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## Rewriting "Plumb Crazy Indian Women": Reframing Mental Illness as Cultural Power in Linda Hogan's Solar Storms

Hannah Dian DeTavis  
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Rewriting “Plumb Crazy Indian Women”: Reframing Mental Illness  
as Cultural Power in Linda Hogan’s *Solar Storms*

Hannah Dian DeTavis

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

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## ABSTRACT

### Rewriting “Plumb Crazy Indian Women”: Reframing Mental Illness As Cultural Power in Linda Hogan’s *Solar Storms*

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Since the earliest published American narratives, writers and subsequent Western clinicians alike have often mislabeled Indigenous behaviors, especially the behaviors of Indigenous women, as insanity. And yet, as Pemina Yellow Bird (Three Affiliated Tribes) explains, “Native peoples generally do not have a notion of ‘insane’ or ‘mentally ill’” (4). Instead, Indigenous peoples often discuss mental health in their communities through storytelling. As but one example of the ways that cultural narratives work to reclaim Indigenous understandings of mental health, this paper analyzes how the writings of Chickasaw author Linda Hogan challenge non-Indigenous understandings of mental health as a gendered phenomenon within tribal communities. Hogan does this in ways that destigmatize behaviors including hallucinations or prophetic dreams that Western medicine considers abnormal, and reintroduces community-specific understandings of these behaviors as either a supernatural phenomenon or a gift of foreknowledge. Hogan’s novel *Solar Storms* (1995), in particular, reframes stereotypical images of tribal women as insane with images of Indigenous women as cultural, political, and spiritual leaders in their communities. While she addresses community-specific understandings of actual mental illness, Hogan also characterizes what many might mistake for mental illness as the essential foresight of Indigenous women and thereby offers a healing corrective to the prevailing narrative of Indigenous women’s presumed insanity. A central discussion in this paper is how Hogan defines knowledge-making and Indigenous women’s rights and responsibilities in *Solar Storms*. The term “rights and responsibilities” refers to a sense of stewardship Indigenous women in the novel experience to protect land and community: this charge may include giving life through childbirth, communicating with animals and the dead, dreaming of medicinal plants, intuitively remembering traditional song and dance, “seeing” creatures without one’s eyesight, and healing, among others. Female knowledge-making, then, refers to insights about oneself, community, and the material and immaterial world in enacting these behaviors. By expressing the possibilities of Indigenous women’s relationship with the natural and supernatural world instead of either exoticizing or dismissing them, *Solar Storms* works to legitimize Indigenous modes of female knowledge-making in the face of ongoing colonial assumptions about Indigenous insanity.

Keywords: Linda Hogan, *Solar Storms*, mental illness, Indigenous women

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Rewriting “Plumb Crazy Indian Women”: Reframing Mental Illness  
as Cultural Power in Linda Hogan’s *Solar Storms*

In Mary Rowlandson’s widely read seventeenth-century captivity narrative, she describes her Indigenous captors as unstable “madmen” (63) whose spiritual premonitions about battle outcomes were only correct because “the devil had told them” as much (66). A counterpart to Rowlandson’s captivity narrative is the account of an Indigenous woman in the early eighteenth century, Patience Boston, who reportedly confessed to murderous ideations of her own children and the eventual killing of her master’s grandchild. Because the account was recorded by Puritan preacher Joseph Moody, who experienced a severe breakdown several years after Boston’s hanging, many scholars question how much, if any, of the account was actually Boston’s, and how much of it was a sensationalized cautionary tale used to perpetuate a gendered slant on the crazy Indian stereotype. The process of associating mental illness with Indigenous women has grown exponentially since Boston’s early eighteenth-century account and has been especially damaging to matriarchal Indigenous communities, which place significant importance on their women as cultural, political, and spiritual leaders and life-givers.

Since Rowlandson and Boston, American authors have continued to write the “crazy Indian woman” stereotype into every genre of white imagination. These images, which continue through a range of media depictions, often delegitimize Indigenous women’s fundamental rights and responsibilities; their spirituality and ongoing relationships to the natural and supernatural world are waived as mere superstition, or worse, manifestations of an unsound mind. Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo) explains that many Western writers from the eighteenth century to today judge Indigenous women’s sacred dreams and visions as “hallucinations” or “the product of diseased minds.” Allen explains that none, however, “suggests that one may *actually* be ‘seated

amid the rainbow” (71), or creating new, valid knowledge. What began as a rhetorical strategy to dehumanize Indigenous people, thereby humanizing Euroamerican settlers and justifying colonial conquest by contrast, became a precursor for the unceasing physical and cultural violence against Indigenous peoples, especially Indigenous women.

Just as early colonial narratives created the perpetual myth of Indigenous insanity, contemporary Indigenous writers are using this same authorial space to reclaim narrative and cultural power over their own minds and ongoing spiritual practices by explaining certain behaviors, like their relationships with the land and animals, through Indigenous epistemologies. As Sandra D. Styres (Mohawk) argues, successful reclamation often takes the form of “storying through remembered and recognized knowledges” as a way to “disrupt Western conceptualizations and re-tellings of the tangled histories of colonial relations” (28). This is not to say that Indigenous peoples do not experience mental illness. Many Indigenous individuals accept certain useful aspects of Western interpretations of human psychology. However, Indigenous ways of knowing—for instance, oral traditions, dreaming of medicinal plants, and a belief in human-animal/land communication—as articulated by Indigenous writers provide alternative self-determined explanations of behaviors that are too often misunderstood when described only in clinical terms. Emphasizing Indigenous stories of the historical and ongoing validity of Indigenous approaches to mental health promotes healing, resilience, and understanding in the wake of a long, ongoing history of stereotyping and stigmatizing mental illness among Indigenous women.

### ***Solar Storms and the Power of Story***

As but one example of the ways that fiction works to reclaim Indigenous understandings of mental health, this paper analyzes how the writings of Chickasaw author Linda Hogan



challenge non-Indigenous understandings of mental health as a gendered phenomenon within tribal communities. Hogan does this in ways that destigmatize psychological behaviors that Western medicine has considered abnormal, and reintroduce community-specific understandings of these behaviors as either supernatural possession or a gift of foreknowledge. Hogan's novel *Solar Storms* (1995), in particular, offers a contrast to stereotypical images of insane tribal women that cause particular cultural violence given the central place of women as cultural, political, and spiritual leaders in Indigenous communities. As Paula Gunn Allen explains, these "images of Indians in media and educational materials profoundly influence how we act, how we relate to the world and to each other, and how we value ourselves" (192). Hogan instead characterizes what many might mistake for mental illness as the essential foresight of Indigenous women and thereby offers a healing corrective to the prevailing narrative of Indigenous women's insanity.

She achieves this by centralizing the novel on the power of story passed down between mother, daughter, and granddaughter, allowing the Wing women reclaim their kinship with land, water, animals, and each other. Hogan's focus on story, Gloria Bird (Spokane) reminds us, "can undo the damaging stereotypes that are continually perpetuated about Native peoples" and exemplifies how Indigenous women "can rewrite [their] history, and [they] can mobilize [their] future" (30). A key discussion in this paper is how Hogan defines knowledge-making and Indigenous women's rights and responsibilities in *Solar Storms*. The term *rights and responsibilities* refers to a sense of stewardship Indigenous women in the novel experience to protect land and community: this charge may include giving life through childbirth, communicating with animals and the dead, dreaming of medicinal plants, intuitively remembering traditional song and dance, "seeing" creatures without one's eyesight, and healing

abilities, among others. Female knowledge-making, then, refers to insights about oneself, community, and the material and immaterial world in enacting these behaviors. By revealing the spiritual nature of Indigenous women's mindsets and behaviors instead of exoticizing them or dismissing them, *Solar Storms* works to legitimize these Indigenous modes of female knowledge-making in the face of ongoing colonial assumptions and resulting unchecked violence against Indigenous women—including mental institutionalization, foster care or adoption placement outside of family, and forced sterilization.

Beyond emphasizing an alternative to the colonial context of Indigenous mental health, Hogan's redefinition of mental illness in *Solar Storms* intersects meaningfully with scholarship on current decolonization, environmentalism, feminism, and disability studies. Through each of these respective lenses, literary scholars identify a pattern in *Solar Storms* where Hogan first outlines a cause of intergenerational trauma and gradually unravels an individual and matrilineal healing process as the characters embrace their tribal roots. Irene S. Vernon, for example, describes how colonization, specifically the exploitation of land, inflicts wounds on individual Indigenous identities and disrupts communal interactions. Vernon posits that "to fully heal from trauma, therapists ask individuals to 'reconstruct a completed narrative of the event,' and Hogan becomes a textual therapist who begins this process" (43). Similarly, in Silvia Schultermundl's ecofeminist reading of *Solar Storms*, she charts the tandem destruction of land and female bonds described in the text, claiming that Angel's healing is proportionate to the healing that occurs between a feminine homeland and its protectors—Angel and her grandmothers (67). In addition to healing from intergenerational trauma in the ways that such scholars suggest, Hogan offers yet another link to the ongoing process of healing: overcoming the longstanding narrative of Indigenous women's insanity. As Angel rediscovers home and wholeness by reconnecting with

her matrilineal community, she realizes that her spiritual foresights and the foresights of her grandmothers were never insanity to begin with. Rather, their actions and attitudes often demonstrate traditional knowledge that has long been shrouded beneath a gendered, racial stereotype.

### **Broken Land and Broken Bonds**

When Angela (later “Angel”) Jenson is seventeen years old, she reunites with her family on the Canadian-Minnesota border after being raised in an abusive foster care system. Set in the early 1970s, *Solar Storms* depicts how Angela was placed in the system before the 1978 Indian Child Welfare Act.<sup>1</sup> The National Indian Child Welfare Association found that prior to the act’s ratification, 25% to 35% of all Native children were removed from their families and communities, and 85% of these children were removed even when capable family members volunteered to take the child (“About ICWA”). Raised in a non-Indigenous setting that perpetuates stigmas of Indigenous women as insane, Angel believes her newfound relatives to be “crazy” when she first meets them. However, once Angel begins to connect with the spiritual practices of her people—descendants of the Cree, Anishinaabe, and “Fat Eater” peoples—she begins to recognize that her female relatives are demonstrating a higher understanding of their relationship to the natural and supernatural worlds. It is only after Angel has this realization that she also experiences prophetic-like dreams and sacred interactions with the natural world. These spiritual experiences connect her to homeland, restore her female relationships, and help her heal from the self-loathing accrued during her time in foster care.

Although Hogan spends the majority of *Solar Storms* constructing a healing narrative

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<sup>1</sup> The federally-enacted Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 regulates the removal of Native American children and their placement to foster care or adoptive homes. The act lays down standards for the placement of these children and more importantly, allows families and tribal communities to be involved in the child’s welfare case (“Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)”).

about Indigenous women's understanding of their own psychology, the text first establishes the initial state of the Wing women's exploited homeland, fragmented relationships, and subsequent depressive or violent behaviors to show how colonial violence upon land is connected to Indigenous women's mental health. The setting of Angela's coming-of-age story is a lake-front community along the Minnesota-Canadian border. Laura Virginia Castor reveals that Adam's Rib heavily alludes to James Bay, the southern tip of the Hudson Bay. In the 1940s, the government began constructing a hydroelectric dam, Hydro-Québec, on a river that ran through Cree territory and ran into James Bay. Although the Cree tribe never consented to the dam project, no major controversy arose until the 1970s when Hydro-Québec began diverting the river away from James Bay, wreaking havoc on the surrounding ecosystem and displacing the Cree community. Castor comments that as a result of this environmental shift, Cree peoples "suffered from marked increases in rates of alcoholism, family violence, and suicide" (158). While Hogan includes a disclaimer in the copyright page that all events in *Solar Storms* are entirely fictitious, the events of the novel at least seem inspired by the real psychological trauma and family fragmentation that resulted from the literal land-based trauma in James Bay and other similarly exploited areas.

The allusion to James Bay and the aftermath of Hydro-Québec is particularly relevant considering Indigenous women's place as stewards of the natural world and their ongoing responsibility to prevent ecological destruction. In several of Hogan's other novels, namely *Mean Spirit* and *Power*, she illustrates how the outside world often perceives Indigenous women as insane when they attempt to protect or defend sacred animals or land sites—sometimes even putting their own lives at stake to do so. For instance, in *Mean Spirit*, a group of non-Indigenous boys shooting into a cave of bats call Osage grandmother Belle Graycloud "crazy" when she

begins guarding the cave with a pistol. This event echoes *Solar Storms*' account of an armed 12-year-old Agnes Wing, who defends a captive bear (the same bear whose skin she would later wear as a coat) from taunting boys who also called the girl "crazy" (46). Likewise, 16-year-old Omishto in *Power* recognizes that her grandmother figure, Ama, "looks wild and crazy" because of her efforts to "be friends with this land" (19). Each of these women's vehemence to guard their homeland and the creatures that inhabit it convey the fierce conviction they feel toward creation.

Figure 1

**TABLE 2.** Worldview Differences that Impact Mental Health Care

American Indian/Alaska Native	Majority culture
● Relational, circular	● Linear, point A to B
● Mind, body, spirit/One	● Psyche is the focus
● Mystical/acceptance	● Scientific/verification
● Ceremonials/rituals	● Psychotherapy
● Tribal connectedness	● Individualism
● Spirituality & balance	● Organized religions
● Cooperation/sharing	● Competition/winning
● Patience/respectful	● Assertive/forceful
● Present oriented	● Future oriented
● Herbs, plants, nature	● Psychopharmacology

Source: Grandbois, 2005.

A 2005 study by Donna Grandbois explains why these women's fundamental differences in worldview affect how they view their protection of land and animals versus how dominant culture perceives those same actions.<sup>2</sup> In particular, Grandbois compiled a chart to point out that those worldview differences ultimately impact mental health care (see figure 1 above). Given the central relationships of among tribal connectedness, spirituality, nature, and mind-body-spirit oneness in Indigenous mental health, it is only natural to consider how Hogan's female characters react adamantly when their land is stripped and exploited, severing the bond between

<sup>2</sup> Although Grandbois acknowledges the vast multiplicity of spiritual beliefs among the hundreds of tribes in North America alone, this chart illustrates how the basic tenets of Indigenous epistemology—including connectedness to community, land, and a spiritual realm—direct their worldview of mental health.

humans and land.

Hogan uses the illustration of broken land as a metaphor for broken relationships and broken minds starting with Angela's description of Adam's Rib. "The waterways on which I arrived had a history" (21), she notes—a land that was robbed by French, British, Norwegian, and Swede trappers and traders. As Angela's ferry passes Fur Island on her way to Adam's Rib, she spies her grandfather's first wife, Bush, a woman who cared for Angela in her infancy. And yet, Angela notes that she feels no connection to her grandmother. Hogan then uses the torn land as a type for the disconnect between Angela and Bush. She explains, "Between us there had once been a bond, something like the ancient pact land had made with water, or the agreement humans once made with animals. But like those other bonds, this bond, too, lay broken" (22). Here, Angela acknowledges that the wholeness of land is directly correlated to the wholeness of women's relationships.

### **Surviving Settler Colonial Poisons**

Hogan then uses the story of Loretta, Angela's grandmother, to chart how human-land deterioration and settler-colonial abuse erode Indigenous women's psyches. Hogan explains that Loretta came from a land called Elk Island, a land stripped of resources, where the starving Indigenous people ate poisoned deer carcasses that settlers had left for wolves. Watching her desperate people die, Agnes explains, is what put a "curse" on Loretta's life unlike any "bad medicine" or "shadow" she'd ever seen (39). Agnes further explains that when Loretta was a child, she was "taken and used by men who fed her and beat her and forced her" (39). As a result, Agnes claims that Loretta became the one to hurt others because she had no love, no belief, and no conscience left in her. Agnes could even "hear ... voices when [Loretta] talked, babbling behind hers, men's voices speaking English" (39). While this woman with "no

conscience” might initially be perceived as mentally ill, *Solar Storms* validates Loretta as a survivor of colonial land violence and sexual abuse. Because Loretta consumed poisoned animals, and those animals had consumed poisoned earth, her tendencies to hurt others can be understood as a symptom of land-based trauma and sexual abuse instead of a causeless biological condition confined to Loretta alone.

This poison of settler-colonial violence against Loretta’s land and her people does not cease with the woman from Elk Island, either. Agnes explains that when Loretta’s daughter, Hannah, washed up on the shores of Adam’s Rib at ten years old, she too “had empty eyes” and smelt of poison that was “deeper than skin,” “blood-deep,” “history-deep” (40). In a study on the Indigenous intergenerational trauma in culturally-specific sobriety programs, Laurelle Myhra (Red Lake Ojibwe Nation) found that participants, like Hannah and Loretta’s female relatives, did not harbor resentment toward family members who coped with trauma in unhealthy ways (alcohol, in many cases). Instead, the participants saw their elders as “survivors rather than perpetrators of abuse.” Myhra interpreted this phenomenon as an embodiment Indigenous peoples’ inclination toward “forgiveness and acceptance rather than denial or avoidance” (32). Even though the women at Adam’s Rib recognized a mental imbalance in Loretta and Hannah, they share the forgiving attitude of participants in Myhra’s study, recognizing that “Loretta wasn’t the original sin” (39). The Wing women pass down Loretta’s traumatic history as a metaphor of how a poisoned homeland will poison Indigenous women and their communities, who are integrally connected to their land.

In Hannah’s case, her mental illness—a culmination of her mother’s trauma and her own—went untreated, resulting in her passing the poison down another generation to her daughter, Angela. In the prologue of *Solar Storms*, Agnes describes Hannah as having an air of

violence and instability that the Indigenous peoples couldn't name (12). Pemina Yellow Bird, a member of the Three Affiliated Tribes and a psychiatric survivor activist, explains why these women did not have a label for Hannah's behaviors: "Native peoples generally do not have a notion of 'insane' or 'mentally ill.' I have been unable to locate a Native Nation whose indigenous language has a word for that condition" (4). As Yellow Bird notes, many tribal languages simply do not account for words that describe conditions and movements specific to Western clinical epistemology. Although the notion of mental illness is not inherently shameful, non-Indigenous writers, like Rowlandson, have often weaponized the concept against Indigenous women as a way to discredit their ongoing spiritual practices and subjugate them to Western-educated peoples.

The colonial violence that mentally dismembered Loretta and Hannah then became the catalyst which physically dislocated Angel from her homeland and her peoples. Hogan reveals that Angela was removed from her mother and placed in the United States foster care system because Hannah, in a break from reality, attacked a young Angela, leaving the child with a large scar tearing down her face (25). Agnes describes Hannah's unstable behavior by drawing from old Cree stories that described:

the frozen heart of evil that was hunger, envy, and greed, and how it had tricked people into death or illness or *made them go insane*. In those stories the only thing that could save a soul was to find a way to thaw the person's heart, to warm it back into water. But we all knew your mother, Hannah Wing . . . was wounded. She was dangerous. And there was no thawing for her heart. (12–13, emphasis added)

Agnes' understanding of evil as hunger, envy, and greed alludes to the colonial settlers, who, as Hogan reveals, stripped the land of its resources and abused the Indigenous women and children



of Adam's Rib (28). The wounding that Hogan describes in this passage refers to the Indigenous "soul wound," or "a constellation of features in reaction to the multigenerational, collective, historical, and psychic wounding over time, both over the life span and across generations" (Duran et al. 342). Understanding Hannah's symptoms as the compounded pressure of historical abuse helps Agnes to explain why Hannah exhibited the same aggressive behaviors both she and her mother, Loretta, had been dealt.

But unlike Hogan's description of the wounded land at Adam's Rib and Elk Island, which she ties directly to capitalist exploitation, Hogan intentionally withholds the specific causes of Hannah's violent behaviors until later in the novel—particularly the childhood neglect and sexual abuse Hannah experiences. This literary move positions readers in the same state of confusion and misunderstanding about Hannah that Angela experiences when the teenage girl first arrives at Adam's Rib. While not all mental illness requires a triggering event, Hogan's deliberate withholding of the "causes" of Hannah's behaviors temporarily highlights Angela's perception of her mother within a "crazy Indian woman" stereotype—a misconception she bridges as Angela later learns her mother's history.

### **"Scars Had Shaped My Life"**

The damage upon Adam's Rib, Elk Island, Loretta Wing, and Hannah Wing then waterfalls to Angela, who bears both seen and unseen scars of colonial violence. She explains that "scars had shaped [her] life" (25), and that it was her mother who gave her the long scar across her face. Because of her mother's unpredictable violence, a symptom of her mental instability, Angela was taken from her home and family and placed in a foster care system for presumably better care. It was this institutionalization that separated her from Indigenous ways of knowing, from female relatives, and from her homeland on Adam's Rib, Fur Island, and the

land of the Fat Eaters. She describes that because her life story had been “contained in [the] lost records” (27) of county workers, she permanently inhabited either two rooms: a “room of fear, fear of everything—silence, closeness, motionlessness” (26), or a “fire-red room of anger” (27). As a result of her forced separation, when Angela establishes contact with Agnes and returns to Adam’s Rib at seventeen, she is still heavily influenced, even jaded, by the non-Indigenous culture in which she was raised. Her separation disrupts her association with home, which causes her to conceptualize her absent mother as “crazy” and her newfound relatives as unusual or out of touch with reality.

Hogan first presents Angela’s newfound grandmothers through the teenage girl’s eyes. Although she acknowledges that the women of Adam’s Rib are “mighty” (29), she also notices Agnes’ uncanny attachment to an old bear-skin coat and Dora-Rouge’s comfortable conversations with her deceased husband. When Bush begins plotting to derail the construction of a hydroelectric dam upriver, Angel begins to wonder “whether or not Bush was truly crazy” (129). And yet, Angela experiences a simultaneous attraction and repulsion to her newfound life and relatives. At times, she feels “sorry [she’d] come” to Adam’s Rib at all, and at others she describes feeling that she was “traveling toward [herself] like rain falling into a lake” (26). Myhra’s ethnographic research on Indigenous peoples raised in white foster homes supports Angela’s description of inner-conflict, with participants in the study experiencing “negative feelings, such as shame and disappointment upon learning they were AI [American Indian]” (22) while also feeling “a strong sense of pride in their elders” (32). Although Angela’s initial misunderstanding of Adam’s Rib and her family is engendered by non-Indigenous intervention—namely, social workers placing her in foster care instead of placing her with family—her misconceptions about her female relatives’ mental state falls away as she listens to their history

and learns to embody her own spiritual practices.

### **Re-membering**

The more Angela returns to herself and to her family, the more her false stigmas about Indigenous women's mental health collapse. In the months following her return, Angela embraces her Indigenous roots and her opinion of her grandmothers and of herself transforms. As another act of reclaiming power, Angela even accepts the new name her grandmothers give her, Angel, to better reflect her evolved identity. Angel describes, "Only a month earlier I knew none of these women, or even that they existed, and now our lives were bound together (in truth as they had been already) by blood and history, love and hate" (93). She is, in a sense, "re-membering" the cultural meaning of her grandmothers' behaviors that was buried beneath institutionally-instilled stigmas. The term "re-member," coined by Janice Acoose (Sakimay Sauteaux First Nation and Marival Métis Colony), refers to the process of becoming a "politically awakened and Spiritually reborn Indigenous woman" (29). By returning to her Nehiowe-Metis and Anishinaabe homeland, Acoose recounts how she healed from the abuses of a white-eurocanadian-christian patriarchy that had systematically dis-membered her from her tribal communities.

Angel's re-membering of home and self follows a similar trajectory as Acoose's, demonstrating that despite prolonged separation from family and homeland, the young woman could heal and grow in her newly accepted identity as an Indigenous woman. Angel describes her "re-membering" her grandmothers and her homeland as "Water going back to itself" (55). Theresa Smith and Jill Fiore's explain why Angel's mindset opens about her identity and relationship when she returns to Adam's Rib. In their assessment of landscape as narrative and narrative as landscape, Smith and Fiore state that listening to land "teaches one to hear and

eventually to retell the stories embedded therein” (58). Instead of seeing Adam’s Rib as merely a “poor place” (24) as she first assumed upon arrival, Angel soon understands the physical earth and waters of her homeland—once ravaged by trappers—as a reflection of her own healing, a place where she could “form a kind of knowing” (54). Angel’s ability to listen to the story of her homeland, also allows her to replace her initial perceptions of her grandmothers as “crazy” with an understanding of them as key knowledge-makers in their community: “I was water falling into a lake and these women were that lake, Agnes, with her bear coat, traveling backward in time ... hearing also the old songs no one else remembered. And Dora-Rouge, on her way to the other world, already seeing what we could not see, answering those we could not hear, and, without legs, walking through clouds and waters of an afterlife” (55). When Angel immerses herself in this water, she begins to be re-membered to her people, their histories, her land, and the value of Agnes and Dora-Rouge’s specialized ways of knowing seen and unseen lessons about the world. This newfound acceptance of her grandmothers further salves the wounds of Angel’s misconceptions about her grandmothers and promotes intergenerational healing among all the Wing women.

### **Storytelling as Therapy**

One key way Angel’s grandmothers help her to be re-membered to Indigenous understandings of mental illness is through storytelling. In his book, *Healing the Mind Through the Power of Story*, psychologist Dr. Mehl-Madrona, MD PhD, (Cherokee and Lakota) explains that a “narrative approach to psychiatry involves finding better stories to replace deficient stories” (274). He further describes how healers can approach those with mental illness in a therapeutic three-step plan: listen to his or her story, help the affected construct a metaphor for the condition, and introduce a therapeutic intervention (or ceremony) that allows the affected to

implement a better story to replace the deficient story (230–255). Hogan’s text reflects Dr. Mehl-Madrona’s suggested healing progression. Hogan invites readers to listen to how the women at Adam’s Rib describe behaviors in their communities. She then constructs a metaphor to describe imbalances in mind, body, and spirit—often comparing those imbalances to forces of nature. Finally, the novel builds a new, communally-enacted story that progresses the metaphors of mental health and replaces harmful narratives of Indigenous women as “crazy” that initially poisoned Angel.

An example of Hogan healing her characters in this three-step process appears when Bush tells Angel stories about her mother that oppose the stories Angel had heard in foster care. In this case, using story to reconceptualize Hannah’s hallucinations and aggressive behaviors allows the Wing women to dismantle stigmas of mental illness actively working against the notions of feminism naturally baked into their culture. Leading up to Angel’s return to Adam’s Rib, she had blamed her mother’s mental illness for stripping her of her family, home, identity, and Indigenous teachings. Leslie Marmon Silko’s (Laguna Pueblo) insights about the power of story confirm how corrosive these false narratives can be on Indigenous individuals. She explains that Indigenous peoples must use stories (in this case, about their own mental health and the valued place of female knowledge-making) as a defense against those who “try to destroy the stories / let the stories be confused or forgotten” (2) as a system of oppression.

Bush passes on her Indigenous perspective of Hannah’s life story as a therapeutic correction, inviting new, community understandings of the woman branded as crazy. Bush explains that when a ten-year-old Hannah mysteriously washed up on the shores of Adam’s Rib after a violent storm, Bush, who was married to Harold Wing before he left her for Loretta, volunteered to raise her husband’s daughter. Bush recalls how, from the beginning, the child

compulsively lied, stole, molested other children, and harmed animals. More troubling was Hannah's assertions that the "others inside her" were responsible for the behavior (103). Even so, Bush validates the child's strange claims through an Indigenous practice that allows her to understand the girl's mind. She describes:

I prepared myself. I slept outdoors on the sacred ground. I sang. I fasted. And one day a part of me stepped inside the girl and looked around. I saw the hand she spoke of, heard the voices in languages neither of us knew. I could see how dangerous it was. An inescapable place with no map for it. Inside were the ruins of humans. Burned children were in there, as well as fire. It pulled me toward it like gravity, like dust to earth and whatever it was, I had to call on all my strength to get away. (103)

As Bush uses tribal ritual—sleeping on sacred ground, singing, and fasting—she sees and feels what Hannah sees and feels. However, her descriptions of Hannah never cast the girl as insane, no matter how erratic or violent her behaviors were. Through Bush's ceremonial exercise, she pieces together a holistic narrative (that missing piece) of Hannah's life that accounts for childhood abuse and subsequent, ongoing trauma. Bush's engagement with Hannah's mind demonstrates the complexity of real mental illness in Indigenous cultures; while Indigenous peoples may acknowledge a person's unstable mental state, they may understand the illness in terms of other-worldly forces or intergenerational colonial trauma before they dismiss the affected altogether.

Bush's ceremony to see inside Hannah's mind represents an Indigenous perspective that promotes curiosity and openness toward unusual behaviors, a contrast to Western perspectives of mental illness that can engender fear, clinical diagnosis, institutionalization, and in some cases, even forced sterilization. *Solar Storms'* omission of clinical language to describe Hannah or any

of the other Wing women may be a stand against the more insidious effects of such hasty diagnoses. Namely, colonial settlers have upheld stigmas of Indigenous women's insanity as justification for forced sterilization—a practice that fed into the eugenics movements to weed out presumably “feeble-minded” or “defective” classes (Davis 36). Disabilities scholar Lennard Davis clarifies, “The loose association between what we would now call disability and criminal activity, mental incompetence, sexual license, and so on established a legacy that people with disabilities”—and I might add those cultural groups stereotyped as mentally ill— “are still having trouble living down” (37). Davis' observations are supported by Sally J. Torpy's history of Native American women's history of coerced sterilization, a violation of human rights that escalated after the 1927 case of *Buck v. Bell*, where the court upheld a state's right to “intervene in an institutionalized mentally retarded person's reproductive rights” (3). Torpy found that a renewed interest in eugenics in the 1960s spurred violent forced sterilizations<sup>3</sup> and family planning workers to encourage black women and Indigenous women to undergo sterilization as a form of birth control (13). *Solar Storms* moves away from the loaded clinical terminology used to justify such violence against Indigenous women and instead paints Hannah as a survivor—just as Agnes came to understand Hannah's mother, Loretta, as a survivor. While Bush's empathy does not “cure” Hannah of her violent behaviors, her near-transcendent experience helps her to eventually explain Hannah's condition to Angel, who is searching for understanding and healing.

### **Accepting True, Hard Narratives**

Angel's journey to restore matrilineal ties, Indigenous knowledge, and her connection to

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<sup>3</sup> Torpy reveals that thousands of Native women in the 1970s were sterilized during standard medical procedures, like appendectomies, without their consent. Others stated that physicians coerced or outright forced them to be sterilized while the women were under medication during childbirth. Indigenous women also explained that on the occasions that physicians did propose sterilization as a form of birth control, they often did so without an interpreter present.

land is not without its growing pains, however. Bush continues to help Angel complete the sketch of her own life narrative by illuminating the teenage girl's traumatic birth story. While in foster care, Angel fantasized that her biological mother was "beautiful and kind and her love for [Angel] went deep" (74) and that she hadn't abandoned Angel by choice, but died surrounded by "beloved people, relatives, all about her" with Angel as "the last thought on her mind" (74). Daniel Heath Justice explains the gravity of Angel accepting the realities of her origin story, violent as it was: "Stories expand or narrow our imaginative possibilities—physical freedom won't matter if we can't imagine ourselves free as well" (150). Although Justice is specifically discussing false narratives of Indigenous peoples as mentally colonized, his insights might extend further to Angel's false imaginations about her mother. While Angel uses these faulty notions of Hannah as a coping mechanism in foster care, Bush explains the truth of Hannah's first attack on Angel in hopes that the story will free Angel to forgive and accept her mother as she truly is. Shortly after Angel was born, Hannah attempted to kill Angel by abandoning her in a tree. When confronted about the missing child, Hannah, in a dissociated state, repeated, "She's not my baby ... My baby died at birth ... Keep it away from me. It's not mine" (112). When Bush finally found Angel placed in the branches of a birch tree, blue and dusted with snow, Bush made the notable observation that Angel seemed to be a "birth delivered to ice" (113). The image of Angel delivered to ice extends the metaphor of Angel as "water returning to itself" and helps Angel feel connected to water in ways she is unable to connect with Hannah.

For Angel, hearing her birth story through Bush's eyes (instead of through the eyes of non-Indigenous social workers or foster parents) becomes just as much about understanding her mother's mental illness as it does understanding herself. In spite of her mother's inability to connect, Angel is as resilient as an enduring winter ("You were tiny, you were cold, and you



wanted to live” (113) and is able to find a sense of home in her grandmothers and in the biosphere. Whether Hannah did indeed experience what a Western-trained psychologist might diagnose as schizophrenia is a moot point. Craig S. Womack (Creek-Cherokee) argues that Indigenous peoples “have a right over [their] own bodies and the way our bodies provide experiences that turn into knowledge” (392). Womack’s description validates the Wing women’s knowledge of Hannah as transcendent—through ceremony and metaphor—which in turn opened them to caring for Hannah personally instead perpetuating her trauma by sending her away from her culture to an institution.

Angel’s internalization of Hannah’s history helps her to understand her own innate strength and importantly, that she did nothing to deserve abandonment. This realization opens her to discover abilities analogous to those of Agnes and Dora-Rouge. Her skills, like plant dreaming and seeing through water to spy fish, manifest most prominently at the crux of *Solar Storms*: the Wing women’s treacherous journey north to stop the construction of a dam in the land of the Fat Eaters, a harrowing echo of the Cree’s struggle against Hydro-Quebec. During their journey upriver by foot and canoe, Angel describes how the “four of [them] became like one animal” and “heard inside each other in a tribal way” (177). Each woman springs to life with specialized knowledge when the women are fully connected with the earth and each other: Bush “opened like lilies” when uncontained “by skin, house, island, and water;” Agnes begins “talking the old language” and remembering the bear “more strongly now and, even without her coat, she talked with it” (177); Dora-Rouge “read things in the moving of waters” and “saw what couldn’t be seen by us” (177). These blossoming abilities illustrate how the women, when disconnected from a Western-dominated urban setting and associated stigmas, can become better unified to each other and their land.

As Angel forgives Hannah, becomes acclimated to her grandmothers' ways of life, and reconnects to her ancestral land, she effectively becomes fluent in an Indigenous epistemology that she was separated from since infancy. Angel realizes this when her abilities also begin to reemerge—namely, when she begins dreaming of plants she instinctively intuits the women will need on their journey: an akitsi plant, redroot, and wolfsbane. Angel begins to recognize that her newly re-membered knowledge of medicinal plants is connected to “a place inside the human that spoke with land ... It was the language animals and humans had in common” (170). She acknowledges that for the majority of her life to that point, she had “lost the knowing of this opening light of life,” and had only begun to find it again in her sleep, a state that allowed her “to remember things [she'd] forgotten” (171). This transformation demonstrates how Angel's dormant abilities are awakened in ways that weren't possible when, as a foster teenager, she attempted to find belonging in “any boy or man who would take [her]” (54).

### **Relapse and Restoration**

While this segment of Angel's journey awakens a newfound understanding of her grandmother's Indigenous epistemologies, it is the Wing women's encounter with a white couple in a canoe, who had lost their way, that causes Angel to slip back into a Western mindset that conflates mental disability with Indigenous behavior. Angel describes this jarring lurch from her Indigenous frame of mind: “I had nearly forgotten there were other people in the world. I came quickly out of lost time, silent space. Now all I wanted was a tube of lipstick” (183). This brief encounter with the white man and woman and their white dog reverts Angel to the self-conscious, foster-teenager she was at the beginning of the novel, who hid the scarred side of her face from the world and silently questioned her grandmothers' sanity. Angel reflects, “For the first time, I saw our little flotilla through the eyes of others and we looked ... like fools ... four

Indian women, one old and birdlike, having to be carried about while she gave out commands and directions she had made up from somewhere inside her old, brittle bones” (183). In this description, Angel no longer esteems Dora-Rouge’s wisdom as endowed knowledge from the natural world; she waives them as something “made up” within her own deteriorating mind. Angel’s sudden self-consciousness illustrates the lingering damage of her upbringing in a white foster system that, as Lennard Davis supposes, associated certain ethnic groups with strangeness and “feble-mindedness” and converged “disability with depravity” to form a “defective class” (36–37). This brief lapse into a non-Indigenous perspective also demonstrates how Angel’s ideological separation from an Indigenous upbringing has a more lasting effect on her matrilineal connections than even her physical separation in foster care.

Angel’s discomfort with her Indigenous identity and her grandmothers’ behaviors escalates when the women invite the white travelers to share a campfire dinner. In the days leading up to this encounter, Agnes begins exhibiting behaviors similar to those associated with dementia. Agnes becomes increasingly lethargic, forgetful, and unaware of herself. Eventually, Agnes insists that if something were to happen to her that Angel would “let [her] lie out for the wolves and birds” (188). At first, Angel is unsettled by Agnes’ request and fears that Agnes is declining mentally. But it is only when Agnes suddenly accuses the man and woman of being cannibals that Angel questions Agnes’ sanity. Dora-Rouge also spontaneously calls out to her dead husband, Luther, in front of the travelers (185). After the travelers settle for bed that evening, Angel overhears the white woman declare, “Those women are crazy. ... They are plumb crazy” (185–186). Lee Maracle (Sto:lo) argues that non-Indigenous peoples often respond to Indigenous accounts of communicating with the dead with the same bewilderment the white woman displays because “Psychiatry is predicated on dispelling the delusions of patients who

hear voices” (114). After the couple packs up and disappears in the night, Angel initially feels resentful toward her grandmothers, giving them a “dirty look” (186) for driving the travelers away. But in the white travelers’ absence, she soon realizes deeper meaning behind Agnes and Dora-Rouge’s behavior. As Paula Gunn Allen explains, Indigenous women often convey the “symbols, significances, and effects” of a situation “in the stories she tells, the songs she sings, and the knowledge she possesses” (208). In this light, Agnes’ utterances were not the ravings of a mad Indian woman as Angel had seen through the couple’s eyes, but the insight of a woman who understood the world through an Indigenous epistemology.

Angel soon learns the deeper meaning of Agnes’ behavior in front of the couple when she learns of a tribal story about a man, woman, and white wolf, who steered a boat made of human skin on a search to eat humans (186). At this point, Angel recognizes that Agnes’ comments about the travelers being cannibals were the recollection of a tribal story, offset by familiar symbols from the story itself. As Allen suggests, “Symbols in American Indian systems are not symbolic in the usual sense of the word. The words articulate reality—not “psychological” or imagined reality ... but that reality where thought and feelings are one” (71). In this sense, it seems that Agnes recognized the white couple as a representation of a larger colonial process of non-Indigenous peoples consuming land and Indigenous ways of life as Angel would later witness firsthand with the construction of the dam.

Angel’s faith is further restored in her grandmother’s otherworldly sources of knowledge when the women reach a turbulent part of the river on their journey and Angel witnesses how kinship with nature can appear as madness, but is a core pillar in her community’s belief system. Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee) defines kinship as a “delicate web of right and responsibilities” (154) in which Indigenous peoples cultivate relationships “with other peoples, from the plants

and animals to the sun, moon, thunder, and other elemental forces” (151). When Dora-Rouge insists that she can strike a deal with a river to allow them to pass, as though the water and the woman have some age-old friendship, Angel comments that it would have been a lie to say “we believed completely in Dora-Rouge as she sat on the bank of the river and spoke” (193). But after they safely make it through the rough waters, she grants that “something godly was bringing us through” (195). After the women survive the river, Dora-Rouge quotes the white travelers, “‘Those women are crazy,’ and began to laugh” (195). Certainly, even Dora-Rouge’s relatives questioned whether to believe in the matriarch’s barter with the river; but by the time they emerge on the other side, they note the power of Dora-Rouge’s dialog with the river. Kate Cave and Shianne McKay explain that Indigenous communities in Canada believe that women share a sacred connection to water: “Attached to [their] role as caretakers of the water are the responsibilities to respect, honor, and express our gratitude to water and its spirit through ceremonies and songs, enabling water to fulfill its role to provide for Mother Earth and, in turn, all her creatures, including humans.” As Cave and McKay suggest, Dora-Rouge’s song was enacting a traditional right and responsibility of Indigenous women, thousands of years old, that demonstrates a sense of kinship between women and water. Though Dora-Rouge laughs at how “crazy” her song to the river might seem, dismissing the ritual as mental illness also dismisses the valuable ways Indigenous women pass on knowledge that is vital to the ongoing survival of their communities and the natural environments they care for.

Angel’s attitude toward her grandmothers further shifts from embarrassment to reverence when Angel recognizes prophetic elements to their behaviors. When Angel returns from searching for a medicinal plant for Agnes, she finds that Agnes has died. Angel and Bush leave her body in a canoe, which they plan to later retrieve. However, when a search team tries to

recover Agnes' body, they only find the boat in which her body once lay, gnawed by animal teeth. Angel feels relieved, claiming that Agnes had wanted to be returned to the earth. She reflects, "on the chance that she had been eaten by wolves, I called every wolf I saw Grandmother" (216). While Angel was initially troubled that Agnes was losing her mind when her great-grandmother requested to be eaten by animals, she eventually sees this prophetic statement as Agnes fulfilling her responsibility to restore the reciprocity of human-animal relations. Once Angel sees the wisdom in Agnes' request—that her body was a part of the earth—Angel is able to connect with the natural world as her family, since the natural world, in essence, consumed her family. Although *Solar Storms* makes clear that Agnes does, toward the end of her life, experience what seem to be signs of dementia, Hogan illustrates how Agnes' slipping lucidity only offers her clearer insight into tribal knowledge and understanding of her place in the cycles of nature that colonial attitudes and industries continue to disrupt.

### **Salving the Soul Wound Through Activism**

Angel's arrival in the land of the Fat Eaters offsets the most defining moments of *Solar Storms*: she witnesses how the aggressive oil extraction, over logging, and the oncoming hydroelectric dam project, directly affect the mental deterioration of the people stewarding that land. Upon arrival at Dora-Rouge's homeland, Angel describes a people with "puffy faces," "empty eyes," and an "unkempt, hollow appearance" (226). She simultaneously describes the destruction of sacred lands as a "murder of the soul" (226). Irene S. Vernon, who describes the intergenerational effects of trauma on the Wing women in *Solar Storms*, explains that "loss of land, violence, removal of children from their families, and other cultural, social, and economic destructions, creates a "soul wound," a wound so deep that it reaches the vital core of . . . being, compounding . . . the 'mental health problems of succeeding generations'" (35). Angel describes

how this soul wound appears in younger generations of the Fat Eaters, once known as “the Beautiful Ones”:

The young children drank alcohol and sniffed glue and paint. . . . Some of them had children of their own, infants who were left untouched, untended by their child-parents. Sometimes they were given beer when they cried. It was the only medicine left for all the pain. . . . Those without alcohol were even worse off, and the people wept without end, and tried to cut and burn their own bodies. The older people tied their hands with ropes and held them tight hoping the desire to die would pass. (226)

In clinical Western traditions, the types of self-harm, substance abuse, and suicidal ideations that Angel observes are often viewed as symptoms of depression, addiction, post-traumatic stress disorder, or another mental illness. Yet in this instance, Hogan makes clear that these destructive behaviors are not isolated cases of mental illness, but manifestations of intergenerational trauma incited by colonial settlers and compounded with each generation until the young “child-parents” become despondent—a result of their forced disconnection with the natural world and traditional epistemologies. When considering a cure for her peoples’ mind-body-soul duress, Dora-Rouge wonders, “how do conquered people get back their lives?” (226). To answer this question, both she and Angel realize that “the protest against the dams and river diversions was their only hope” (226). Daniel Heath Justice comments on the unifying effect of Indigenous activism to defend their lands, explaining that “peoplehood is shaped by relationships and lived purpose, fueled by a desire to create something that will last beyond the pains of oppression” (152). Because the pain of losing homeland causes the Beautiful Ones to self-destruct, the fight to protect and reclaim their land is a fight for their peoples’ survival in a literal way.

### **The Final Link to Intergenerational Healing**

At this point in *Solar Storms*, Angel seems to recognize that she can only reconcile her people to the rent ecosystem when she herself mends the severed branches of her female lineage. This she does, namely, by confronting the trauma of her mother's abandonment, a result of Hannah's mental illness. One night, after Angel, Dora-Rouge, and Bush move into the home of distant relatives Tulik, Luce, "Auntie," and "Grandson," Angel has a revelatory dream of the house in which her mother is dying (239). When Angel arrives at Hannah's weathered home, she finds that her mother is in fact dying from stab wounds inflicted by the man who lived with her. According to two women who stopped by to tend Hannah, the man, Eron, claimed that when he moved in with Hannah, he "always felt like someone else was in the room" (246). Dr. Mehl-Madrone's explanation explains, "Within traditional North American healing, a very helpful concept is that of the spirit behind an illness . . . Again, though indigenous people take spirit literally, it's interpretation as metaphor" may help healers grapple with the complex realities of mental illness and talk back to those metaphors in constructive ways (346). Eron then recounts how one day, Hannah "carried a basket from the water. In it, clear as day, there was a dead child" (246). In stabbing Hannah, Eron believes to have stopped the demons that drove Hannah to bite Angel's face "like a dog" (246) years before. In the end, Hannah, desiring freedom from the "demons or restless beings or ice spirits that had gone to live inside" her, begged Eron to kill her, saying "It's the only way" (247). Despite Angel's understanding that Hannah's trauma and dangerous behavior was "not her fault," Angel still feels wounded by "the pain of betrayal, abandonment" (243). To help Angel heal and understand Hannah's condition, Dora-Rouge—like Bush and Agnes—passes down a story that will help Angel process her mother's condition. She does this by conveying a story to her great-great-great granddaughter of a woman in 1936, "the starvation year" (248), who exhibited symptoms similar to Hannah.



Dora-Rouge's story of the "ice woman" is another instance of a narrative healing ceremony, similar in purpose to Bush telling Angel the story of Hannah's upbringing. The story, which in many ways parallels Hannah's, helps Angel reconceptualize Hannah as a victim of abuse and subsequent mental illness instead of a willful aggressor. According to Dora-Rouge, the ice woman ate the flesh of her family members who had died of cold and hunger. It was then that the "woman and ice, just as in old stories, became lovers," and that she "rolled naked in snowdrifts *like a woman gone mad*" (248, emphasis added). Even though Dora-Rouge recognizes that the woman's behavior appeared to be madness, she herself does not interpret the woman in the story as having mental illness. Instead, she ascribes the woman's behavior to a seemingly superhuman nature, believing that "a normal person, a human being, could not have survived it" (248). This instance portrays the ways in which Indigenous people do describe behaviors of mental illness with specific vocabulary. Although some Indigenous peoples do not have specific terminology to describe mental illness, as Yellow Bird suggests, James W. Thompson et al. found that mental illness in Indigenous communities is typically described as supernatural possession, an imbalance with the natural world, or the manifestation of a special gift (204). Hogan doesn't attach specific terminology to the behaviors of the Wing women because *Solar Storms* is not written to diagnose Indigenous women's behaviors. The text, instead, validates their intuitions and framework of the world through a narrative perspective.

Although Angel initially felt the sting of betrayal when Hannah once again abandoned her daughter, this time in a permanent way, this story of the ice woman helps Angel work through the trauma of losing her mother again, so she herself does not inherit a "frozen heart" (23). Angel mends the broken chains of matrilineal connection when she discovers she has a baby sister, abandoned in a wooden box. She comments that her sister's new life had "formed in

this place where some hundred-year-old history was breaking itself apart and trying to reform” (249). This notion of restored balance comes only after Angel internalizes the story of the ice woman as a productive metaphor that resolves in a thawed heart: the ice woman’s heart, Hannah’s heart, and Angel’s heart. In finding her baby sister, fresh and full of possibility, Angel finds the final link to intergenerational healing and feels a sense of purpose to protect the land of the Fat Eaters and create a better place for Aurora to grow up.

### **Fear-fueled Stigmas**

When Angel returns from Hannah’s now-empty home with Aurora, she again experiences the re-membered stewardship over her ancestral land as she more frequently comes into contact with non-Indigenous peoples seeking to exploit the region’s river. In Silvia Schultermantl’s reading of the text, she remarks, “Angel’s fight for the legal rights of her tribe and the conservation of the tribal lands are acts of responsibility based on her understanding of the organic interconnectedness within the biosphere” (68). Angel’s fulfilment of this responsibility further bonds Angel to the women in her family, despite continual assumptions from outsiders that the women (and Indigenous people at large) in her community are mentally incompetent. On one occasion at a town hall meeting when one of Angel’s distant relatives Auntie declares that her people had lived there for thousands of years and did not want dams erected, a white man in a position of authority “called [them] remnants of the past and said that he wanted to bring [them] into the twentieth century” (280). Angel realizes that “He, like the others, believed that we were ignorant” (280). As Waziyatawin Angela Wilson (Dakota) suggests, this man’s response to the Beautiful Ones defending their land illustrates the “powerful institutions of colonization” which “have routinely dismissed alternative knowledges and ways of being as irrelevant to the modern world” (359). Despite the man’s assumption, Angel acknowledges that

her people are not foolish or mentally inept as the man assumes them to be. She asserts, “Everyone had a gift, each person a specialty of one kind or another, whether it was hunting, or decocting the plants, or reading the ground for signs of hares. All of us formed something like a single organism” (262). Even though Angel still experiences moments of self-consciousness when she speaks with plants, fearing she appears “foolish” (261), her unity with the Beautiful Ones in defending her ancestral land with her people helps her realize the value of spiritual practices disregarded as ignorance or insanity by outsiders.

Angel soon realizes that the outsiders’ tendency to regard her people, especially the Indigenous women, as mentally ill is largely rooted in fear. When Angel goes to the police station to report a group of white men intimidating Tulik in the middle of the night by spotlighting his house with bulldozers, the white officer completely disregards her. When she tells him her name, Angel Wing, he belittlingly asks, “Your real name,” as though the girl had fabricated or imagined a name for herself. The officer then finds a reason to imprison Angel (in this case, for driving to the station without a license). Of her jailer, Angel remarks, “He had sweat stains on his shirt, as if he had reason to fear me, instead of the other way around” (291). When Angel is released the next day, the officer warns Angel not to “follow in [her] mother’s footsteps”—assuming that Angel’s justified complaint against the intimidation tactic was equal to her mother’s supposed mental illness. Angel’s encounter with the officer demonstrates how non-Indigenous assumptions of Indigenous women’s insanity also engenders a deep-seated sense of fear and distrust. This moment also confirms Foucault’s overarching assertion in *Madness and Civilization* that diagnoses or assumptions of mental illness are often tools of social control and subjugation. As yet another move to dismiss the important place of Indigenous women as protectors of their land and families, this officer suppresses Angel and what she represents to

uphold a power structure that positions him as an authority of truth and Angel as a raving, “trouble-making” Indigenous woman.

This police officer’s behavior echoes centuries of organized detainment of Indigenous peoples not because of legitimate mental illness but because of fear and misunderstanding of Indigenous dances, songs, and extra-human communication. At the turn of the twentieth century, the United States government institutionalized this violence against Indigenous peoples already removed to reservations. As early as 1899, for example, after two centuries of continuous war in pursuit of Indigenous lands and resources, the federal government began funding the Hiawatha Insane Asylum for Indians, the first and only mental institution exclusively for Indigenous peoples. A 1929 federal investigation of the facility revealed most of the patients interned were not mentally ill, but were brought to Hiawatha because they resisted government oppression (like orders to send their children to federal Indian boarding schools) or because of physical ailments (like tuberculosis or epilepsy). Many were detained simply because they practiced ceremonial dances and songs that non-Indigenous peoples chose not to understand (Yellow Bird 5). Like the racist rationale used to incarcerate Indigenous peoples at Hiawatha, Angel, too, is detained because she is resisting government oppression—this time, the exploitation of sacred land and water. While the Hiawatha Insane Asylum for Indians was shut down in 1933 after clinical psychiatrist Dr. Samuel Silk deemed the asylum an intolerable place of “padlocks and chamberpots” (Yellow Bird 6), the stigma of Indigenous people, and particularly of Indigenous women, as mentally ill has long prevailed, reminiscent in this officer’s conflation of Hannah’s presumably insane behaviors and Angel’s demand for justice.

The officer’s culturally-ingrained fear and stigmatization manifests more broadly in a crowd of white people confronting the Beautiful Ones’ peaceful protest, illustrating the violence

that can erupt from deeply entrenched racial stereotypes. As the Beautiful Ones camp beside the river to protect it from the construction crew and police, a mob of white workers and their wives begin yelling at the Indigenous people singing traditional songs as they guard the land with their bodies. Angel recalls the white crowd chanting, “Bullshit. Bullshit” as a “song against life . . . because they were limited and could live in only one way and they wanted us to give up our way of life for theirs” (315). Here again, the non-Indigenous protestors dismiss the tribal community’s ongoing spiritual practices and beliefs as nonsense because of their misunderstanding of Indigenous ways of life. The tension between the groups becomes so severe that eventually, law enforcement throws tear gas into the Indigenous land and water protectors, prompting Angel and Bush to flee with Angel’s infant sister back to Adam’s Rib. Although Angel and her grandmothers were unable to stop the dam project, the women discovered a sense of unity and affirmed identity in defending their ancestral land. Schiltermandl explains, “It is not so much through their return to a pristine land within their tribal territories but rather through their activism for the preservation of the tribal lands that the characters in Hogan's fiction reach a sense of completion to their identity quests” (69). When the women return to Adam’s Rib, they find the land transformed just as they themselves have transformed. Of this conclusion, Geoffrey Stacks makes the astute observation that Hogan positions the damage and healing of Adam’s Rib as a mirror image of the damage and healing of Angel.

### **“Water Returning to Itself”**

The conclusion also suggests that this tandem land-body restoration transcends physical healing and extends to mental healing as well. When Bush, Angel, and Aurora return to Adam’s Rib, they find that the damming up north that they had fought to prevent had rerouted the rivers, causing Adam’s Rib to flood and Fur Island to completely submerge. While the women are

certainly wounded to lose their land, they recognize that “in spite of our heartache, [the water] looked peaceful . . . laying itself down across our world” (338). The women show respect for nature’s reclamation of itself, too, as they empty Agnes’ abandoned home in preparation for the water to overtake it. Bush, waxing the linoleum floor, tells Angel, “I’m making this place presentable for water” (337). At this point in the novel, Angel’s reconnection with Dora-Rouge, Agnes, Bush, Hannah, and Aurora causes her to think of this flooding of Adam’s Rib with new eyes. Although the novel typically depicts how the Wing women’s mental trauma is a result of bodily trauma and land trauma, Angel realizes that water’s reclamation of Adam’s Rib is also a kind of healing—the same kind of healing as Agnes returning to earth in being consumed by animals. *Solar Storms* then becomes a story about “water returning to itself” (35) in both a literal and metaphorical way.

### **Conclusion**

While literary scholars often regard *Solar Storms* as an eco-feminist text, Hogan infuses the text with the theme of woman-land connection by unravelling how matrilineal separation, physical and sexual abuse, and the desecration of land are inseparably related, affecting the mental health of Indigenous women. However, Hogan does not dwell in this simultaneous destruction of female bonds, land, and sanity. Rather, she uses the narrative to convey the power of the Wing women when they reconnect and are unified. Together, these women re-member a composite mosaic of Indigenous knowledge that was otherwise dislocated when they were separated. This focus on healing, rather than brokenness, illustrates the resilience of Indigenous women, especially when they enact ongoing spiritual practices. Furthermore, Hogan’s emphasis on the healing and strength of Angel and her grandmothers corrects harmful representations of Indigenous practices—like communicating with the dead, with plants, with water, and with

animals—as symptoms of mental illness. Instead, Hogan repositions these practices as essential ways for Indigenous women to connect to each other and cultivate mind-body-spirit wholeness as a community, to restore the balance of human and earth.

While the text certainly does depict what seem to be symptoms of mental duress in Hannah, the “child parents” of the Beautiful Ones, and even Agnes at times, Hogan disallows the reader to understand these symptoms as isolated psychological events. Many Indigenous communities do recognize the value of Western clinical studies and medical practices in treating the depression, alcoholism, and the suicide epidemic in tribal communities across the United States; however, Hogan demonstrates that Indigenous re-tellings of those conditions have a more poignant effect than prescribed medication.

*Solar Storms* stands as a powerful example of how Indigenous voices are reclaiming a narrative of their own mental health to reinstate the essential place of Indigenous women as spiritual leaders and life-givers. The novel does this by carefully charting the chain of settler-colonial abuses that have led to a fragile or fragmented mental state. Furthermore, the text illuminates that, even in such states, the Indigenous women experiencing mental illness understand symptoms in a way that further unlocks a type of re-membling of Indigenous knowledge and identity. In such instances, *Solar Storms* stands as an effective contrast to Mary Rowlandson’s captivity narrative of Indigenous “madmen,” Patience Boston’s “confession” of insanity-induced murder, and the abusive institutional practices that rode upon such racist stereotypes, like the Hiawatha Insane Asylum for Indians, Indigenous child displacements prior to the Indian Child Welfare Act, and forced sterilization of Indigenous women. Although Angel acknowledges that her family’s “human pain was deep” as a result of such stigmas and institutional abuses, the story she narrates of matrilineal and land reunification allows her to

throw “an anchor into the future and follow the rope to the end of it, to where [her family] would dream new dreams, new medicines, and one day, once again, remember the sacredness of every living thing” (344).



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