how certain themes such as spirituality, kinship, and struggles of identity are able to transcend generations. Therefore, the past and history itself “can help us understand that the present is but the result of ancient actions” and that “healing can proceed from the knowledge revealed by the chronicles that are open accounts of the past.” (Pulitano, 33). Hence, not only does this novel allow for Howe to bridge the past to the present but it also “creat[es] opportunities to overcome oppressive histories with returns to homelands or reversals of defeats” (Squint 211).

Spirituality is crucial when discussing Howe's allusions to the Upper and Under Worlds and the constant need for order and balance. In addition, spirituality and its manifestations loom large through Howe's intentional stressing of the importance of known traditions and customs such as her mention of the Green Corn ceremony, the bone picking ceremony, the drinking of black drink, and the smoking of the pipe. Through the use of "Indigenous traditions to heal wounds and restore peace among the Choctaws, [Howe purposefully] includes dances, chants, a bone-picking ceremony, and sacred funeral songs" (Hollrah 75).

Throughout the novel, images of "fire" and the "sun," beings of the Upper World, are described as physical manifestations of both power and life, possessing spirits of their own who have the ability to control and affect what happens in This World. For instance, Shakbatina's grandmother, the first Shell Shaker mentioned, lights a fire which does not go out for four days while she performs a dance of peace in hopes that her husband and his men will either not go to war or will come home safely from battle (Howe 2). According to Howe, "Amazingly, the fire did not go out. Miko Luak, fire's spirit, was so spellbound by her story that he would not leave for fear of missing important details of Tuscalusa's courage" as she tells the story of her people through her dance and begs for Miko Luak's mercy (2).

Another powerful image throughout the novel is the emphasis placed on blood itself and blood sacrifice to restore order and balance, two ideas central to Southeastern Indians' beliefs. Following Shakbatina's dance, for instance, the ground becomes bloody due to the deep cuts made into her ankles by the rope and turtle shells she has tied

onto them. This is the first of her sacrifices and “Miko Luak took pity on her. He carried her prayers up to Itilauchi, the Autumnal Equinox, who listened with compassion” (Howe 2). Through Shakbatina’s “sacrifice of blood,” she was able to gain his attention and pity and ultimately restore peace and order.

The second sacrifice Shakbatina makes is again a blood sacrifice, although at this point she sacrifices her life. She sacrifices herself to avert war between the Choctaws and Chickasaws as well as to save the life of her daughter Anoleta, who has been accused of murdering a woman from the Red Fox village. Shakbatina sacrifices herself, “knowing that peace will follow between [the] two tribes” (Howe 4). This sacrifice is necessary because, according to Choctaw tradition, if someone is murdered who is a member of a different clan or tribe, the only way of restoring peace and order between the clan of the victim and the clan of the perpetrator is to sacrifice a member of the guilty group. Because of the nature of kinship and vengeance, it was not necessary for Anoleta to die; however, it was necessary for someone of her clan to die in exchange for the Red Fox woman who was killed. Interestingly enough, it is Shakbatina who volunteers herself and offers the ultimate sacrifice, offering them “blood for blood,” knowing that her “essence will live inside [her] daughters” (Howe 9, 14). In accordance, literary scholar Monica Barbara Seibert states that “Shakbatina dwells in collective history” and that though her character, “Howe offers a female narrator with a high degree of awareness of her embedded-ness in history and in a specific, politically inflected kinship genealogy” (94). Because she is a Shell Shaker, “an Inholahtha woman, born into the tradition of our grandmother, the first Shell Shaker of our people,” she is one of the few peacekeepers for the Choctaws and her presence as a Shell Shaker as

well as a member of the accused clan allows her to ultimately keep peace by offering herself as a living sacrifice (Howe 1). In addition, Kirstin Squint posits that Shakbatina's self sacrifice and execution "becomes an act that resonates across centuries to unite the Choctaw tribe, split by the 1830 removal from the Mississippi homelands to what is now Oklahoma" (211).

By using color imagery through her constant refrain of the colors red and white, Howe is able to convey the themes of war and peace especially when describing the ceremonial execution of Shakbatina. According to Southeastern Indian ideology, there was the existence of both red (the color of blood and war) and white (peace) towns. On many occasions, the warriors as well as the women of the village would paint their faces "red" symbolizing success in preparation for battle and upcoming warfare. The most memorable occasion of this within *Shell Shaker* is when Shakbatina prepares herself for her execution, painting her face red and wearing a white robe in order to both beg for her life as well as call for justice, symbolizing "We must fight to survive," an obvious contradiction according to Southeastern Indian beliefs, wearing colors symbolizing both war and peace and making herself the "first warrior killed in battle against the Red Fox" (Howe 15). Symbolically, her red body paint and her white robe represent her opinion that the Choctaw should, "Make peace now, but make war when the time is right" (Howe 104). Her killing is therefore carried out to "make things even" in accordance with the laws of kinship and vengeance (Howe 15). The color white is again mentioned when the old woman gives Koi Chitto (Shakbatina's husband) a white cloth to trade to his people when he returns to them from battle, saying "Its whiteness has



been made by our beloved Sun; if they wear it they will become hungry for peace” (Howe 100).

Along with color imagery, Howe also uses animal imagery. The bird, a being of the sky and the Upper World, is a powerful image. When the men are all killed, Shakbatina’s grandmother and the other “Seven Grandmothers” are able to transform themselves into birds and fly away from the dangers posed by De Soto and his army as well as to shame the intruders by defecating on them as they marched underneath them as they flew (Howe 4). Other images used include the “sunburst and the coiled snake,” each believed to be supernatural, representing “the power of the people to subdue their enemies” (Howe 18). The sunburst, a symbol of the Upper World is associated with the powers derived from the sun, a supernatural deity, while the snake was believed to be a creature of the Under World. Therefore, through her intentional use of color and animal imagery as well as images such as fire and the sun, Howe alludes to the Upper and Under Worlds and how they affect the present both in the 1770s and 1990s.

In addition to the rituals performed by Shakbatina, the Choctaws themselves practiced numerous ceremonies to prepare themselves for the upcoming battles including playing stickball (the “little brother of war”) and drinking black drink. Black drink was drunk for purification purposes, and people often vomited during this ritual. In the novel, before Koi Chitto picks the bones of his wife, Shakbatina, he “smokes the dreaming tobacco that will open his mind [and] prepares black drink, a concoction that is used as an emetic” (Howe 104). Each of these activities was designed to rid the body of impurities and allow him to focus his attention on the task at hand, preparing his wife’s body for burial.

Numerous other rituals are performed by Delores Love (one of the Billy family's close family friends) during the 1990s. By performing several Choctaw burial and ceremonial rituals underground, she has become widely known among the Choctaw community. Starting out by singing at Choctaw funerals, she too is an embodiment of the past, because she is one of the few characters who sets out to preserve past traditions, "starting a revival of Choctaw music and traditions" as well as practicing those beliefs herself through the rituals she performs (Howe 150). Oddly enough, the actions of Delores and Dovey Love (Delores's sister) act as cultural affirmations for the other characters of the novel, particularly Tema, whom they inspired to go into show business following their examples as Choctaw actresses and performers (in effect "playing Indian" and exemplifying what people expect Natives to look and act like by appearing in Wild West shows and singing traditional tribal songs). According to Tema, their play "reinforced [her] Choctaw beliefs" by portraying the strength of Choctaw women to independently accomplish their life goals and become incredibly famous and wealthy doing so (Howe 152). Although they are promising depictions of the strength that resides in Native women, they too are somewhat stereotypical because they are playing the part of what a Native woman is supposed to be- strong, highly spiritual, and heavily conscious of the Native past, using their Nativeness to advance them in their own careers and causing Tema herself to derive her identity as a Choctaw woman from their example.

In addition to Howe's emphasis placed on images and beings of the Upper and Under Worlds, she also often discusses the presence of spirits and how, through their influence, characters react in the present. These influences can be both positive and

negative. In fact, Howe's entire novel centers around how spirits are never really gone and can come back at any time. For instance, all three of the Billy sisters have visions and hear voices. The first occasion is when Auda Billy hears a Shell Shaker spirit telling her, "We have returned. You can use any fire. Use them all. [...] Your time has come. Black time becomes red." pressing her to defend herself against Redford McAlester, her boss, the Choctaw chief, and a sexual predator (Howe 25). This call to battle transforms her from woman to warrior, ready to fight against the osano (blood sucker) Redford McAlester (Howe 27). Next, Tema Billy hears voices saying "Your hands killed Red Shoes!" while performing at a play in Dallas, because she is a descendant of Shakbatina and Anoleta, both of whom allowed Red Shoes to join their family, clan, and tribe (Howe 32). Consequently, for the Billy sisters, the past is never far away since each of them has the ability to hear voices whether it be while they are awake or asleep. In fact, on one occasion, Auda has visions of Red Shoes in her sleep, rather than the man she is accused of murdering, Red McAlester (Howe 82). Because of Howe's constant shifts in narration as well as time period, Howe is able to convey how the past and the spirits of the past, if not allowed to achieve their goals, come back and "haunt" the present.

Following Redford McAlester's murder, the whole Billy family is called into action to defend two of their own, Auda and her mother, Susan, showing just how strong the bonds of family and kinship are within Choctaw society. Thus,

"The narrative of Shell Shaker perfectly captures a sense of community in the way that the characters come together to support one another and solve the challenges facing their families and tribe" (Hallrah 74).

Descending from a line of Shell Shakers and the warrior chief Tuscalusa, they are a very powerful family within the community and their influence is pervasive. Without the support of Auda and the Billy family, Redford McAlester would not have risen to power in the first place and would not have become chief of the Choctaws. "She, [Auda] was responsible for creating his image within the tribe" (Howe 22). Unfortunately, his power was not used for the good of the tribe; he was using their casino money to make alliances with the mafia. The parallel is to Red Shoes who likely led the Choctaws into a revolution prior to removal. Both were "A predator of his own people" (Howe 24).

Guided by the spirits of years gone by, the Billy women carry with them the burden of making peace between the past and present and between order and disorder and eventually are forced to rectify the wrongs of the past through present action. Because they are in a way responsible for McAlester's rise to power, they are the only ones with the power to make things right and consequently bring peace to their people. Guided by the traditions of matrilineal kinship, the Billy family (Auda, Adair, Tema, Susan, Uncle Isaac, Hoppy, Dovey Love, and Delores Love) ban together to protect each other. Therefore, according to Uncle Isaac, "Like all other major events in his life, this must revolve around Indian women" because of their role in Choctaw life as both peacekeepers as well as those who typically call the tribe to war (Howe 61). In a way, Auda's actions do both. The murder not only creates chaos in the tribe but it also calls attention to the wrongs committed by McAlester as well as eliminates the tribe's osano ("bloodsucker"). In a way, "The old is sloughed off and discharged, the new begins" (Howe 62). For them, "There is a war going on, but hardly any of the Choctaws

know it is a real war,” a war between the past and the present, between the osanos and the Choctaws and Auda and Susan are at the forefront of the battlefield (Howe 70).

The battle fought between the past and the present involving the spirits of the deceased is far more complicated than one might think. Because the situation between Redford McAlester, Auda Billy, and Susan Billy is strikingly similar to that between Red Shoes, Shakbatina, and Anoleta, a connection is obvious. As a result, according to the prophet Devine Sarah (also known as Big Mother Porcupine) “the spirits have come back to pick a fight” (Howe 71). Because Redford McAlester is the embodiment of Red Shoes, his spirit must be appeased as well as the spirits of those hurt most by his actions, past and present. Like Redford McAlester, Red Shoes was a traitor and a villain to the Choctaws,

“trading information for muskets- to the English, or the French, or his own [...] convince[ing] the young Choctaw warriors in the western towns that he was Imataha Chitto, the greatest giver, the red leader who could unite the people against the foreigners, but in truth he was a bloodsucker” (Howe 72).

Both Red Shoes and Redford McAlester betrayed the Choctaws- selling them out for power and influence among their enemies. In Redford McAlester’s case, he was working with and for the Mafia through the casinos he established (Howe 90). Anoleta, like Auda, took him into their community and helped raise him to prominence among her people just for her family to be betrayed by his actions. Finally, Shabaktina, like Susan, is willing to take the blame for the trouble Red Shoes caused and the murder of the Red Fox woman; however, she, unlike Susan, who claims to be the one who murdered Redford McAlester, is condemned to death for these offenses. These similarities not

only establish the connection between the past and the present but they also play with the idea of Native identity. Because Redford, Susan, and Auda are the modern embodiment of their past counterparts, they are in effect living out what should have happened years ago and are somehow subject to the wills of the spirits of their past selves. Consequently, for the Choctaw, “what is in the past has not passed” and “nothing ever dies” (Howe 72, 79). They are “ever living, ever dying, ever alive” (Howe 96). Such truths allude to the circularity of time and the past.

Most important, however, is Howe’s insistence on the need for order and balance in this world whether it be the world of the eighteenth century or that of the twentieth century. When Redford McAlester is murdered, the entire town is turned upside down. This single action sets the plot in motion and sets the main characters on a frenzy to create order and appease his spirit as well as that of Red Shoes from centuries long ago who has been causing trouble within the Choctaw nation ever since. Because the Billy clan are known to be “Shell Shakers” or peacekeepers, they take this task head on, especially since it is one of their own, Auda, being accused of McAlester’s murder. To set things right and restore balance, they decide they must take McAlester’s body back to the Choctaw lands of Mississippi where Red Shoes died so long ago and give him a proper Choctaw burial in order to give him all he wanted in life in death, by burying the illegally acquired casino money with his corpse. Through this action, the Billy family is able to find their own power in order to make peace in their community as well as unite both the tribes in Oklahoma and Mississippi by burying the past that has haunted both groups for generations, first through Red Shoes and then through Redford McAlester .

Consequently, the past is never far behind the Billy family, yet they are constantly burdened by its presence in the present, particularly the chaos brought by the return of Red Shoes's spirit in Redford McAlester's body. Because neither Red Shoes nor Redford McAlester were who they pretended to be, "the ones who would unite the tribes" and instead are "bloodsuckers," the Billy family, ultimately responsible for their rise to power and illegal and immoral indiscretions, are forced to take up their family's role as "peacekeepers" to restore order within their tribe and to ward off the ills brought by the casino and the mafia.

The act of burying McAlester's body is not only a way to rid them of his blood and his spirit but is also a way to show they forgive him for the harm that he brought the Choctaws, by performing a traditional Choctaw burial in an ancient mound (Howe 120). Accordingly, the Billys, as designated "peacekeepers" (and those believed to be responsible for his death) must give his spirit a resting place not only for the purposes of making peace with the dead, particularly the spirit of Red Shoes, but also to unite the community in a concerted effort of grieving the dead chief (Howe 120). By placing McAlester's body in a Mississippian mound, they are returning his spirit and the spirit of Red Shoes to the Earth which they believe will protect it from escaping and "giv[ing] him everything in death that he wanted in life [particularly material wealth]. That way, he will never leave it again" and his troubled spirit will be appeased (Howe 158, 160). Not only is this action significant because it is an effort to rid their community of such a destructive spirit but it is also done in order to appease its greed. According to Leanne Howe in an interview with Kristin Squint, "From a Native community standpoint, hoarding "things" (including the act of burying someone with his numerous possessions)

means that you're selfish. So I wrote what hoarding might have been about with the character of Red Shoes and Redford McAlester" (Squint 214). Accordingly, "It takes a sacred place like that to heal a troubled spirit" and until his body is placed in their ancestral grounds with his possessions, he will wreak havoc on the Choctaws, especially the Billy family (Howe 161, Hollrah 74).

According to literary critic and scholar of Native American studies Melanie Benson Taylor, "Leanne Howe (Choctaw) is even more direct about the limits of theft and vengeance as a means of redemption" (61). Therefore, reverence, rather than revenge has to be achieved in order for the Billy family to finally find peace. No longer can the Billy family go on fighting against the spirit of Red Shoes. Instead, they must restore order and balance by appeasing Red Shoes/ Redford McAlester's spirit through the act of burying his body in the Mississippian soil with the money he gained through his illegal dealings with the mafia. This action is also taken to unite the Oklahoma to the Mississippi Choctaws- two groups long separated ever since the Choctaw Removal of the 1830s by bringing the Oklahoma Choctaws back to the place of their origin, their peoples' homeland in Mississippi (Howe 166). As a result, the South becomes "a place of origin as well as a potential site of relief" (Taylor 61). Therefore, in addition to the themes of history, spirituality, kinship, and identity are those of "place and community" (Weaver 74). Thus, Mississippi itself becomes very significant because of its relation to the history of the Choctaw people. Instead of Redford McAlester, Delores Love is the Imataha Chitto, "the prophesied leader who will reunite the two tribes" by taking the spirit of the man who has plagued their community for generations to its final resting place (Howe 169).



“By insisting on the power of Choctaw women to solve the conundrum that weakened the tribe and in the long run provoked the tragedy of its deportation, [Howe] wants to minimize the impact of the European Conquest, which is radically at odds with the accusations generally leveled by Natives” (Pulitano 34). Instead, she places equal blame on the Choctaws for the problems that have emerged within the tribe since the arrival of Europeans including the rise and fall of Redford McAlester and Red Shoes. Rightfully, it is only the Choctaws themselves who can fix this problem and restore peace and order to their community through the burying of Redford McAlester and the quelling of his tortured spirit.

In sum, present throughout the novel are “a number of common themes concerning land, theft, deprivation, isolation, narcissism, and violence,” themes typical and expected of literature written about Southeastern Native Americans yet also emblematic of their history (Taylor 2). More importantly, however, are the themes of spirituality, kinship, and personal and tribal identity, themes which have played an extremely important role within the collective history of Southeastern Indians which the Billy’s use to right the wrongs of the past- both recent and ancient. The tribe of which Howe discusses, the Choctaw, is real, unlike those in the works of Linda Hogan and Louis Owens. The history which Howe discusses of removal, betrayal, and survival is also real, yet throughout *Shell Shaker* the themes of spirituality, kinship, and identity are shown to be more important, allowing readers to question whether Howe is in turn diverting the ills of history, showing just how complex Native history itself truly is. As a result, “Howe’s fictional treatment of Choctaw history decolonizes the ‘usual’ version that readers might have learned because the story is told from the perspective of a

Choctaw author,” ultimately becoming “a Choctaw story” and accomplishing what the critics in the introduction so aptly stress as important when writing about Native Americans(Hollrah 75, Squint 213).

### 3. LINDA HOGAN'S DISCUSSION OF THE SOUTHERN NATIVE PAST IN *POWER*

Through the writings of Linda Hogan, a Chickasaw poet, novelist, storyteller, playwright, and environmentalist, readers are not only provided with insight into Native perspectives on the history of Southeastern Native Americans but are also given insight into her own political agenda. Examples of these works include: *People of the Whale: A Novel*; *The Woman Who Watches Over the World: A Native Memoir*, *The Sweet Breathing of Plants: Women and the Green World*; *Power*, *Dwellings: A Spiritual History of the Living World*; *Solar Storms*; *Mean Spirit*; *Eclipse*; *Daughters, I Love You*; *A Piece of Moon*; and *Calling Myself Home* just to name a few. Because of her deep commitment to environmentalism, the majority of her writings revolve around Native interactions with nature and how nature is in turn related to spirituality. From the beginning of Hogan's literary career, environmentalism has been one of the main themes of each of her novels. According to literary scholar and Native American environmentalist, Lee Schweningen, the reason for this focus is Hogan's insistence on nature's value toward restoring and reclaiming the human self and "thus, reconnecting with nature for Hogan means reconstituting a very literal part of that self" (185). *Power*, the focus of this chapter, is no exception. Other powerful themes of this novel consist of kinship and identity.

From its start, *Power* focuses mainly on the interactions of its two main characters: Ama and Omishto. Ama, a staunch environmentalist is in a way Omishto's

mentor and surrogate mother, teaching her how to live peacefully with the environment until it is disturbed by a powerful hurricane, turning their world upside down. In the aftermath of the hurricane, not only are the Taiga (the fictional tribe in which Ama and Omishto belong) forced to reconcile with the damage brought to their land by the hurricane but are also forced to prosecute Ama for her killing of the mythical panther, an act she believed would restore peace and order between the environment and its human inhabitants. Unfortunately, this action does the opposite, sending the Taiga into a frenzy and Omishto on a quest to find herself.

One major theme of Hogan's *Power* is how the environment itself influences Native religious beliefs. These are the conclusions drawn by numerous literary critics such as Joni Adamson, Lee Schweninger, Elvira Pulitano, and Barbara J. Cook. In fact, in the introduction of Barbara J. Cook's *From the Center of Tradition: Critical Perspectives on Linda Hogan*, she asserts, "Hogan's writing is often at the intersection of environmental matters and the historical and ongoing treatment of American Indians, thus linking environmental justice and social justice issues," showing the importance of the environment to Hogan, as an author and how it is reflected through her writings. (1). What these literary critics fail to discuss, however, are the ways in which environmentalism and spirituality relate to each other as well as to Southern and Native American history, failing to explain how Native Americans, like Southerners, "endured [their] own distinct and protracted version of colonial subjugation," a connection I will make visible through examining their critical works and what they have to say in relation to Hogan's *Power* (Taylor 9). These connections are demonstrated through the novel's two main characters, Omishto (the narrator) and Ama. Through an examination of these

two characters, the novel's themes of spirituality in relation to environmentalism, kinship, and identity are exemplified. Consequently, for Ama, the environment and her spiritual beliefs are directly connected because of her dependence on nature for her own personal survival, beliefs she passes on to Omishto, the daughter she never had.

Briefly, although Omishto and Ama do not have a direct familial connection, they are members of the same clan (kinship group) allowing them to form a bond similar to that between a mother and daughter. Unlike Omishto's mother, Ama is the one who takes it upon herself to teach Omishto the ways of their people, the Taiga (a tribe invented by Hogan as emblematic of Southern Native Americans), teaching her to cherish the environment and a direct connection to the spirit world found in the environment. As a result, Ama functions as the character most closely tied to her natural surroundings as well as the cultural preserver of the novel. She, like numerous characters in Southern novels, is possessed by a sense of reverence for the past, both teaching the old ways of their people as well as proscribing to those ways through her living situation, living in a dilapidated old house in the middle of the woods, away from society and the modern Taiga people, "Giv[ing] in to nature or to something inside herself [...] liv[ing] with the world and not against it." (Hogan 47). Ama teaches Omishto to respect and be grateful for the land and its plant and animal life. As a result, Hogan "make[s] visible the interrelationships of humanity and the natural world" (Cook 36). Consequently, "Hogan's writing draws on a traditional understanding of the interconnections within our world [...] establish[ing] the interdependence of land, animals, and humans" (Cook 36). Ama lives off the land, growing and killing her own food and refusing to take part in the modern world.

According to Omishto, the land “is Ama’s love, this cloudy place with its thick trees, snakes, and waters” (Hogan 8). Through Ama’s teaching, Omishto is introduced to a way of life foreign to people such as her mother and is learning that “It’s my [Omishto’s] love, too, this place of million year old rivers and sloughs and jagged limestone, and I’m just barely getting to know it” (Hogan 8). This love of the land and the wilderness brings Omishto and Ama together as well as pulls Omishto farther away from people like her mother, the modern Native American, accepting of industrial progress and expansion, concepts brought to American by Europeans. Ama, unlike Omishto’s mother is a living embodiment of the Native past and is “like the rivers, dropped out of time” (Hogan 8). Her house is not her home because her home is in the wilderness. “She never seems quite at home in anything [...] just in the wild swamps and grasses and trees [where] nature is a part of her story” (Hogan 9-10). In sum, “She’s wild as the land” (Hogan 21).

Like Ama, Omishto feels at home in the wilderness, away from the hustle and bustle of city life, desirous of a simpler way of life and desirous for the way she imagined things used to be in the ancient past. Because she does not like to be at home with those who participate in the modern world, she goes to Ama’s house where, “It’s like being a part of the world” (Hogan 18). Because of the time she spends with Ama, she too is becoming appreciative of the natural world, learning to “survive and be friends with this land” (Power 19). Like Ama, she too is resistant to commercialization. Omishto states, “I told my mom I was mad about it because it was the building and farming and sugarcane that were killing the deer. [...] She thinks it’s the small price you pay for progress. I think it’s the way to kill a world” (Hogan 27). It is obvious when examining

this statement that Omishto and her mother operate on separate spheres whereas Omishto and Ama are more alike in their beliefs concerning the environment and the need to preserve its grandeur. Accordingly, their “insistence on anti-capitalist values must be seen as an earnest attempt to recapture a prior order” (Taylor 5).

Omishto, like Ama and the Taiga people who came before her, sees the beauty of the natural world (the land, the trees, the deer) even after a hurricane passes through. Her description of the way the world looks during and following the storm is especially poignant. “There are no edges, no borders between the elements because everything is water, silver and glassy. The whole ground moves and shimmers as if it is alive. The roads are nothing more than reflected sky [...] Heaven has fallen” (Hogan 46). Most notable is Omishto’s constant reference to the importance and power of water because of her people’s (the Taiga’s) reliance upon water being a tribe that lives in the Florida everglades. It is a rainy, watery environment where “Water is natural here. This land wants to be beneath it again, as it used to be not so many years ago” (Hogan 46). As strange as it sounds, the land, through its personification, is desirous (nostalgic) for a return to the way things were.

Along with this discussion of environmentalism is one of the novel’s main themes: spirituality and its relation to the environment. Throughout *Power*, there is a strong reliance on the importance of spiritual beliefs found in Southeastern Native American cultures and reflected through the invention of the Taiga tribe. Like traditional Southern historical and literary works, the practice and acceptance of a belief system is crucial to plot development in *Power*. Although the beliefs of Ama and Omishto do not revolve around the acceptance of a central hierarchical figure such as a God, the power of their

beliefs is still very significant. Through the character of Ama, readers are led to believe that Taiga beliefs concerning spirituality and environmentalism are very closely connected. Therefore, it is impossible to discuss one without the other because of the strong link between the two. The spirits of which the traditional Taiga (specifically Ama) believe and respect are found in nature, many rising out of one of the three spiritual worlds discussed in Chapter Two. Because Southeastern Natives, to which the invented Taiga tribe belong, revered (and often feared) various spirits of beings found in the each of the three worlds, throughout *Power* are constant allusions to the three worlds of which the Southeastern Indians believed: This World, the Upper World, which “existed above the sky vault”, and the Under World, which “existed beneath the earth and the waters” (Hudson 122).

Crucial to understanding Southeastern Native American belief systems is being aware of their constant reliance on balance and order. According to anthropologist Charles Hudson, “If there is a single word which epitomizes the Southeastern Indian belief system, it is ‘order’” (Hudson 121). Consequently, the creation and adherence to their belief system hinges on this idea. In accordance, “The Upper World “epitomized order and expectableness, while the Under World epitomized disorder and change” (Hudson 125). The Upper World was comprised of spiritual deities such as the Sun and the Moon. Fire was also from the Upper World because it was “the principle symbol of purity” (Hudson 126). Along with fire, anything that came from the sky such as thunder, wind, and birds (especially eagles and falcons) were a product of the Upper World and were very spiritually significant.



The Under World was also filled with supernatural beings such as the Piasa and the rattlesnake spirit (Hudson 127). The Piasa, the “underwater panther,” was an especially memorable supernatural deity. As a result, the appearance of a panther in any form is not only symbolic of great power but also chaos, being one of the beings found in the Under World with others such as snakes, lizards, and fish making an appearance in This World to cause chaos and inversion.

Especially crucial to understanding Native belief systems is understanding the importance of birds to Southeastern Native beliefs and the wind to that of the Taiga. Although the wind is not mentioned in historians’ and anthropologists’ discussion of the Southeastern belief system, Hogan makes it crucial to the beliefs of the Taiga. According to Omishito, “The wind is a living force. “We Taiga call the wind Oni. It enters us all at birth and stays with us all through life. It connects us to every other creature” (Hogan 28). For the Taiga, the wind is viewed to be one of the most powerful of spirits responsible for creating the world as well as manifesting itself in its inhabitants and giving them their life force (Hogan 42). According to their belief system, the wind has both the power to give and take away life. According to Omishto, “It is a force. Oni is like God, it is everywhere unseen” (Hogan 41). In the hurricane which occurs at the beginning of the novel, the wind could have easily killed both Omishto and Ama when, “The wind has pushing hands, it has a body. It screams like a train coming through. It hits so quickly it stops [Omishto] in [her] running and throws [her] to the ground” (Hogan 34). On the same note, as the hurricane comes in, birds are seen in the sky, coming from the West, a very powerful foreshadowing of what is to come as they (beings of the Upper World) flee, ushering in “a noisy excitement in the air” (Hogan 26).

Most notable in *Power* are Hogan's allusions to the Under World and the beings found within its domain, particularly snakes, panthers, and ghosts. Not only does the hurricane transform their (Omishto and Ama's) world into "another world" by covering it with water and destroying much of the natural environment, uprooting trees and flinging animals across the sky, but it also causes the appearance of snakes, crawling up on Ama's porch, trying to save themselves from the storm (Hogan 31). According to Omishto,

"The preacher would say this is a bad sign, snakes at a woman's feet, but Ama doesn't believe in the preacher. She believes old Janie Soto and Annie Hide and the old women would say the snakes are a sign of God, they always were, it was this way and it still is. They are God" (Hogan 39).

This quotation not only shows the breach in spiritual beliefs between the traditional Taiga and those that believe in Christianity but also their feelings about snakes. Christianity posits that snakes are a symbol of evil and are a woman's enemy because of the role of the snake in the Creation story, being inhabited by Satan and convincing Eve to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge (the one thing God specifically prohibited her and Adam from doing). For the Taiga, the snake also is a thing of power, but a thing of God.

In addition to the image of the snake is that of the panther. When describing the underwater panther, Omishto states,

"Before the human people entered this world, there was the great cat, Sisa. [...] Sisa is our name for the cat, the Florida panther, the Taiga name. [...] Sisa was

the first person to enter this world. It came here long before us. [...] Panther is our elder, and this is why we respect it” (Hogan 15).

Obviously, the panther has great spiritual significance to the Taiga people, specifically, Ama. Accordingly, “Ama loves the panther. [...] She worships the cats. She says one was born alongside of her, to give her strength” (Hogan 16). However, this love is far more than just that. It is an obsession, and Ama often has dreams that include the appearance of a panther. On one occasion, one even speaks to her when “even the elders never see one anymore” (Hogan 24).

Also apparent in *Power* is the presence of women who “remind [Omishito] of ghosts” and disappearing just as fast as they emerge (Hogan 24).

“Four women from another tribe come down along the road slow as a breeze, shaking their rattles, singing together beneath the heavy clouds that are coming in with them, from the same direction, as if they are forming up near the Kili Swamp” (Hogan 25).

This scene, “which is an epitome of the entire narrative [...] is characterized by a harmonious linkage between the natural and supernatural categories of reality,” specifically the appearance of Under World creatures (ghosts) in This World (Walter 72). Thus, the appearance of the four women at the beginning of the hurricane should be understood as ominous symbolic representations of the the chaos that is to come, the hurricane and the eventual killing of the panther. Ergo, “*Power* ultimately perpetuates the binary thinking of Western epistemology using the rhetoric of good [the Upper World] versus evil [the Under World],” both existing in and affecting the world in which

Omishito and Ama live, on the borderlines of past tradition and mystery and modern reality (Pulitano 207).

Once the hurricane has passed, Ama seems possessed by some power greater than herself (possibly by a spiritual force or deity) and is determined to kill a wounded deer, or so Omishto believes. She “walk[s] as if pulled by something, drawn as if she has no choice” (Hogan 54). Tracking the deer, Ama “can see and smell them as if by magic.” Ama is now a true hunter, “look[ing] like some kind of creature, not human,” a true predator (Hogan 52). She is therefore possessed by her desire to see and ultimately kill a deer as a form of sacrifice to what she and the Taiga view to be a very powerful spiritual being hailing from the Under World, the panther.

While hunting the deer, Ama kills the panther instead while in a trancelike state. This action in particular turns her and Omishto’s world upside down. Ama is put on trial by her tribe and isolated from Omishto, causing much heartache to both parties because killing such an animal is in many ways the last thing a member of a Southeastern Indian tribe. Because of its obvious connection to the Under World, they would have instead protected and even worshipped it. This killing is very important because not only is it the climax of the novel but the panther is far more than simply an endangered species. In fact, literary critic, Laura Castor states, “In the Seminole mythology [a real tribe similar to the one to which Omishto and Ama belong] on which Hogan bases her story, the panther is a sacred animal” (177). Although her motive may be skewed, Ama views her killing of the endangered and sacred Florida panther as ritualistic in an effort to rid the world of chaos. (Cooper 143). According to Ama, this killing, a ritual of sacrifice similar to the blood sacrifice of Leanne Howe’s *Shell Shaker*,

is performed in order to make peace between humans and the environment (Cooper 143). Accordingly, Cooper posits that simply the appearance of the panther is a sign of the disorder brought to the Taiga by the hurricane.

The character of Ama also becomes a physical embodiment of the past itself. Accordingly, Ama is at one point described as a “human ruin,” something left behind from years gone by (Hogan 9). Not only is she a ruin because of her faithfulness to the beliefs of the past, “Swear[ing] by old time beliefs, and believ[ing] in all the Taiga stories,” but she also has not moved past these histories, refusing to go to school or participate in any form of modernity (Hogan 13). She is also the character responsible for passing on these beliefs to the next generation, specifically Omishito. She is who Omishito desires to become stating, “I think it’s courage more than foolishness that Ama has, and besides, sometimes I long for, I feel a longing for the old ways she lives by” (Hogan 19). However, once Ama kills the panther, Omishito becomes more critical of her religious fanaticism while still respecting who Ama is and what she represents and in turn becoming more critical of the world in which they live. Consequently, according to Cooper,

“Omishito acknowledges that Ama’s act is precipitated by the derangement of an anthropocentric society willing to sacrifice the health of the planet for immediate conveniences. Yet despite Ama’s valid and valorous intentions, her violent actions damage her own humanity and sense of kinship with nature and with other people” (144).

Ama, unlike the majority of other characters in the novel is a reminder of from where the Taiga came, and she is a physical manifestation of their history and ultimately is willing

to go so far as to kill a panther in order to combat the onslaught of modernism. “Ama said the old ways are not enough to get us through this time and she was called to something else. To living halfway between the modern world and the ancient one,” bridging the gap between these two very separate spheres (Hogan 22). In addition, Omishto states, “Grandma said it was like Ama was from another time when she came back and that she’s been out of place in this world ever since” (Hogan 22). Yet, regardless of Ama’s connection to the past, she “elect[s] survival over extinction, affiliation over isolation, and cohesion over fragmentation” allowing herself to be a part of the Taiga tribe by communicating with Omishto, desiring to “recapture the stories long told about rather than by the Native peoples themselves” and ultimately determined to preserve the Taiga history and save its people from the ills of modernization no matter what it cost her personally (Taylor 172, 174).

Although Ama is very sure of her own identity, Omishito is torn between the worlds of her mother (Ango-American) and Ama (Taiga). In fact, according to literary critic Roland Walter, “The book articulates Omishto's identity formation through a movement from dislocation to relocation” (70). As a part of the modern Anglo-American world, Omishito lives with her mother and goes to school while studying “war and the numbers that combine to destroy life” (Hogan 105). As a participant of the ancient Taiga world, she socializes with Ama who teaches her of her peoples’ history in addition to their old religious and spiritual beliefs. Ultimately,

“These stories of the past gradually enable Omishito to make meaning out of the present, to understand that “an unbroken thread of light” links the past to the

present and the future (181), that “there are unseen forces all around us” (14) with the power to destroy and create (Walter 70).

Therefore, through her fusing of what she learns from the modern Anglo-American world in which she lives and the ancient Taiga world of which Ama lives, Omishito is able to become more accepting of herself and her environment as well as the presence of supernatural forces in the modern world in which she lives. For Omishito, at the start of the novel, neither the ancient nor the modern way of life is mutually exclusive and she uses each freely in her own identity formation, ultimately deciding to embrace her Native roots of which Ama teaches (Direnc 51). As a result, “Omishito’s quest for selfhood constitutes an act of cultural survival in response to the disruption of communal identity and memory through internal colonization” which Ama and eventually Omishito ward off through their acceptance and practice of traditional Taiga beliefs (Walter 73).

Although Hogan’s work is viewed by some to be a cliched representation of Native Americans, past and present, it is nonetheless useful toward understanding the importance of the interplay between the past history and present reality of Southeastern Native Americans. Because not all Native Americans are environmentalists, *Power* by no means sets out to portray all of them in that way, specifically mentioning those, like Omishito’s mother, that do not subscribe to such beliefs and are in a way, the modern, progressive representation of Native Americans. In addition, Hogan’s emphasis placed on Omishito as the narrator allows readers to see through the eyes of an impressionable youth torn between two worlds. By allowing Omishito to in effect bridge the cultural divide, Hogan is able to emphasize the effects of colonization on a fictional Native tribe. In affect, according to literary scholar Dilek Direnc, “While the novel allows the voice of

the Other to be heard, it suggests that America can be remade if it remains open to the contributions of Native Americans and their diverse cultural traditions” (73).

Through Hogan’s fictional creation of a Native tribe, she is able to show her true motives as an author: to encourage readers to look critically upon the stereotypical representation of Natives throughout histories written by those inside and outside of Native communities because of her ability to re-assess and re-appropriate the traditional historical narrative of Native American history through *Power*, a fictional work by ultimately stressing the importance of spirituality, kinship, and identity formation to that history, rejecting the trope of the disappearing Indian and replacing it with images of strong, independent, self-reliant Native Americans living on the borders of the past and the present.



#### 4. ENVIRONMENTALISM AND THE PAST IN LOUIS OWENS'S *WOLF SONG*

Louis Owens, a Native American novelist and scholar of Choctaw, Cherokee, and Irish ancestry, is the final author I examine. In particular, I will discuss the presence and influence of history in his work *Wolf Song*. Traveling back and forth from California to Mississippi throughout his childhood, Owens became interested in the history of his people (Native Americans as a whole), and, in turn, he devoted his life to writing their story. Of his numerous literary works, his novels are the most well-renown and include: *Wolf Song*, *The Sharpest Sight*, *Bone Game*, *Nightland*, and *Dark River*. Each is not only known for its use of the history and traditions of Native Americans, but each is also very overtly environmentalist, a theme impossible to ignore in *Wolf Song*.

*Wolf Song* opens with the story of Jim Joseph, a member of the fictional Snohomish tribe living in Washington and fighting the onslaught of industrialization and deforestation in the mountains by shooting at the equipment used to clear a mining road through the mountains outside of the small town of Forks, Washington as they attempt to clear a road leading to the mine that is to be built. For Joseph, the mountain is his last connection to the past and the history of his people and in turn, he would rather die fighting this deforestation and industrialization than succumb to the whims of the Forks community who hope that the mine that is to be built will bring money to their community, trading the natural world for the material one. Joseph's death, shortly thereafter, causes the arrival of Tom (his nephew and the main character of the novel)

back home following his short stint in college and brings Tom into a spiral of events that cause him to question his identity as Jim Joseph's nephew and as a Native American, divided between the world of his mother, Sarah, and brother, Jimmy, modern depictions of Native Americans, and that of his Uncle Jim who represents a traditional Indian who felt at home more in the forest and who saw the deforestation of the mountain as the last frontier for the Snohomish.

*Wolf Song* begins with the main character's uncle, Jim Joseph, living in the woods of Washington state and shooting at the machinery being used to clear out a mining road through the mountains. Although placing the novel in the Northwest, Owens's use of this destruction echoes Native American history because each group has witnessed the destruction and displacement of their land by Euro-Americans, whether it happened in the eighteenth, nineteenth, or twentieth centuries.

Although his shooting was not aimed at the loggers, Jim hopes to slow down the building of the road through the mountains. For Jim Joseph, who is Native, the mountains were and should remain a sacred place for his people and were the last of their footholds. Jim felt that everything else had been taken from him, including his Native tongue as he was the product of an Indian boarding school run by whites. "He couldn't even speak the language anymore. In the government school they had cut out the tongues of Indians, sewing in different tongues while the children slept" (Owens 5). The message is that the Native children had not only been robbed of their families but they were also robbed of their tribe's culture, history, and now the last of their lands. By robbing them of their language and their childhood, Euro-Americans were ultimately able to rob Natives of their history because their history was created through oral

traditions rather than written records. In addition, the robbing of their language also created in them an identity crisis, unsure of where an English-speaking Native, robbed of their language and culture, fit into modern American society. Therefore, because the mountain is the one place that has not been overrun by white Americans and big business until recently, it is also the only place where he feels comfortable being himself and speaking his Native name (Owens 5). Wanting a return to the way things were, in the imagined past, Jim is hell bent on protecting the land with every fiber of his being, ultimately sacrificing himself for the land, always wanting a return to the romanticized past (Owens 76). For Jim and his people, the mountain itself is a part of him and his tribe's history because,

“They had woven it over thousands of years into their stories telling themselves who they were and would be in relation to the beautiful peak. Through their relationship with the mountain they knew they were significant, a people to be reckoned with upon the earth” (Owens 93).

According to Jim, “it seemed sometimes that the world was being thrown away by the whites,” therefore, he saw himself as the protector of the mountain from industrialization and deforestation because, “ain’t never been nobody who knew this country like he did” (Owens 6, 19). Also, according to Tom, Jim’s nephew and the main character of *Wolf Song*, “That country was sacred to him” (Owens 33). Literary critic Jace Weaver observes that, “Central to Native American storytelling, is a construction of reality that begins always with the land” (Weaver 64). In fact, Lee Schweninger asserts that Owens

“juxtaposes an American Indian land ethic with the clearly unethical treatment of the land by European American culture, especially in the contexts of the logging

and mining enterprises that destroy the ecological integrity of the Snohomish homeland” (11).

This juxtaposition is most evident in Tom’s reaction to the destruction of the mountain. Because Tom is a modern, educated Native American, he is expected by his peers to be supportive of the economic prosperity brought by the logging on the mining road and the eventual building of the mine. However, his feelings of “responsibility toward his heritage, his personal past, and the landscape are all inextricably interconnected” causing Tom to have to struggle with his own identity and whether to turn to his Native roots or his college education, to stay and fulfill the work of his uncle or to leave and never look back (Schweninger 11).

In addition to Owens’s focus on the land itself, he pays much attention to describing the creatures that inhabit the land and the forests. In one episode, as Tom Joseph is riding into his hometown of Forks, Washington, to attend his uncle’s funeral, animals, Owens describes the crow in the sky and salmon in the rivers in a way that romanticizes them as well as their purpose in this world, making them majestic (Owens 14). Although Tom does not believe in the worship of sacred animals, he does believe in respecting them as evinced by his descriptions of the wolf that appears outside his family’s house the first night he is back home. In addition to animals, Owens pays equal respect to the flora. For example, when the Josephs drive through the woods to the place they intend to bury their uncle. Here, however, Owens delivers descriptions of the trees and plants rather than the animals. “Here, the old growth had never been taken, and the cedars towered on trunks eight and ten feet through, while enormous, sagging hemlocks dripped moss upon the hidden graves” (Owens 51). Through these

descriptions, readers can see clearly that Owens is infatuated with the natural world and in turn imparts this infatuation onto the character of Tom.

The wolf spirit, in particular, is extremely important to the plot development of the novel. As a child, Tom had heard of the saka'yu (wolf spirit) from his Uncle Jim, with its "strangeness and magic" (Owens 34). According to these stories,

"The wolf spirit brought deer to the man who possessed it. It wasn't complicated.

The man just had to walk up to the deer who came to give itself. The deer liked to be taken by such a man, and afterwards, if it was done properly, if their bones were sunk in a stream or a pond, they would come back" (Owens 35).

These were the ways of the what Jim and Tom considered to be the "real world, before everything became crazy," the world of their ancestors before industrialization, where the supernatural, such as the wolf spirit and the deer giving itself to the man possessing it, was a part of their daily lives (Owens 35). In fact, his uncle, a great hunter believed to possess wolf spirit, was called "Wolf" and was desirous to become reincarnated as a wolf after he died (Owens 53). Not so much coincidentally, the first wolf seen by Tom and his brother appears at their house the night their Uncle Jim dies symbolizing the possibility that Uncle Jim actually became a wolf spirit when he died alone in the woods. The second appearance of the wolf occurs as Tom is sleeping, hoping and waiting to be visited by the wolf and become possessed by its spirit. Although Tom was unaware of the wolf, its appearance is extremely significant because following Jim's death, the wolf spirit was believed to be passed to Tom, his favorite nephew, so that he could have the power and the will to continue his uncle's legacy of trying to stop the road and the mine.

Its passing was very successful, prompting Tom to continue his uncle's work (Owens 57, 90).

For Owens, a past, where wolf spirits were a part of daily life, was and is a more desirable place to live than than the present. In fact, on many occasions Owens describes the past, like the environment, as a romantic utopia. For instance, According to Tom, "The wilderness had been an enormous, boundless world of meadows and waterfalls, silver lakes, granite and ice" (Owens 81). On that note, he states that the people of that time period were respectful of their world because,

"Indians use to know how to live so's we didn't destroy our mother earth. We had to live that way because we knew we would always be here. I think the white people treat the earth like they do because they think they'll only be here a little while" (Owens 77).

The romanticized, imagined Native past of Owens was a much simpler and respectful time where Native Americans knew how to live, unlike the present where their worlds have been turned upside down. By envisioning this perfect past, the Natives of the novel, particularly Jim and Tom, are able to convince themselves that with the arrival of whites came chaos and exploitation of the environment. Instead of conserving their resources and preparing for the future, like those of the idyllic Native past, Euro-Americans were only interested in what could help them in the present. For Jim and Tom, the invading whites and their descendants are the ones to blame because had they not arrived, Indians would still be living as they should- off the land instead of being dependent on whites for their well-being in a capitalist society.

White people are the villains of this story, a theme considered stereotypical of Owens's writing according to literary scholar and critic Jace Weaver, ultimately opposing Indians to the Anglos and the Anglos to the novel itself (Weaver 118). In addition, "the mountains had been taken from Indian people by white invaders and had been taken from the invaders by the invaders' government" (Owens 80). Heavily critical of Owens' work, Weaver sees the problems in such generalizations. Owens asserts in his work that Europeans are primely responsible for the problems faced by Native Americans, and although this statement is true to some extent, Native life and history is far more complex than Owens would have it. Regardless, Owens and his main character, Tom, continually vilify Euro-Americans. Typical are passages such as:

"You know, it's like they made a treaty with these mountains and trees and rivers. They say it's set aside forever, but that's just like in all them treaties with Indian peoples where they said 'long as the grass grows,' and stuff like that. They busted every one of them treaties and someday, they're gonna bust this one too" (Owens 80).

Statements such as this present a prime problem observed by Weaver-- an intense desire by Owens to separate Indians from Europeans, though Owens himself is of mixed heritage. With the building of the mining road, the time for breaking the last treaty is now. For the loggers who are clearing the mining road, the mountain is nothing more than a means to an end (timber) but for Tom and his Uncle Jim, the mountain is far more and is in desperate need of protecting from the invading whites. No longer are they willing to surrender to the people who have taken everything from them and who are

now set to destroy the mountain. For Tom and Jim, the mountain becomes the final battlefield.

In addition to environmentalism, references to spirituality are found throughout the novel. Spirituality is at its core crucial to understanding the Native past and their belief systems because of its influence on how their history (oral and written) is represented. At the center of spirituality are the customs and traditions of the Snohomish Natives (an invented tribe created by Owens), particularly, the Josephs. For Owens, some of the most important rituals are associated with burials. According to Tom, cedar trees, in particular, are considered sacred and are crucial to Snohomish funeral ceremonies (Owens 20). To keep the ghosts (beings of the Under World) away, Sara Joseph, Tom's mother, burns cedar branches following Jim's death (Owens 33).

Although the Snohomish are not a Southeastern tribe, Owens uses images that depict the beliefs of Southeastern Indians to describe his invented tribe. This reliance is probably due to the fact that Southeastern traditions are those he is most familiar with being of mixed white, Choctaw, and Creek descent. In particular, Owens uses the cosmological structure of the Upper, Under, and This Worlds as relayed in Southeastern Indian oral traditions. Crucial to understanding these rituals in a Southeastern context is the need for balance and order between the three worlds described in previous chapters. Understanding the Under World is especially necessary when reading Tom's many descriptions of his hometown, Forks, Washington. Upon his entrance into Forks, the location is described as a dark, watery place, similar to Southeastern Indian descriptions of the Under World.



“Moving into the narrow lane he felt as though he were passing from one world to another. this damp, darker world didn't have anything to do with the one he'd left in California, or much to do with what was closer, as close as Seattle or any of the white cities” (Owens 23).

Tom is not able to feel at home in California because he is so used to the literal and figurative darkness of Forks. He was “too dark-- inside, not outside-- like maybe [he'd] been in this valley so long [he] couldn't stand that much light” (Owens 73). He is not comfortable outside of his community and outside the bleak surroundings of his home; therefore, transplanting him into a place like Southern California simply does not work.

The Josephs though were not traditionalists. In fact, the Josephs were one of the few Native American Baptist families left in the Forks area. But neither Tom nor his brother Jimmy accepted organized religion (Owens 45). Instead, Tom practices the Native rituals taught to him by his uncle, refusing to “separate the spirit from life and call it religion” and wondering whether “being a Christian and watching television left only a certain amount of room for belief” (Owens 51, 56). In effect, he questions the possibility of being a modern Indian without betraying his heritage. Instead of going to church, the mountain is the site where he feels most spiritual, only wishing to pray in the presence of such grandeur and beauty (Owens 94).

Tom also possesses a strong connection to the spiritual world, being able to feel the pain of Native Americans long ago. The first example we are given of this “feeling” he gets are in his description of the UC Santa Barbara campus. “They built that campus on top of an old Indian burial ground. Sacred ground. Nobody else seemed to notice it,

but I could feel those people there all the time. They didn't want anyone there" (Owens 64). Consequently, he is able to feel the pain of Native Americans from years gone by and it greatly disturbs him, possessing such a connection to the Native past as well as with the spirits of those who died long ago. Later, after Jim's death, Tom feels that his mother's house is "haunted" following his uncle's death, possessed by his uncle's restless spirit. Again, a spiritual entity connecting Tom to his Native past.

On his quest for self-discovery and to become a "real Indian," Tom not only relies on his spiritual beliefs but also on his personal appearance to reaffirm his "Nativity." Although few of the characters actually look the part of an "old time Indian" (Plains warrior), it is crucial to note that both Jim and Tom Joseph have the characteristics typically associated with modern representations of Native Americans (Owens 18). Amel, a mine worker with whom Tom hitches a ride into Forks immediately realizes who he was because of his Native American features (olive skin, long black hair, and dark eyes). Upon his first conversation with his ex-girlfriend Karen she goes so far as to say, "You look like an Indian" and "You're getting to be real serious [...] like the Indians they always show in those old movies" (Owens 63, 104). Although the novel is set in modern times, there remains a lingering image of what a "real" Native American should look like which typically means that they should look like they did centuries ago, free of European genetics and Anglo-Saxon features. These are the characteristics that set Tom and his uncle apart from characters like McBride, Tom's college roommate, who is the literal embodiment of the modern Native American college student, taking part in the modern world and having a social life while in college, whereas Tom wants to be the embodiment of the "old-time Indian." Even Tom's mother Sara, is described as looking

“exotic, like someone from another country,” instead of looking like one of the First People’s of this country (Owens 25). Tom, unlike his friends, and even family members however, looks the part. In fact, as a member of the high school football team, Tom was called “chief” by his teammates because of his distinctive Native American features (Owens 20).

Consequently, Tom is always measuring himself to the image of the “real Indian, before the whites came and began to cut the trees,” always coming up short of what he believes he should be (Owens 37). In Tom’s eyes, the “real Indian” is often described as that of a Great Plains warrior with his buckskin clothes, fancy headdresses, and fearless nature (Owens 83). Through his illusions to the Plains Indians, Owens himself is ultimately questioning who is really “Indian” and is putting forth the idea that, according to Weaver, “both everyone and no one is Indian” (Weaver xx). To this end, “Take one step into this region and we are confronted with difficult questions of authority and ethnicity” in addition to those of identity (Weaver 4). Consequently, “The American Indian is a ‘treasured invention,’ writes Louis Owens and relayed to us by literary scholar Annette Trefzer, a cultural product that

“often bears little resemblance to actual, living Native American people because the people believed to be the ‘real Indians’ are often a mixture of fact and fiction, an invention of the mind caused by a highly idealized sense of nostalgia” (Trefzer 4).

Although Tom’s decision to try and save the forest from destruction is not made early in the novel, it is expected of him by the people of the community because of his connection to his uncle and because of the stereotype they have bestowed upon him as

a tree-hugging, nature-loving, child (or Native) of the forest (Owens 105). Ultimately, it is his identity struggle that drives him to take it upon himself to continue the mission of his uncle, to try and save the mountain forests from being cut down by the people he believes have stolen everything from his people and from his family, living up to what the whites of the community (particularly J.D. Hill, an influential member of the community) expect of him. He wants to be like the Indians of years gone and live up to the expectations he has for himself, proving that he is in fact, a “real Indian” bent on saving the environment and preserving the history and culture of his people (Weaver 36). According to Jimmy (Tom’s brother), “[Tom went] off to college and then [he] came back here and wander[ed] around the so called wilderness pretending [he’s] an honest to goodness Indian talking about mother earth,” in effect calling him out for his stereotypical behavior (Owens 120). However, regardless of his stereotyped persona, Tom makes a conscious decision to take action because of his strong sense of duty and because of his determination not to be a sell-out like all of the other Native Americans living in Forks who had given up the fight.

On one occasion, Tom claims and uses his ethnicity and the public persona of Native Americans as “wild Indians” to intimidate the driver of the hearse who is driving through the woods to the Indian cemetery by telling him that Native Americans used to bury their dead by hanging them in trees inside canoes. Tom goes on to invoke the idea that it was the whites and the white laws who took this right away from them, imposing some of the blame on the hearse driver who is white and works for the funeral home. Tom even goes so far as to say that, “White men came and made a law against it. Now the law says we have to pay somebody like you to help put us in the ground. You people

came to our country and told us that what we'd been doing for a thousand years was not legal" (Owens 49). He figuratively plays the "Indian card" to get his way and ultimately ends the conversation with the threat, "You're in Indian country right now," insinuating that the driver is ultimately at the mercy of the will of violent Indians if they do not get their way. Therefore, Tom is not only comfortable with playing the role of a dangerous savage but is able to embrace this identity in order to get his way.

Also notable is the fact that the Josephs, a poor Native American family, live on the outskirts of the community and "at the edge of town" similar to the way Tom lives on the edge of civilization-- with one foot in the modern world and one in the ancient one (Owens 24). Because they live on the edge of town, the Josephs are isolated from the community, living in a dilapidated old house that is literally falling apart around them, emblematic of the degraded and disappearing Indian trope. In fact, the porch roof "sagged like a broken bird wing" (Owens 25). The Josephs were also poor alcoholics. Tom's mother, Sara Joseph, with beer on her breath, makes "authentic Indian socks and caps to sell to the tourists" (Owens 24). The Josephs thus represent a great dichotomy of modern Indians, from the Tom, the man desirous to become like his ancestors and to ultimately change the fate of the environment and his people, to Jimmy and Sarah, who are modern-day stereotypes of the alcoholic Indian, corrupted by the arrival of the Euro-Americans and convinced that their only means of existence is to work for the people who have done them wrong because somehow, "everything is different now" (Owens 124). Tom however, represents the past and does not accept things as they are with his place in a modern Native community. Most of the Native community believe that he "does not belong," and they constantly tell him to go back to California and to never

come back (Owens 137, 151). Not only does Tom remind them of his uncle but he represents change and a challenge to authority in addition to a return to the imagined, romanticized past, free of industrialization.

Although Owens's work is powerful, it can be problematic, reinforcing the white idea of the "Indian in the woods." Although his purpose may be to send a message to his audience on the grounds of "I did what you wanted by writing a book about the kind of Native Americans you expect," he is also in effect trying to complicate such notions by juxtaposing these characters with the modern Native American in addition to his attempt to right the wrongs of the past through fiction. To this end, "Louis Owens states, Native writers move beyond 'ethnostalgia- most common in Euro-American treatments of Native American Indians- to an affirmation of a syncretic, dynamic adaptive, identity in contemporary America,'" forcing readers to question whether the character of Tom can be viewed as this adaptation (Weaver 8-9). Whether he fully accomplishes this goal, I am not sure because when read by a less educated audience he may be viewed as simply reiterating these stereotypes.

Not only is Owens attempting to complicate the idea of what it means to be a modern Native American, he is also complicating the notions of the past and Native history itself. To Owens as evinced through *Wolf Song*, the past and history itself is never really lost or truly in the past. Therefore, by engaging the history of Native Americans as well as discussing the strong influences of environmentalism, spirituality, and identity to the historical narrative, Owens attempts to make *Wolf Song* a good representation of Native fiction that desires to reevaluate and re-assess the Native past in order to affect the present.

## CONCLUSION

In sum, by assessing these three literary works and what their authors have had to say about the Native past and history, I set out to achieve the goal of inserting the voices of Natives themselves (Howe, Hogan, and Owens) as they attempt to rewrite Native American history. By asserting the themes of which their works rely most, spirituality, kinship, and identity, I was able to connect these past traditions that played a tremendous role in the daily lives of Southeastern Natives centuries ago to their present influences and how those ideas are relayed to us by each author.

Although this study is very localized to the writings of authors from Southeastern Native descent, it can also be expanded to include authors from all around the county. The use of primarily Southeastern Native American authors was based primarily on my knowledge of Southeastern Native American history itself and felt most comfortable discussing. Regardless, the inserting of Native literature and its responses to Native American history can surely be expanded to include all Native authors and I sincerely hope one day that this project will be undertaken by another scholar of Native history and literature.

To take this work a step further, the need for indigenous methodologies takes precedence. By allowing for the people of which history is written to tell their peoples story in their own ways, free from Western influences, the possibilities are endless if coupled with traditional historic sources. By asserting the importance of Native scholars

throughout all disciplines toward the purposeful re-assessing and reevaluating of Native history, many alternative stories can be told, thus allowing for readers to have a more well-rounded knowledge of what Native history truly is. These are the hopes I have for the future of Native American Studies and Native American history.

Unfortunately, as we all know, allowing for more indigenous methodologies within the traditional historical narrative can be quite difficult to achieve; however, I do have hope for the future of the discipline. With the integration of all voices, including those of authors such as Leanne Howe, Linda Hogan, and Louis Owens, there is no telling what could be achieved and the promises of the future of Native American Studies are endless.



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