

**TERRESTRIAL INTELLIGENCE: REVERENCE
FOR AND RECIPROCITY TO THE WORLD
OF NATURE IN LINDA HOGAN'S MEAN SPIRIT .**

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“...to see again
the beautiful unwinding field
and remember our lives
from before the time of science,
before we fell from history”

(“Flood : The Sheltering Tree”, *The Book of Medicines*)

The poem “Flood : The Sheltering Tree”, in *The Book of Medicines*, by Linda Hogan, Native American writer, depicts her nostalgia and longing for her lost Chickasaw tradition and culture. She recreates a time when the earth had its “beautiful unwinding fields” untouched by the European Colonization. She reterritorializes a space and a time through her works, which is an attempt of the colonized cultures to retrieve their lost culture and tradition. This, in turn is a way of showing resistance against the domination of White European culture and practices.

The works of Linda Hogan focus on Native American communities and their connection to nature, spirituality and cultural identity. Hogan is an active environmentalist whose works reflect environmental and social issues. As she was born as the daughter of a Chickasaw father and a white immigrant mother, her mixed blood origin gives her a dual perspective, which is reflected in her works.

She got acquainted with the dominant white culture and American Indian culture. Her father was in military service, and her family always moved with him and the major part of her childhood days were in Colorado and Germany. In these times, she had a longing for her native Oklahoma and the Chickasaw tradition. The fulfilment of this longing is made possible through her fictional narratives. She writes from the perspective of both a cultural outsider and an insider. She uses the coloniser's language, which enables her to resist for struggle for cultural identity. In her novels, the writer conveys that the life of the land and human life are inseparable. This paper is an attempt to show how Hogan, in her novel *Mean Spirit*, stresses the idea of spiritual relationship between human beings and nature and how she argues that there is a primordial language shared between man and nature which she refers to as “terrestrial intelligence”. According to Hogan, “there is terrestrial intelligence that lies beyond our human knowing and grasping” (*Dwellings 11*). The spirituality of traditional Native cultures helped them to listen to what nature speaks. There is a kind of non verbal communication between them which is beyond the verbal language created by human beings. She refutes the western ideological constructs of nature by giving importance to the mystery of nature.

Mean Spirit, Hogan's first novel, written in the year 1990, is a fictional account of the life of the people who belong to the Osage and Creek tribes in Oklahoma. She blends the real historical event of Oklahoma oil boom of the 1920's, and shows how it affected the life of Indian families in Oklahoma which is also the story of exploitation of Indians by the White dominant society. The characters live in a conflict of whether to accept the traditions of the white world or to stick on to their native culture. The background of the novel's action is given by Lila Blanket and her daughter Grace Blanket. The setting of

the novel is Watona, an Indian territory in Oklahoma. Lila Blanket is a river prophet, a listener to the voice of water, a woman who interpreted river's story for her people. The Blue River told Lila that "the white world was going to infringe on the peaceful Hill people" (*MS 6*). She knew that a dam was going to be built at the mouth of the Blue River. The water must have told her about this. She went back to her tribe and told them, "It is probable that we're going to lose everything. Even our cornfield" (*MS 6*). She easily understands the warning given by the nature and she decides to send some of her children to learn about the White ways. She believes, "some of our children have to learn about the White world if we're going to ward off our downfall" (*MS 6*). Lila sends her daughter Grace to her friend Belle Graycloud's house. Grace gets a job and she buys a small grassy land. Michael Horse, the water diviner discovers the presence of oil in Grace's allotment. She becomes rich and she gives little importance to her native traditions and culture. She gives birth to Nola, who is not fit for town life. Hogan brings out the contrast between Grace Blanket and Nola. Nola like her grandmother talks to animals and listens to the voices of nature. She is peaceful and happy in the midst of her mother's people. Grace Blanket becomes the owner of the oil land and thus she becomes an easy target of oil thieves. Grace is murdered for oil. For White men, women are business investment. Marriages with Indian women benefit Whitemen financially. Unfortunately Grace's body also disappears. Her corpse is looted for the valuable things buried along with it. The plot of the novel progresses further with the investigation of Grace Blanket's murder by Stacey Red Hawk, an Indian Officer. While unveiling the plot of the murder, Hogan shows us the life of natives and their spiritual relationship with nature, their encounters with the White world and the fears under which they live.

Belle Graycloud is a powerful female character in the novel who can be considered as the voice of Hogan, the environmental

activist. She sleeps alone in her herb garden. “The Earth is my market place” (*MS 16*), she used to tell her family. She lives in her world of beehives and chicken coop collecting watercress and wild onion. Belle says, “I am sick and tired of oil drillers. They burn the poor birds right out of the sky” (*MS 6*). She becomes violent when she sees a truck filled with eagle carcasses. She removes the dead eagles from the truck. She breaks a window of the truck and with her bleeding hand she screams and shouts at the naholies who brought the eagles. Later Michael Horse, the water diviner, writes a letter to the President requesting him to take steps to protect animals. “The eagles are our brothers. Their loss hurt us. The bear is no longer with us, nor is the wolf. And it goes without my saying how the buffalo were massacred” (*MS 117*). He writes to the President, “We do not have a desire to see our fellow creatures gone from the world” (*MS 117*). The words of Michael Horse tell us how the life of Indians is interconnected with the world of nature. Hogan explores the world of nature with regard to its native mythological and spiritual significance. She highlights how close the lives of animals are to human life and she combats the human/nature alienation created by western thought.

Hogan also attempts to deconstruct our notions of bats and snakes. In native mythology, the presence of Gods and Goddesses is in the form of spirits and animals. In Joe Billy's words, “bats are a race of people that stand in two worlds like we do” (*MS 257*). For Hogan, bats have spiritual significance. She believes that they are the intermediaries between our world and the next world. Hogan conveys the idea of terrestrial intelligence, by giving importance to the spiritual presence of birds and animals. She tries to break the human/nature dichotomy and heal the alienation between human beings and the natural world. “The snake is our sister. It is wisdom to

know this” (*MS* 262), says the priest, Joe Billy. This is the terrestrial intelligence which Hogan stresses in her works and she challenges the Western philosophy and religion which is at the core of alienation between human and animal world.

Hogan's novels are an exploration of the dwelling places of animals, birds and native people. She depicts the cave as an important dwelling place. Caves are the places of healing for Indian people. It is a neutral ground, “a sanctuary outside the reign of human difference, law and trouble” (*Dwellings* 29). They are places of refuge from dispute that took place in the world outside the caves. Caves connect the present world with the other world. For Hogan, caves are places of great spiritual significance. Michael Horse spends his time in a cave to record the history of his native people. Belle Gray cloud believes that “Sorrow Cave” is the house for bats that bear powerful medicine to those who believe. She is ready to sacrifice her own life for saving bats in the Sorrow Cave. There are several instances in the novel where we can see this reciprocal relationship in human and animal world. Belle nearly loses her life, but is miraculously saved by the locket of meteorite worn by her. The native characters like Michael Horse, Joe Billy, Lila Blanket, Nola and Belle Gray cloud maintain a spiritual relationship with nature and they are also able to understand the non verbal communication of nature. The presence of a mystical group called runners who earned a special place in both the human world and spirit world also conveys Hogan's idea of terrestrial intelligence. They know the language of the owls and the ways of animals. Hogan maintains this relationship while describing events in the novel. When Stacey Red hawk, the investigating officer talks about the murder of Indians, Hogan writes, “Outside, the breeze shook the fiery red leaves from the trees” (126).

Hogan's native culture encourages her reverence for and reciprocity to the world of nature. In her works Hogan gives importance to spiritual history, where oral traditions and nature's mystery are given more prominence over western ideological constructs of nature. Hogan's respect for terrestrial intelligence is clear in her insistence for a more balanced relationship between the spirit world and human world. This balance is essential for the sustenance of both human beings and nature and a solution to the problem of environmental degradation. Hogan's writing has grown out of her love for living world and all its inhabitants. She writes out of her respect for the natural world. She believes that human kind is not separate from natural world. Her devotion to earth, land and environment reflects this love and inspiration. She requests our acknowledgment, reverence and reciprocity to the earth and its non human communities.

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