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CONFLICT AND RECONCILIATION:
REPRESENTATIONS OF CHRISTIANITY IN
CONTEMPORARY NATIVE AMERICAN LITERATURE BY WOMEN

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Rachel Luckenbill

August 2016

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Rachel Luckenbill

2016

CONFLICT AND RECONCILIATION:
REPRESENTATIONS OF CHRISTIANITY IN
CONTEMPORARY NATIVE AMERICAN LITERATURE BY WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

CONFLICT AND RECONCILIATION:
REPRESENTATIONS OF CHRISTIANITY IN
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By

Rachel Luckenbill

August 2016

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Linda Kinnahan

The Native American literary Renaissance of the 1970s and 1980s created a web of American Indian voices interpreting the past, indicting America's imperialism alongside Christianity for its participation in conquest, and renegotiating the cultural possibilities and losses resulting from colonial takeover. In contemporary Native America, Christianity is both the subject of controversy and a widely practiced religion. This dissertation explores representations of Christianity in works by four contemporary female Native American authors, Linda Hogan, Louise Erdrich, Diane Glancy, and Joy Harjo. The study's theoretical framework privileges indigenous voices by relying on a paradigm of reconciliation mapped by Native American activist and attorney Walter Echo-Hawk and by employing ethnographic research methods including an interview study with American Indian women. Gender, story, land, and multiethnic identity surface as major themes throughout the study.

Hogan, Erdrich, Glancy, and Harjo each engage in or resist cross-cultural reconciliation

in the wake of Christianity's involvement in colonization and assimilation. Hogan focuses on strengthening communities within Native America; Erdrich explores the possibilities and pitfalls of community building between American Indians and Catholic German-Americans; Glancy creates community by giving voice to both Native and non-Native Christians who have been silenced in the past; and Harjo calls for an expansive community that grows across cultural and religious boundaries, resulting in enemies becoming family members. I ultimately argue that imaginative writing makes space for dialogues of reconciliation that are otherwise stifled in the midst of complex and historically tense cultural and socioeconomic circumstances. Together, these writers perform an act of reconciliation that is neither total nor insignificant. Individually acting out aspects of Echo-Hawk's paradigm for reconciliation, works produced by Hogan, Erdrich, Glancy, and Harjo can be read in tandem as simultaneous expressions of anger, consternation, and indignation over the ravages of colonization and Christianity's participation in it. The same texts offer creative expressions of possibility and hope for a future marked by distinctive Native American cultural contributions and a revised and repentant Christianity stripped of its institutional sins and characterized instead by the peace and love that persists at the heart of its teachings.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to the Native American women in Oklahoma who welcomed me into their homes, churches, and workplaces, generously sharing their stories, their heartache, and their hopes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am deeply grateful to my dissertation committee. Dr. Linda Kinnahan offered unflagging optimism, encouragement, and advocacy, giving me the best blend of support and freedom. Dr. Kathy Glass directed me to resources that changed the course of my work and calmed me with wise perspective and attention to health and wholeness. Dr. Cari Carpenter connected me to colleagues in Oklahoma who have now become friends and helped me approach Native American literature with sensitivity and heightened awareness. I thank Dr. Laurel Willingham-McLain for not only serving as my principal investigator for the interview study but for also being a dear friend and mentor throughout my PhD experience. I have the best husband who has not only been encouraging and supportive but has put his tech savvy skills to use making sure computers and programs did not stand in my way. I also owe a debt of gratitude to the English department faculty at Duquesne University. They have collectively provided mentorship and resources throughout this process. I'm particularly thankful for the guidance offered by Dr. Greg Barnhisel and Dr. Emad Mirmotahari. I thank the English department, the Center for Catholic Intellectual Tradition, and Dean James Swindal of the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts for financially supporting my three research trips to Oklahoma. I am grateful for the hospitality and resources of the West Virginia University Native American Studies program. And last but not least, I think joyfully about all of the people who offered lodging, meals, and friendship as I drove across Oklahoma, conducting interviews, searching through archives, and engaging in cultural experiences. I especially look forward to embarking on exciting new projects with Dr. Kimberly Roppolo Wieser (University of Oklahoma) and am grateful for her kind friendship and guidance over the past year.

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Introduction

Interviewer: *“Is there anything you wish more people knew about your culture or your faith?”*

Interviewee: *“Just to know that we do exist. God made us Native Americans no matter what tribe. God made us that. And I don’t believe that God intended for us to give our culture up to be Christians. But that we could practice who we are, [and] receive Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior which will really, truly enhance who we are. And I wish more people would understand that.”*

– Sarah, Mississippi Choctaw¹

“I prayed and prayed and I said, ‘Lord, . . . I want myself – I want to know my own Indian ways’ . . . because my mom raised me like a non-Indian even though she was Indian. The church we went to had no Indians. We never went to powwows. I never got to go to a lot of things that, after I left high school, they all started going to. And I prayed and prayed and I told God, ‘I’m beginning to feel like I’d just rather be my Indian ways.’

“I do love the Lord and I believe in the name of Jesus and the blood of Jesus. I believe in the Holy Spirit. I believe in everything that the Bible says, but I also know that this brown skin is not gonna turn white.”

– Mary, Chiricahua Apache

A myriad of tiny sparks lit up the sky each time the men hefted a new massive log onto the fire. Every night the crowd around the circle grew until 200, 300, 400 people gathered for the Fire Dance. The event was hosted by a Methodist Apache family who annually recreate this traditional Apache ceremony. With frybread in hand, I sat with Mary, a vibrant Chiricahua Apache woman who spent every moment thinking of how she could serve those who were hosting the ceremony. Mary told me earlier that day about being the song leader at her Methodist Church, writing gospel music for the congregation to sing. She played a few tunes for me on the piano, her voice lilting and crooning Loretta Lynn style. Mary was raised by her Christian

¹ This is an excerpt from an interview conducted as part of my "Female Native American Perspectives on Christianity" research study. This and all other excerpts appear in italics at the start of each section of the dissertation. Rather than citing them individually, I include one bibliographic entry for the study itself. The individual interviews are not published and reside in my confidential records.

mother to believe her Native American culture was off-limits, pagan even. But she began to crave cultural knowledge as an adult. Mary has since joined the Native American Church (NAC), having learned that her father was a practitioner. The first time she attended an NAC meeting she recognized the songs: her father had sung them to her when she was young. Around the circle at the Fire Dance, Mary and I sat with her Methodist and Native American Church friends in unity celebrating an ancient ceremony.

Mary, Sarah, Anna, Lynn, and Josie all have stories that begin with early exposure to Christianity and progress toward a later awakening or coming home to Native American roots. They are five of the 15 American Indian women who participated in my interview study in 2015. The names I share here are pseudonyms, but the tribal affiliations are real.² I drove across Oklahoma from Talequah to Anadarko, meeting with the women in their homes, places of work, church campgrounds, and schools, asking questions about the relationship between faith, gender, and culture in their richly diverse experiences. They shared liberally with a spirit of generosity and openness.

In the following dissertation, these women's words introduce each chapter and highlight some of the central concerns I address in relation to literature by Linda Hogan (Chickasaw), Louise Erdrich (Ojibwe), Diane Glancy (Cherokee), and Joy Harjo (Creek). I showcase excerpts from the interviews in this writing project in recognition that only Native American voices can adequately frame an understanding of Native American writing. In *Red on Red*, Craig Womack writes that "Native perspectives have to do with allowing Indian people to speak for

² The interview study, "Female Native American Perspectives on Christianity," was approved by the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board (IRB). All participants signed a consent form that described the study and its purposes. The IRB recommended that I promise anonymity to each of the women in order to minimize any risk they might face in discussing their beliefs. Many of the women and I myself find the need for such anonymity frustrating though certainly understandable. Several of them expressed disappointment at not having their real names used in the project because efforts to preserve Native American culture rely in part on acknowledging and celebrating individuals in the Native American community.

themselves . . . with prioritizing Native voices” (4). In this dissertation, I prioritize the voices of Mary, Sarah, Anna, Lynn, and Josie who have taught me how to approach cross-cultural research with humility. I learned far more from them than I can recount in the present study. I learned that relationship infuses research with humility, meaning, and empathy. I learned that American Indian women have volumes to speak but are underrepresented in contemporary print culture and academia. I learned that they want to be visible so that lives and histories of American Indian people are no longer omitted from educational, social, political, and historical narratives. I learned that they welcome relationship with individuals outside their cultural communities, that they have generous hearts full of love and hospitality, and that they are strong in the midst of inconceivable challenges. I dedicate this dissertation to these women.

The Native American Renaissance of the 1970s and 1980s³ created a web of American Indian voices interpreting the past, indicting America’s imperialism alongside Christianity for its participation in conquest, and renegotiating the cultural possibilities and losses resulting from colonial takeover. This dissertation will focus on four contemporary female Native American authors. Leslie Marmon Silko, a giant in the Native American literary community, is conspicuously though strategically absent from this study primarily because she is so widely known for her representations of Christianity. She features Christianity prominently in multiple texts, especially her novels *Ceremony* and *Garden in the Dunes*. I chose to focus instead on well-known authors who do not often receive attention for their portrayals of Christianity either

³ In the introduction to his book-length study, *Native American Renaissance*, Kenneth Lincoln traces the attention paid to “native’ ways and words” in American literature (4). After acknowledging the interest of many modernist writers in indigenous American voices, Lincoln describes the post-World War II generation of Native American authors as existing “outside the great traditions of Western literature” and as influenced by “non-Indian modernists [who] had been discovering native art forms” (7). He calls the ensuing Native American Renaissance “a written renewal of oral traditions translated into Western literary forms” (8). He dedicates the rest of his book to understanding the rise and flourishing of American Indian writing that culminated in the Renaissance of the 1970s and early 1980s (9).

because they publicly oppose it (like Hogan and Harjo) or because their identification with it is unusually strong and therefore off-putting for certain communities (as is the case with Glancy). I also wanted to feature authors who are the subject of scholarly controversy since such controversy sometimes marginalizes the writers at the center of it. For instance, scholars widely disagree about the degree to which Erdrich accepts or rejects Christianity, making her the sometimes recipient of stern critique from within her community of Native American writers.

This dissertation examines the capacity of literature to negotiate reconciliation in the midst of cultural and religious conflict. On Thursday, July 9, 2015 Pope Francis “apologized for the sins and crimes of the Catholic Church against the continent’s indigenous peoples during the colonial conquest of the Americas” (Winfield and Bajak). Though the Pope referred specifically to the continent of South America, his remarks were circulated widely in US social media outlets and welcomed around the world as a step toward healing in the centuries-long tension between Christianity and indigenous populations. The literature I feature in this study records moments of cultural transformation as Native Americans resist and/or adopt Christianity. I focus on the often tense and ambiguous representations of Christianity in American Indian writing alongside explorations of its integration into contemporary Native America. This dissertation seeks to address the role literature can and does play in performing reconciliation in the midst of cultural and religious conflict between Protestant and Catholic churches and the indigenous people of the United States. I examine how Linda Hogan, Louise Erdrich, Diane Glancy, and Joy Harjo engage in or resist cross-cultural reconciliation in the wake of Christianity’s involvement in colonization and assimilation, ultimately arguing that imaginative writing makes space for dialogues of reconciliation that are otherwise stifled in the midst of complex and historically tense cultural and socioeconomic circumstances.

The theoretical framework of reconciliation that I reference frequently in this study builds upon the ideas of Native American attorney and activist Walter Echo-Hawk. His *In the Light of Justice: The Rise of Human Rights in Native America* calls for reconciliation in the wake of “raw conquest and its nasty little brother, colonialism” which resulted in “the theft of a nation, systematic appropriation of lands belonging to others, and outright subjugation” (263). Echo-Hawk focuses his book on examining the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and he proposes concrete steps toward holding America accountable to the declaration. His reconciliation model grows out of what Echo-Hawk calls “a framework for healing historical wrongs” based on “principles for healing human misery” developed by “our ancestors” over the course of centuries (250). He relies on “wisdom traditions” and “world religions” that collectively emphasize “mercy, compassion, absolution, amnesty, clemency, restitution, and restorative justice” (260). Though he encourages the application of this framework in a political context, his model of reconciliation is applicable in the present study which is concerned with literary responses to Christianity’s involvement in the “human misery” brought by colonization. Echo-Hawk asserts that “national soul-searching through discourse can alleviate the psychological barrier” that prevents the United States from changing policies that perpetuate injustice against indigenous people (258). Authors have the ability to help shape such discourse. This dissertation focuses upon each of the five steps of reconciliation detailed by Echo-Hawk and examines how Hogan, Erdrich, Glancy, and Harjo engage in this paradigm. The five steps are 1. acknowledgment of wrongdoing underpinned by “honesty and truth telling,” 2. sincere apology, 3. forgiveness, 4. atonement, and 5. Healing and reconciliation based on building community (265-270).⁴

⁴ Kateri Mitchell echoes Echo-Hawk’s emphasis on restoration through community building when she writes about the role community plays in American Indian Christian practice: “it is through the life within a community that one

Echo-Hawk's model of reconciliation is multi-vocal, relying on principles supported by various religions and borrowing heavily from Nelson Mandela's and Archbishop Desmond Tutu's work with the reconciliation commission in South Africa. Tutu explains in the wake of South African apartheid that "unless you deal with the past in a creative and positive manner, then you run into the terrible risk of having no future worth speaking of" (quoted in Echo-Hawk 262). Tutu continues, justice that leads to healing "seeks to rehabilitate both the victim and perpetrator, who should be given the opportunity to be integrated into the community he or she has injured by his or her offense" (262). This construction of community manifests in a variety of ways throughout contemporary Native American literature. Hogan focuses on strengthening communities within Native America; Erdrich explores the possibilities and pitfalls of community building between American Indians and Catholic German-Americans; Glancy creates community by giving voice to both Native Americans and non-Native Christians who have been silenced in the past; and Harjo calls for an expansive community that grows across cultural and religious boundaries and results in enemies becoming family members.

Contemporary Native American fiction and poetry by women participates in "restorative justice" by transforming the relationship between Christianity and Native America. According to Echo-Hawk, "restorative justice" involves "restructuring relationships that gave rise to indigenous grievances and addressing root problems that led to the systematic abuse of their rights" (11). This dissertation uses Echo-Hawk's reconciliation process as a starting point, demonstrating that each author's literature enacts one or more parts of that process and paying particular attention to how both Linda Hogan and Joy Harjo outline models for reconciliation

learns to believe and to experience the depth and sacredness of life, given as a gift by our Creator. Thus, faith is lived and gifted through our relationships. To really experience life is to be in harmony with our God and one another, with our extended family and our community, with nature and the whole of creation" (172-73).

that showcase the need for harmony between humans and nature. I argue that texts by Hogan, Erdrich, Glancy, and Harjo are representative of how the body of Native American literature is simultaneously performing all steps of the reconciliation process without requiring any one author to perform the entire process herself. This is a communal act of reconciliation. In keeping with this sense of community, this study seeks to embrace the practice of being multi-vocal, striving to recognize the value of American Indian traditionalist, Native American Christian, and Christian non-Native voices.

The reconciliation process Echo-Hawk identifies is mutual. Community building requires both the perpetrator and the victim to take steps toward healing. As both a white woman of European descent and a practicing Christian, I embark on this project in search of forgiveness for the injustices committed by groups to which I belong and in search of mutually beneficial relationship with members of the Native American community, recognizing that we are all part of the same human family and will thrive increasingly as we learn to live in harmony, respect, compassion, and understanding. As both a scholar and a member of the offending community, I play a dual role in this project as observer and participant. I position myself as witness to an ongoing conversation among Native American writers, and I seek to participate in reconciliation by avoiding the reproduction of harmful power dynamics between researcher and research subject that have plagued the American Indian community for so long. I do this primarily by grounding my research in relationship and by positioning myself as a learner and listener.

Chapter one of the dissertation focuses on Chickasaw novelist Linda Hogan. Hogan's voice stands out as one of truth teller, direct, unforgiving, and painfully transparent. She offers no forgiveness or compromise for the Christians who so often colonized while proselytizing. While Hogan's animosity toward Christianity manifests across her texts, especially *Mean Spirit* (1990)

and *Dwellings* (1995), I argue that its expression performs the first step in Echo-Hawk's reconciliation: Hogan indicts Christianity for its role in perpetuating injustices against Native Americans. In Christianity's stead, Hogan articulates a paradigm of reconciliation based on a Native American land ethic. She expresses this clearly in *The Woman Who Watches Over the World* (2001) and puts it into action in *Solar Storms* (1995). My intention is not to suggest that Hogan's work is somehow incomplete because it focuses on the first step in Echo-Hawk's process. On the contrary, Hogan and Echo-Hawk appear to have different aims. Whereas Echo-Hawk seeks "restorative justice" that results in perpetrator and victim engaging in mutually beneficial relationship with one another (259), Hogan's reconciliation is focused on recuperating the indigenous community and maintaining/reviving its own particular cultural and spiritual worldviews. Even within Echo-Hawk's model, however, Hogan's indictment of mainstream America is essential. Echo-Hawk notes the pervasive "complacency, inaction, and inattention" to injustices against Native Americans (251). Without indictment, without recognizing and recording that wrong has occurred, the rest of the reconciliation process is stalled. For example, step two, sincere apology, is impossible without "truth-telling about the injustice inflicted upon the victim" (265). Ideally, such acknowledgment should come from the perpetrator of harm. Hogan, a member of an oppressed community, speaks into the void, naming the wrong doing and holding white mainstream America, and Christians with it, responsible. The work of Hogan and other writers who indict imperial America opens the door for healing to occur. In this exploration of Hogan's work, I also identify themes that appear throughout the dissertation including the importance of story and imagination in shaping the future, the centrality of land in negotiations with Christianity, and the role writing plays in articulating multiethnic identities. This is the chapter in which I also begin to foreground gender, though it takes center stage especially in the

chapters on Erdrich and Glancy.

Chapter two explores what results as Louise Erdrich plants her narrative firmly within two cultural and religious centers, an Ojibwe reservation and the Catholic Church. Through her exploration, in *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little Horse* (2001), of a German-American outsider, a woman named Agnes who disguises herself as a male Catholic priest, Erdrich soundly critiques the church for its sexism and racism while flirting with the possibility that healing and love can overpower cultural and religious boundaries. In this chapter, I consider the role gender plays alongside religion in complicating and mediating cultural interactions, and I closely examine the role imagination, in the form of dreaming, plays in negotiating such interactions. Erdrich visits all five steps in Echo-Hawk's reconciliation, emphasizing indictment, apology, and forgiveness. The fact that she visits all five steps does not make Erdrich's work more complete than Hogan's. The two authors have different aims. While *Solar Storms* and *Mean Spirit* appear to be concerned with the survivance of and healing within exclusively Native American communities, Erdrich's texts, and for that matter texts by Glancy and Harjo as well, consistently explore cross-cultural relationships between Native Americans and Euro-Americans making them more likely candidates for enacting multiple facets of Echo-Hawk's model.

Chapter three focuses on Cherokee author Diane Glancy, an outspoken Christian determined to convince readers that Christian and Native do not need to be mutually exclusive identities. Positing that story has the power to transform the future, Glancy moves toward healing by voicing her own story of cultural conflict, writing in *Claiming Breath* (1992) about living "between two heritages" (4) and wanting to experience relationship with Christ while being fully Native American. Glancy acknowledges wrong in *The Only Piece of Furniture in the House* (1996), where she records both the hope and despair experienced especially by women when

Christianity is paired with oppression. In this text she also uncovers the oppression experienced in minority populations regardless of whether or not they are American Indian. In *The Reason for Crows* (2009) she continues her critique of sexism in the church while enacting atonement and community building by giving voice to Kateri Tekakwitha, a 17th century Mohawk convert who was recently canonized by the Catholic Church.

Chapter four examines the work of Muscogee Creek poet Joy Harjo. Like Hogan, she openly criticizes Christianity, exploring in her memoir *Crazy Brave* (2013) her early attraction to Jesus and eventual break with the church because of racism and sexism. I argue that her poetry enacts the community building Echo-Hawk identifies as reconciliation's goal. She collapses distinctions between victim and aggressor, writing about victims who desire revenge but who choose to love their enemies by incorporating them into their communities. She demonstrates a shared value between Muscogee culture and Christianity when she emphasizes the transformative power of loving one's enemies. Harjo identifies "story" as the catalyst for this love, showcasing how literature can offer creative responses to Christianity's involvement in colonial takeover while celebrating distinctly Native American perspectives.

Story takes center stage throughout the entire dissertation. All four authors acknowledge and harness the power of words to transform reality. They draw on ideas articulated by N. Scott Momaday in his 1997 essay collection *The Man Made of Words*. Momaday writes that the imagination "enables us to use language to its highest potential. It enables us to realize the reality beyond the ordinary, it enables us to create and to re-create ourselves in story and literature" (Preface 2). Momaday writes about the intimate connection between words and land in "An American Land Ethic." He explains that words play an essential role in "realiz[ing]" present and past identities and experiences that are carried by the land (48). This "racial memory," this

history to which all Native Americans have access through the land, “must at last [be] deal[t] with . . . in words” (49). It must be storied into existence; it must contribute to “an understanding of the whole universe” (49), an understanding that “maintain[s] our humanity” (47). Storytellers are the ones who engage this process of realization, or articulation between the land and people. Momaday writes about how the storyteller uses words to craft "realities lived and believed" and in doing so, "creates the storytelling experience and himself and his audience in the process" (Preface 3). This creation and re-creation undergirds contemporary Native American efforts to articulate cultural identities in the wake of and in the midst of colonial conflict. Momaday's ideas are echoed throughout this study. Linda Hogan showcases the role of the storyteller in translating messages from the earth. Louise Erdrich features a protagonist who asserts her controversial cross-cultural identity through spoken and written words. Diane Glancy writes about fashioning a new reality out of language, one that gives voice to Native Americans and Christians whose stories are carried by the land. And Joy Harjo writes poetry about people who take their cue from the land, responding to tragedy by focusing on rebirth and reconciliation.

The tension between Christianity and Native American cultures, exacerbated not just by ongoing colonial conflict but also by Christianity's emphasis on a hierarchical relationship between humans and land, is widely represented in contemporary literature and produces a conundrum for American Indians who do identify as Christian. Three out of the four authors represented in this project do not identify as Christian and the one that does, Diane Glancy, meets continual resistance to her faith in part because of her Native American heritage. In his introduction to *Native and Christian*, James Treat identifies “ongoing debate among Native Christians over the nature of religious identity” (3). Treat writes, “a variety of complex and interconnected historical, social, and cultural factors have quieted Native Christians in many

tribal and religious contexts and have made it particularly difficult for Native Christian women to publish their spiritual convictions” (3). Glancy notes that the publishing industry has been unwelcoming, rejecting her work that is openly Christian (“Walk-in-2-Worlds” 114). Treat recognizes that often the terms “Native” and “Christian” are considered exclusive of one another by Native American traditionalists and by mainstream Americans who view American Indian culture as pagan. At best, the two identities are “ambiguous and contested” (2). In Treat’s book-length study, he presents “Native Christian narrative discourse” comprised of reflections on faith written by American Indian Christians, showcasing what he calls “a hallmark of patient persistence and a herald of spiritual healing” (22). While the purpose of this dissertation is to illuminate ongoing dialogues, whether critical, revisionary, or celebratory, between American Indian cultures and Christianity, one additional impulse of the project is to pay attention to the Native Christian voices that are often marginalized from academic and popular discourse. I do this in two ways, first by featuring an entire chapter on Cherokee Christian writer Diane Glancy and second by featuring several Christian American Indian voices in the interview excerpts that preface each chapter. At the risk of sounding missional, I want to chip away at the absence of academic discourse about Christianity in contemporary Native America, not to proselytize but to illuminate dialogues that are already happening, often without notice.

Significantly, because of Glancy’s outspoken Christianity and also because of some distance between her family and the Cherokee experiences on the Trail of Tears and in Indian Territory (“Walk-in-2-Worlds” 110-111), Glancy writes from a position of marginalization within Native America. This might disqualify her in the eyes of some from calling for reconciliation between these two communities. However, all four authors featured here represent multiethnic perspectives. Each one of them grapples with what it means to belong not just to the Native

American community but to communities of European origin as well. Each writer speaks from a particular political, cultural, and religious perspective. I have deliberately chosen to feature authors with varied viewpoints, most notably the polar opposites of Hogan who both critiques and dismisses the church and Glancy who belongs to it to. For each writer, I consider her own perspectives on identity and the relationship between Native American culture and Christianity while recognizing that texts do not always speak in concert with their authors. Hogan, Erdrich, Glancy, and Harjo all produce literature that participates not necessarily in the entirety of reconciliation but in a portion of that process, sometimes because of and other times in spite of the author's own sociopolitical positioning.

*

In contemporary Native American literature, Christianity is the subject of controversy, shadowed continually by its association with colonization. Karsten Fitz notes that literary criticism has largely neglected negotiations between Christianity and Native American traditional religions in spite of the fact that American Indian authors frequently foreground such negotiations in their fiction and poetry (1). Sandy Grande cites “Western Christianity [’s]” role in “underwrit[ing]” colonization especially in the Native American context (124) as the major factor in the resistance to discourse about Christianity in relation to American Indians today. Carol Berg notes that the American government often relied on Protestant missionaries to engage Native Americans in the destructive process of assimilation, encouraging religious conversion as a way to strip American Indians of their unique social and cultural practices (161). Both Protestant and Catholic missionaries participated often ruthlessly in assimilation. Lakota/Sioux and Ogallala theologian Richard Twiss writes that “the majority of these missionaries denounced

and demonized Native cultural ways, part and parcel, as pagan, idolatrous, evil and sinful” (23). Twiss argues that “perhaps the most devastating blow to the lives of Native Americans was the forced removal of thousands of their children from their homes, the goal being assimilation into American or Canadian society” (24). The boarding schools into which the children were forced often led to children experiencing “nervous breakdowns as a result of various abuses” (24). Twiss contends that the negative impact of boarding schools persists through generations resulting in alarmingly high suicide rates among present day American Indian youths (24). Paula Gunn Allen, in *Spider Woman’s Granddaughters*, describes how Native American life is situated in the context of tragedy: “We are contemporary because we survive in the face of a brutal Holocaust that seeks to wipe us out, and our context is as much historical as it is tribal” (2). I seek to take nothing away from this context by writing about Christianity in relation to American Indians. I do not force Native American texts into dialogue with Christianity; instead, I illuminate a tense conversation that has already begun.

Following such a dark history, efforts toward reconciliation between Christianity and Native Americans are continually fraught with controversy. This study explores a spectrum of approaches to the Christian faith. Native American traditionalists often harshly critique Christianity as a threat to American Indian cultural preservation. For many, missionaries so completely associated Christianity with European white culture that this connection persists. Many or most traditionalists were exposed to Christianity early in life and have since embraced in its stead the land-based American Indian worldview independent of Protestant or Catholic doctrines. One impulse among American Indian intellectuals has been to explore the mixture of Christian belief and Native American spirituality, testing out the pitfalls and sometimes benefits of cross-cultural lifestyles. On the other hand, a surprisingly significant number of contemporary

Native Americans practice Christianity. A small group of scholars is working on studies that illuminate the transformation of Christianity into an indigenous American religion and the robust church planting practices engaged in by American Indian pastors and lay leaders. These Native American Christians face difficult questions as they pursue their faith because of Christianity's dark involvement in colonization. Still others reject the institutional church but embrace the teachings of Jesus, many of which resonate with Native American beliefs. Significantly, all of the authors represented in this study engage Christianity while asserting their individual cultural identities, not allowing their Native American heritage to be overshadowed by French, German, or English ancestry or by any hint of the belief in European American cultural superiority so often associated with Christianity.

Why even pursue reconciliation when Western culture and Christians have done so much harm? The postcolonial contact zone in which Native American cultures and religions were decimated by institutions that practiced the superiority of Western European ways is now the site of a messy struggle for survival. While Hogan locates hope of survival in return to an entirely indigenous worldview, literature produced by Erdrich, Glancy, and Harjo suggests that survival depends in large part on movement toward reconciliation that recognizes the vitality and dignity of Native American cultures while building bridges of healthy communication and even relationship with the populations and cultures of Euro-Americans that are inextricably intertwined with contemporary Native American life. In addition, the existence of a sizable American Indian Christian community⁵ is one reason why dialoguing about coexistence of American Indian and Christian traditions matters. Furthermore, the prevalent impulse among

⁵ For example, the Oklahoma Historical Society's *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture* records 7200 members in the Methodist Oklahoma Indian mission conference in the year 2000 and notes that while "Baptist and Methodist congregations outnumbered the rest of the field, . . . There were sizable numbers of Catholics and a growing number of Pentecostals as well" ("American Indians and Christianity").

mainstream Americans to view Native Americans as “frozen in time” or culturally “pure” often leads to misunderstanding of the spiritually complex landscape among American Indians. Rather than seeing Christianity and Native American spirituality as only and always mutually exclusive, this dissertation seeks to acknowledge the coexistence and co-mingling of such traditions.

The contemporary Native American Christian community is significant but in many ways invisible, since Native and Christian are often considered oppositional identities and the combining of the two can signal cultural compromise. Among the Cherokee alone, Glancy estimates that at least 60% of the Nation’s current population is Christian, while one member of the Association of Studies in American Indian Literatures places the number as high as 90% (Donohue “Question”). Even with the complicity of the church in forced assimilation, land theft, kidnapping, and more, Twiss argues that “in our day, one should be able to take for granted that Christianity is not just the religion of white people” (64). Quoting theologian Tite Tienou, Twiss explains that “Christian faith . . . is at home in a multiplicity of cultures, without being permanently wedded to any one of them” (qtd. in Twiss 64). This is one of the factors that explains how numerous Native American communities in the contemporary United States practice Christianity not as a religion bequeathed to them by colonizers, but as a system of belief that resonates with their own cultural backgrounds and internal sense of spiritual realities. Kateri Mitchell asserts that recognizing the distinctness of Native American Christianity is vital. She writes, “the total expression of who we are as individuals and as members of a given Indian tribe, nation, or clan creates a religious experience unique to us as Indian people” (171). Simultaneously, the reality of Christian practice among American Indians involves a multiplicity of religious expressions, doctrinal beliefs, and culturally inflected spiritual practices. Apache Methodists, Cherokee Baptists, and Menominee Catholics are all distinct from one another. No

one group has the corner on what Native Americans “should” believe. Recognizing the complexity of American Indian spirituality is a vital part of recognizing the agency of each Native American to believe and practice his or her own distinct worldview.

All too often, because so many Native and non-Native Americans view Christianity as Western, they are unable to see it as an American Indian religion. This association with Western culture is based on the failure, for centuries, of Euro-Americans to culturally contextualize Christianity. Scot McKnight explains that “Euro-American scholars, ministers and lay folk . . . have, over the centuries, used their economic, academic, religious and political dominance to create the illusion that the Bible, read through their experience, is the Bible read correctly” (qtd. in Twiss 61). This results, for example, in many contemporary American Indians still associating Christianity with patriarchal hierarchy in spite of the matriarchal nature of many Native American cultures. It also causes an attitude of suspicion and caution about the incorporation of Native American customs into church services, especially the Catholic Mass. For example, the Church of Gichitwaa Kateri in Minneapolis, Minnesota has long incorporated “traditional Indian elements” like “buffalo hide,” “sage,” and “Ojibwe and Lakota languages” into their services (French). In 2010, mass was “temporarily suspended” by the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis when “conflict arose over the use of specialized wine” (French). Simultaneous to this conflict, Pope Benedict had “called for renewed emphasis on tradition and uniformity in the Catholic Church” leaving parishioners at Gichitwaa Kateri concerned that their own tension would result in the loss of “Indian practices” (French). Such anxiety is indicative of tensions within the Christian community over the integration of culture into spiritual practice. Among the women I interviewed, a number of them who wanted to practice Christianity described having to disobey parents who advised them to steer clear of the religion because they viewed it as a

Western system that threatened Native American culture. Cultural contextualization, had it been practiced by the early missionaries, would have led to a full incorporation of Christian belief within Native American cultural practices. For centuries, Christianity has been adopted into a multitude of cultures because its central tenets do not rely on any particular cultural orientation. Richard Twiss was part of the contemporary movement to decolonize Christianity and embrace it as a fully Native American, not Western European, religion.

The specter of colonization still does haunt many Native American Christian communities largely because of a lack of cultural contextualization, an unfortunate trend initiated by Euro-Americans and sometimes even perpetuated by indigenous ministers trained in the Euro-American system. An American Indian who is also a Christian must not only grapple with historical Christianity's involvement in colonization but also with the remnants of colonial thinking in the contemporary church. For decades, Christianity was taught to Native Americans as part of European culture. Young American Indian children were often forced to worship in English and follow a white Jesus. Their cultural traditions and languages were barred from church services even under Native American pastoral leadership. Twiss explains that after a missionary establishes a church, “there may be a Native pastor in charge” but if that pastor was trained to practice Christianity only in a European American context, then that context is what the pastor perpetuates (52). In Twiss’s words, “if it looks white, sounds white and behaves white, it’s probably the ‘white man’s religion’” (53). Because Christianity was and still often is so firmly linked to Western white culture, “an authentic Native American cultural or Indigenous expression of following Jesus was never allowed to develop – the very idea being rejected as syncretistic and incongruent with ‘biblical’ faith” (23). In *Rescuing the Gospel from the Cowboys* Twiss records and celebrates “decolonization” and “retraditionalization” efforts within the

contemporary Native American Christian community (15). In recent decades, many indigenous churches have become a site of resistance and cultural revitalization, incorporating Native languages and customs into worship services. For example, each year at the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference, song leaders from churches around the state lead conference attendees in singing Native American hymns in Cherokee, Creek, Comanche and other languages. This dissertation highlights literature in which tension between Native American cultures and Christianity persists in large part because indigenous cultural contextualization is not yet widespread and Christianity is still associated with Western European culture.

Because of Christianity's controversial status both in the past and present among Native Americans, and particularly among American Indian writers, very little scholarship examining the relationship between the two has been produced. The involvement of Christianity in colonization is recognized in history books and studies of boarding schools, and early Native American writing, much of which is Christian, is frequently anthologized. But book-length studies on Christianity in contemporary Native American literature are nonexistent with the exception of *The Salt Companion to Diane Glancy* edited by James MacKay. Substantial analyses of Christianity in Native America in general are few but significant. I have already mentioned James Treat's *Native and Christian* in which Treat examines the complexities of identifying with both groups, and Richard Twiss's *Rescuing the Gospel from the Cowboys* in which Twiss showcases decolonization efforts within the present-day American Indian church. A third sustained study is Andrea Smith's *Native Americans and the Christian Right: The Gendered Politics of Unlikely Alliances*. Smith explores the possibility that "so-called identity politics [can] be reconceptualized as alliance politics" (xi). All too often, Smith asserts, Native American activists are misunderstood as only representing cultural concerns and Christians are

misunderstood as only ever following the Republican party line (x). Her book explores existing and potential alliances between the Christian Right and Native American activist groups, exposing the assumptions that make these parties seem irreconcilable and the common values that make them partners (xi).

Hogan, Erdrich, and Harjo have all been the subject of much scholarly attention, and academic interest in Glancy has recently begun to increase. Hogan's work attracts studies on Native American approaches to land, the devastating effects of capitalism on Native American communities, and the brokenness and healing experienced by American Indian women. Much of the criticism written in response to Erdrich's fiction centers on her portrayals of multiethnic encounters and gender identity. Her works that imagine the coexistence of Catholicism and Ojibwe spirituality have stirred up significant controversy, many scholars asserting that Erdrich does not critique Westernized Christianity harshly enough. Joy Harjo is widely studied with scholars focusing on transformation, ethnic identity, land, women, spirituality, and the connection between poetry and music. She is perhaps the most interviewed of all four authors, and these interviews provide a rich body of commentary on her poetry. Both Harjo and Glancy are known for experimenting with genre, challenging Western definitions that identify genres as distinct from one another. For example, Harjo writes poems that are also songs and Glancy writes creative nonfiction essays that are also poems. While Glancy is widely published, scholarship on her writing is minimal compared to the attention given these other authors. With the exception of James Mackay's book length study which analyzes Glancy's interactions with Christianity, most articles focus on the author's award-winning book about the trail of tears, *Pushing the Bear*, and her work as a playwright.

My dissertation adds to these discussions by developing a full-length study of

Christianity in Native American literature that makes distinctive use of ethnographic practices in order to foreground Native American female voices. Through this foregrounding, I endeavor to “speak with” rather than “speak for others,” a distinction encouraged by Linda Alcoff in “The Problem of Speaking for Others.” According to Alcoff, “speaking for” an ethnic or racial minority undermines the autonomy and authoritative voice of that group. However, “speaking with” incites dialogue during which the other “challenges and subverts” existing power dynamics between themselves and the researcher (Part 2). I incorporate both the reconciliation paradigm outlined by Walter Echo-Hawk and the interviews with Mary, Sarah, Anna, Lynn, and Josie to provide a structure for “speaking with.” In addition, a full-length interview I conducted with Diane Glancy serves as the foundational research for chapter three.

Honoring the principle of “speaking with” has led me into a new commitment to research anchored in relationship. Relationship fosters mutual exchange, compassion, and empathy, working against the unhealthy power dynamics implicit in the colonial system. I have been changed by the individuals I have met throughout the course of this project and thank them for helping me see with new eyes. In fact, this entire project had its genesis in relationship. I met Joy Harjo for the first time in the spring of 2007. I was employed as a visiting instructor at Lebanon Valley College and was in charge of bringing an author to campus for classroom visits and a reading. I had encountered Harjo’s poetry not long before that and found in it language that resonated with my own spiritual and emotional journey. She stayed on campus only two days but made a remarkable imprint on my life evidenced in part by this dissertation. Harjo emboldened me to learn from those different from myself and approach life as a seeker, looking always for the presence of God, choosing love and life at all times, and deeply valuing relationship. I am particularly struck by the image in my mind of Harjo interacting with my mother, autographing a

photograph for her, and honoring her with respect and kindness. My mother was ill at the time and would pass away four years following on which occasion Harjo sent me kind words of condolence and understanding. I am deeply grateful for the intersections, however brief they have been, between Joy Harjo's path and my own. I have the pleasure of studying the words of the very poet who inspired my pursuit of diversity, reconciliation, and understanding.

I approach the subject of this study as a learner and listener. Alcoff notes that the desire to speak, when experienced by a person in a position of power, can indicate a desire for "mastery and domination" (Part III). I aim to avoid such a takeover. I know I am not immune to the hierarchical structure of discourse and do not purport to avoid it perfectly and completely. I understand my own culturally programmed tendency to see myself as a carrier of knowledge, but I approach my work with the desire to be changed by it. Adopting the stance of speaking with rather than speaking for contemporary Native Americans, I position myself as a witness to an ongoing dialogue between Native Americans and Caucasians, both Christian and non-Christian among each group. I intend to draw out the strands of this dialogue, observing it candidly from the position of an outsider. After I interviewed her, Glancy commented that being an outsider is not always a bad thing. It affords a perspective that is not possible from within. So armed with her affirmation of my desire to engage in this dialogue as a non-Native witness and armed with Alcoff's careful attention to the practice of speaking with others, I begin this study of Christianity in contemporary Native American literature.

Chapter 1

“When I was growing up you had no choice, really. You were either Christian or atheist . . . I grew up in a family that was Christian, several generations Christian, big church workers. But by the same token, we’re very much aware that we are Indians. I don’t want to say that I was raised in a traditional home. That would not be totally true. But certainly raised in a home where traditional ways were respected, taught, and observed. But with most, I think, basically, with most Indians, it’s never either or . . . We just add Christianity or whatever to the system that we already have and there’s a lot of picking and choosing . . . But the more I observe the Christian church, particularly today, I’m totally disgusted with it. And particularly with the actions of Christians, and especially with what I call this lunatic fringe, right-wing conservative Christianity bullshit, and I refer to them as the Christian Taliban. And I think they’re an embarrassment to the faith – they’ve totally corrupted what was here certainly in the 19th century.”

“So many Christians have traditionally thought that they should dominate nature, not live with it, and that everything is for their pleasure.”

“American Indian history, culture, literature is pretty much hidden. It’s not taught in public schools. It’s not even in your university . . . When you’re looking at a major university and you’re not teaching one American Indian lit course, not even in your English departments, not even in your American lit divisions – this is past barbaric because your most vibrant writers right now are your Natives.”

“I think it’s appalling that the average American doesn’t know shit from Shinola about Indians. And you can quote me there, really. But they don’t. And other than Cherokee and maybe Sioux, I would imagine most Americans can’t even name tribes. On a good day, you might get five, five names. They certainly don’t know history. They do not know their atrocities. But again, you’ve got the same group of Bible thumpers that are so wrapped up in the flag and patriotism and how the guys going to Iraq are defending our freedom, and they haven’t thought through that, apparently can’t. And it’s shameful.”

-Josie, Cherokee

Introduction

Chickasaw writer Linda Hogan identifies the shore of the ocean as a place of continuous transformation, “a place of endings and beginnings, of constant movement and change” (*The Woman Who Watches Over the World* 23). This shore of change, much like Mary Louise Pratt’s “contact zone” where cultures meet one another, is a place of shifting, crushing, eroding, and revealing beliefs and values. Hogan’s work explores contact between Native American and

European-American people and values, exposing the destructive impact of Western values on both the land and indigenous people. In *Dwellings*, Hogan writes that “What we really are searching for is a language that heals this relationship” between humans and nature by taking “the side of the amazing and fragile life on our life-giving earth” (59). She also identifies the strength of language to facilitate human relationship: “Without language, we humans have no way of knowing what lies beneath the surface of one another” (57). As she articulates a Native American model for reconciliation and healing that depends upon the connectedness of humans and nature, Hogan soundly indicts Christianity for its participation in colonization of both Native Americans and the earth.

In performing this indictment, Hogan’s work aligns with the first step in Walter Echo-Hawk’s paradigm of reconciliation, naming the wrong that has been committed. She does this throughout a variety of genres, three of which are featured in this chapter: memoir, creative nonfiction, and novels.⁶ In *The Woman Who Watches Over the World* (2001, memoir) and *Dwellings* (2007, creative nonfiction) Hogan records the devastating loss experienced in the wake of colonization, identifies the role of Christianity in the life of her family, and articulates an indigenous model of reconciliation based on harmony between people and the land. The novel *Mean Spirit* (1990) contrasts this indigenous model sharply with Western⁷ American ideologies that devalue both humans and nature. Throughout *Mean Spirit* Hogan articulates strong critique of the church while positioning her American Indian worldview in the context of a westernized American Christian society. At the close of the novel, she posits a way forward that accepts the

⁶ While I focus on her fiction and nonfiction, Hogan is poet, novelist, and performer. Her most recent piece, *Indios* (2012), combines poetry with performance and her newest collection of poetry, *Rounding the Human Corners* (2008), was nominated for a Pulitzer.

⁷ I use the term “Western” to indicate the influx of European cultures, systems, and beliefs that early (and unfortunately many contemporary) Americans believe to be superior to Native American ways.

influences of Christianity and revises the teachings of that religious system. In the novel *Solar Storms* (1995), Hogan leaves Christianity behind, focusing instead on putting her land ethic into action through Angel, the young female protagonist who learns to be the voice of the earth for the people.

I contend throughout this dissertation that imaginative writing is that language of reconciliation and healing not just between the earth and the people who dwell on it but between historically disparate cultures. Hogan's texts, along with those produced by Louise Erdrich, Diane Glancy, and Joy Harjo are themselves shores of change, contact zones in which multiple ethnic heritages and their accompanying religious traditions encounter one another, and in their responses shift, crush, erode, and reveal.

A significant amount of scholarship has been produced in response to Hogan's writing, especially her novels. *Studies in American Indian Literatures* (SAIL) devoted an entire issue to Hogan in 1994. About *Mean Spirit* in particular, scholars like Eric Gary Anderson⁸ and Andrew Smith⁹ have taken up the topic of survival in the midst of cultural trauma and considerable attention has been paid to the role of nature, particularly the bats in Sorrow Cave, in the novel.¹⁰ Andrea Musher examines the protection of these bats as a watershed act of resistance against oppression and Western values. Of particular interest in this study are Andrea Musher's and Karsten Fitz's readings of Christianity's role as a counterpoint to Native American values in *Mean Spirit*. Academic research on *Solar Storms* focuses on subjects such as economy, nature,

⁸ See "States of Being in the Dark: Removal and Survival in Linda Hogan's *Mean Spirit*" published in *Great Plains Quarterly*.

⁹ See "Hearing Bats and Following Berdache: the Project of Survivance in Linda Hogan's *Mean Spirit*" in *Western American Literature*.

¹⁰ These scholars include Andrea Musher ("Showdown at Sorrow Cave"), Anna Carew-Miller ("Caretaking and the Work of the Text in Linda Hogan's *Mean Spirit*"), and Melani Bleck ("Linda Hogan's Tribal Imperative: Collapsing Space Through 'Living' Tribal Traditions and Nature").

and women¹¹ with a strong showing of scholarship written from an ecofeminist perspective.¹²

Though this chapter considers Hogan within the framework of Echo-Hawk's reconciliation paradigm, Hogan herself does not envision the possibility of significant cross-cultural reconciliation between Native Americans and Euro-Americans. While Erdrich, Glancy, and even Harjo envision the possibility of healing through some level of cross-cultural integration, Hogan is less hopeful. She writes, "I've concluded over the years that the two ways, Native and European, are almost impossible to intertwine, that they are parallel worlds taking place at the same time, bridges only sometimes made, allowing for a meeting place of lives" (*The Woman Who Watches* 27). In spite of the difficulty, these bridges or moments of meeting do occur in some of Hogan's writing. Later in this chapter, I will pay particular attention to these very meeting places that happen infrequently but significantly in *Mean Spirit*. I focus more fully, though, on the development and implementation of Hogan's land-based vision of reconciliation.

The Woman Who Watches Over the World and Dwellings

Hogan's creative nonfiction develops this vision and provides a foundation for reading Native American texts that centralize healing, land, and the imagination. Hogan records both personal and communal suffering related to colonization, explores the implications of a multiethnic heritage, examines her relationship to Christianity, and finally articulates an American Indian worldview reliant on the interconnectedness of people and nature.

¹¹ Scholars addressing these topics include, but are not limited to Desiree Hellegers ("From Poisson Road to Poison Road: Mapping the Toxic Trail of Windigo Capital in Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms*"), Birgit Hans ("Water and Ice: Restoring Balance to the World in Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms*"), Shari Huhndorf ("Mapping by Words: The Politics of Land in Native American Literature"), Jim Tarter ("Dreams of Earth: Place, Multiethnicity, and Environmental Justice in Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms*"), and Carla Lee Verderame ("Traditional Mothers and Contemporary Daughters in Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms*").

¹² See Bethany Fitzpatrick ("My Body, My People, My Land: Healing the Bonds that are Broken in Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms*"), Ellen Arnold ("Through the Mirror: Re-Surfacing and Self-Articulation in Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms*") and Sylvia Schultersmandl ("Fighting for the Mother/Land: An Ecofeminist Reading of Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms*").

In her memoir *The Woman Who Watches Over the World*, Hogan offers a stark, honest, and often didactic record of suffering that finally yields new life after much pain. Hogan records devastating personal losses and meditates on the injustices committed against Native Americans by Europeans. She records the “tragic legacy of Indian boarding schools” (87) along with countless “stories of suffering that . . . were continent-wide” (118). She does this not as a way of dwelling in darkness or morbidity but so that both she and other Native American people can move forward.

Hogan attributes much of the discord between European and Native American cultures to disparate values. In stark contrast to the money oriented greed of the Western world, Hogan notes that settlement resulted in loss of “the people who had believed harmony [not money or land] was the measure of wealth” (*The Woman Who Watches* 63). She explores the contrast between the community and nature-centric values of American Indians and the people-centered money oriented values of Europeans throughout both *The Woman Who Watches Over the World* and her creative nonfiction piece *Dwellings*.

Drawing connections between communal and personal loss, Hogan writes about the tragic history of her own Chickasaw tribe. First noting the impressive beauty of both Chickasaw women and ponies, she mourns that “inside of them was hidden the grief at saying goodbye to our world” when they were removed from their lands (*The Woman Who Watches* 55). She describes the Chickasaw after having traveled on the Trail of Tears:

The horses were gone. The women wept. There were deadly epidemics. The watchers and writers of the time spoke of a changed people. Traveling alongside the Chickasaws were whiskey sellers, thieves, and horse-stealers intent on taking our well-bred, famous horses. We stopped, several times, unable to continue, frustrating the soldiers and American

government. We were broken, almost forever, by grief and betrayal. We didn't even make it to what was to be our own land, but stopped in despair on Choctaw land, which was closer than our own. (56)

The despair resulting from such grief and betrayal has lasting effects. Hogan explains that the imprint of history upon an individual is so deep that “history, like geography, lives in the body and it is marrow-deep” (*The Woman Who Watches* 59). Hogan continues, “Terror, even now, for many of us, is remembered inside us, history present in our cells that came from our ancestor’s cells, from bodies hated, removed, starved, and killed” (59). Such terror is so embodied that it often manifests as physical disease (20). Hogan writes of alcoholism’s role in the aftermath of colonization: “there is a great sadness in the loss of a man to a bottle. Yet it is not an uncommon story in Native America, where there were even greater losses than his, the loss of lives and an entire land, its languages, its theologies and their beauty” (52). Hogan acknowledges that alcohol “is – was – a way of not remembering. It was an escape from the pain of an American history” (54). But pain embodied through multiple generations is ultimately inescapable. The violent rending or “split of cultures . . . has come to dwell in our skin” (20). Writing acts as a way to record these terrors outside the body. Hogan’s memoir, her own personal writing exercise, denies her need to escape the brutal history and turns her instead toward remembering so that healing can happen. Even while she acknowledges the conflict and violence of the last several centuries, she is able to write about recovery: “Fire, like pain, like love, is a power we do not know. Yet from the ashes of each, something will grow” (128). She finds beauty and transformation in the midst of pain and calls her experience of healing “a way of putting life together again . . . As if harmony and balance . . . were the final destination” (180). Writing is Hogan’s “way of putting life together.”

Hogan traces her own personal pain and suffering back to centuries of violent colonization. She writes, “I was a child who had been suicidal for as far back as I could remember, praying each night for death, as if I’d inherited all the wounds of an American history along with a family which hadn’t yet learned to love, touch, or care” (*The Woman Who Watches* 42). In many ways, her “life was shaped by a poverty of the heart, the lack of present love” (43). Still, both Hogan’s personal story and the story of her Chickasaw tribe is one of survival. As a testament to the resilience and perseverance of American Indians, Hogan writes, “I am ordinary and broken, but I know that we, as Native people, are awake and have survived. We have become something” (142). Here she records the connection between the personal and communal, the brokenness of the one but the survival of the many.

Hogan explores a different kind of suffering, one made complex by the beauty of culture as she describes her experiences as a multiethnic individual. While her father was Chickasaw, her mother’s family was white, and her maternal grandfather wrote journal entries “about killing buffalo” (*The Woman Who Watches* 119). Her mixed identity places her on both sides of the European/Native American conflict. About this she writes, “When I think of these parallel worlds, it’s with the realization that I can obtain blood of both victim and victimizer” (119-120). Throughout her writing, she identifies both the advantages and especially the challenges of this double identity. In an interview with Joseph Bruchac, Hogan describes her ability to “pass for white . . . go to powwows and to the opera with equal ease” (qtd. in *Indigenous American Women* by Mihesuah 107). Hogan continues, “I feel that my life’s been really rich for me, with a lot of different kinds of experience and people and traveling and it’s really good” (107). Such ease is not always the norm for mixed heritage individuals as Hogan and the other writers demonstrate. In *The Woman Who Watches Over the World* Hogan writes about the juxtaposition

of loss and gain resulting from “living in a world of between:”

Not just between cultures as a mixed blood girl . . . But in other ways, too. I’d existed in a middle world between girlhood and womanhood. It wasn’t limbo. It was a life more empty than that. Now I traveled between places, between continents, between lives. This region would become the region I would always seek out, even as an adult, in my work, my interests, my loves. Perhaps ‘between’ was, is, at the root of my very existence. (34)

Hogan identifies both the emptiness and a sense of desire produced by a cross-cultural life. She describes feeling both a lack and a pull toward that space.

Ultimately, though she is rooted in the “between,” she chooses to make her strongest allegiance to her Native American heritage. She explains, “But I also hold that there are forces deeper than blood. It is to these that I look, to the roots of tradition and their growth from ages-old human integrity and knowledge of the world” (120). Hogan identifies intimately with the tragic history of her people and with her grandmother: “I am one of the children who lived inside my grandmother, and was carried, cell, gene, and spirit, within mourners along the Trail of Tears” (12). Though she describes herself as “mixed-blood,” Hogan identifies most strongly with Native Americans: “we come from people who lived in a time when dances, with their central fire, were outlawed, gatherings suspect, languages forbidden” (123). In spite of this oppression, Hogan calls the whole Chickasaw community, and her grandmother individually, as resilient: “however broken or burned to the ground they were, many of us have risen out of the forbidden ways” (123). Hogan solidly anchors her writing, her worldview itself, in Native American cultures.

Perhaps because of this strong allegiance, Hogan has chosen not to adopt the Christianity

her family was introduced to by missionaries. Acknowledging the role Christianity played in her family's past, Hogan writes about her paternal grandmother who was taught by missionaries at an Oklahoma boarding school called Bloomfield Academy (*The Woman Who Watches* 120). Hogan describes this grandmother as "an active churchgoer, practicing the outward shape of Christianity while retaining, I believe, the depth of Indian tradition, a reverence for life, a way of being in the world, a certain calm and clarity" (121). Her grandmother "lived outside the confines of the white world within an older order, holding the fragments of an Indian way" while practicing Christianity (121). Hogan values her grandmother as "the face of survival," stubbornly rejecting "American ways" (121). In her grandmother, Hogan sees the possibility that a person could practice the old ways and Christianity as long as their ultimate allegiance is to Native American culture.

Hogan does acknowledge some early interaction with the Christian faith and even refers to needing it as a girl in crisis. Writing about the difficulty of her preteen years, Hogan describes seeking "refuge in religion. I believed a small childish version of the Bible and God. Religion, as a girl, became my world. It was all I had and I needed it in order to survive" (*The Woman Who Watches* 41). Placing the emphasis on her own actions, Hogan writes, "I used it to save myself. God understood me" (41). Hogan locates salvation not in God but in the individual. She explains, "salvation, itself, is an interesting word. From salvage. That's what heals us, that we salvage for ourselves from the wreckage of the larger life around us, or even from the smaller one inside. It's what humans spend their lives on. It's not so much a choice as it is a destination" (111). As her memoir continues, Hogan increasingly adopts American Indian beliefs and practices in place of Christianity. She writes, for example, about her recovery from a tragic horseback riding accident that left her hospitalized for months and profoundly changed both in mind and body. She credits

her healing to her return “to the Indian world and my own ways” through visions and dreams (173). As she began to regain her awareness she realized that “I was not afraid of the dark. Underneath, there was grace. I saw beautiful things unseen by everyone else around me” (171). Hogan demonstrates both resilience in the midst of trauma, mirroring the resilience of the Chickasaw people, and devotion to Native American culture. Rather than finding hope or meaning in the Christian story, Hogan anchors her spiritual self in “something that comes from a world where lightning and thunder, sun and rain clouds live . . . the mystery of nature and spirit” (*Dwellings* 17). She anchors herself in the earth.

Hogan identifies the disconnect between Western Christian and indigenous worldviews as a root cause of much conflict. She explains that American Indians view “the creator and the creation [as] one” (*Dwellings* 85). She continues, “This land and every life-form is a piece of god, a divine community, with the same forces of creation in plants as in people” (96). That creative force makes nature a source of origins: “For tribal thinkers, the outside world creates the human: we are alive to processes within and without the self . . . Nature is the creator, not the created” (“At One with the World” 155). She goes on to explain that “There exists, too, a geography of spirit that is tied to and comes from the larger geography of nature” (155). In contrast, she cites “the Western belief that God lives apart from earth” as being responsible for “collective destruction” and forgetfulness about “the value of matter, the very thing that soul inhabits” (*Dwellings* 85-86). Hogan faults Western ideologies for making “nature smaller than it is and . . . the human larger” (“At One” 155). Recalling the insights of Charles Eastman of the Santee Sioux, Hogan calls out Christian hypocrisy: “[Eastman] wrote in ‘The Soul of the White Man’ that the new people, the Christians did not live their ‘wonderful conception of exemplary living.’ It appeared, he said, that they were ‘anxious to pass on their religion to all races of men,

but keep very little of it themselves” (qtd. in *The Woman Who Watches* 61). Hogan faults Christians for disrespecting both humans and the earth. Hence, she does not locate the solution to the problem in Christianity because she considers it to be Western and calls instead for a return to the importance of the earth for human healing.

Throughout her memoir, Hogan writes about people longing for healing and attempting to make it possible even though humans are often “powerless” to bring about such transformation on their own (*The Woman Who Watches* 28). The answer, she insists, is an American Indian sensibility about the natural world. Hogan finds her home, her deepest connections, not in “mainstream America” but in “the America that reveres the land, that is attached . . . to where we dwell” (21). She and other Native American peoples “are connected to the land” (21). Hogan continues, “this is what we love about our elders, that they honor us when we care, not when we win, but when we look after the earth and show compassion” (30). Such compassionate concern for the earth and the emphasis on caring over winning stand in sharp contrast to the Western emphasis on land ownership and development and to the institutional church’s complicity in separating Native Americans from the land.

According to Hogan, maintaining respect for and connection to all of nature is one way of facilitating healing from trauma. Writing about a loon suffocating in oil who is then healed by a human caretaker, Hogan says, “Our healing, we both knew, was connected to this other healing, as woman to land, as bird to water. We are together in this, all of this, and it’s our job to love each other, human, animal, and land, the way ocean loves shore, and shore loves and needs the ocean, even if they are different elements” (*The Woman Who Watches* 29). The fate of both humans and the land is interconnected. Hogan writes about her daughter’s journey to “the famous place of the healing earth, near Chimayo” to seek restoration for her family (149). Hogan

contrasts going to the land for healing with going to the “sanctuary or church” (149), calling the earth “the source itself” and the “place of origins” (149). She believes in “a geography of healing” (149), and so much of her writing is environmental, advocating on behalf of the earth and articulating Native American connections to it.

Hogan argues that “spiritual fragmentation” accompanies “ecological destruction,” making the ability to remain harmoniously connected to the earth essential for the survival of both humans and nature (*Dwellings* 52).¹³ In both her memoir and *Dwellings*, Hogan lays the groundwork for her understanding of the spoken and written word’s role in facilitating this connection. She explains that the “voices of the world” bring restoration and healing: “They give us back ourselves, point a direction for salvation” (*Dwellings* 53). Survival then depends upon the individuals gifted with the ability to hear and translate these voices: Hogan identifies these individuals as artists like writers and musicians who speak messages of healing from the earth. She calls them “healers” and “interpreters because they are the ones who are able to hear the world and pass its wisdom along. They are the ones who return to the heart of creation” (50). At the “heart of creation” is a message of new life even in the midst of trauma. Hogan offers this example, “after one group of humans killed another with the explosive power of life’s smallest elements split wide apart, the mountain flowers began to grow. Out of the crumbled, burned buildings they sprouted. Out of destruction and bomb heat and the falling of walls the seeds opened up and grew” (33). She calls this life that grows up in the midst of destruction “a horrible beauty” (33), but beauty nonetheless that the earth’s interpreters translate into words of hope and restoration for the world and its inhabitants.

¹³ In "Native American Women Poets" Jennifer Andrews notes that Hogan directly addresses Christianity and the Bible when she "rewrites Biblical history in *The Book of Medicines* (1993), offering alternatives to Creation, the Fall, and even redemption by connecting to the land and its inhabitants, steps that began a process of healing and displace master narratives of science and history with a commitment to ecological responsibility" (85).

Story and song both play a significant role in this process of translation. In *The Woman Who Watches Over the World*, Hogan asserts that it is “the human condition” to “live by stories” (206).¹⁴ In *Dwellings*, Hogan locates story “at the very crux of healing, at the heart of every ceremony¹⁵ and ritual in the older America” (37). She comments on the importance of sharing or performing stories and songs rather than keeping them private: “A spoken story is larger than one unheard, unsaid. In nearly all creation accounts, words or songs are how the world was created, the animals sung into existence” (21). These art forms, then, both create and restore the world. Hogan locates the ability to rise above the “wreckage” of life in “see[ing] with our inner fire and light” (*The Woman Who Watches* 112) and she affirms that this type of sight, the “opening [of] the eyes,” is “the job of storytellers, witnesses, and the keepers of accounts” (112). She elaborates, “The stories we know and tell are reservoirs of light and fire that brighten and illuminate the darkness of human night, the unseen” (112). The role of the artist, in the case of Hogan, Erdrich, Glancy, and Harjo, is essential for both the survival and the thriving of the natural and human worlds.

According to Hogan, storytelling is embodied, firmly rooted in the physical human body and the land. She writes, “our stories and myths remain because skin isn’t where a person ends.

¹⁴ Kim Mammedaty highlights the importance of story both in her own spiritual journey and in the life of her congregation when she writes, “God was meeting me where I was as a Kia woman in the midst of a living gospel story” (161), and stories “shaped my understanding of the world, of God’s activity in the world” (161). She continues, “the stories of Indian people have a prominent place in the preaching of the Word” (116). Kateri Mitchell explains in more detail the significance of storytelling in Christian Native American communities: “in rhythm with a harmonious beat of our faith life, we celebrate life and gift for the elders – our storytellers and teachers – in our legends, songs, dances, and art” (173). The stories of elders evidence God’s persistent love and protection “from the beginning” (173). The legends passed down through generations “teach us about life and about making choices that help us lead a fuller life, a life of greater harmony” (173).

¹⁵ Hogan describes how ceremony calls everyone’s attention to the connectedness of “all things”; this is “part of healing and restoration,” Hogan writes (*Dwellings* 40). Healing occurs “within ourselves” as “we bring together the fragments of our lives in a sacred act of renewal, and we reestablish our connections with others” (40). Healing takes place in the context of community with the other ceremony goes and with the earth and its inhabitants. Hogan describes the result as an “intimate kinship” with the world (41). Storytelling facilitates this kinship and the healing that accompanies it.

We live not only inside a body but within a story as well, and our story resides in the land” (*The Woman Who Watches* 204). Hogan relates healing for the physical body to the process of both “remembering” and storytelling: “As with outward journeys, the journey to the bones, the organs, the interior, is one a healer or a sick person must take in order to seek a cure, as if following illness back to its origins and remembering the body history as a kind of map or story . . . healers follow and remake the human body” (188). Here the body functions itself as a sort of narrative. Hogan writes, “Sometimes myth is formed by the body and what happens to it, especially in the realm of pain, death, and birth. Phantoms of generations past are in our bodies. These explain us to ourselves” (203). The body is a “sacred habitat” (183), housing the stories that record the past and make the future possible. This habitat is capable of storing narratives that begin long before the life of the individual they inhabit. Hogan explains, “‘I want to tell you my story.’ This is what Indian people say. And our stories do not begin with us as individuals. The story of my daughters began 100 years ago” (*The Woman Who Watches* 78). Stories then remain with people through the passage of time so that the history of colonization lingers in the hearts, minds, and bodies of contemporary Native Americans: “To other Americans, this history [of massacres and removal], if thought of at all, belongs to a far past, but in truth these events are recent and remembered” (79). As a storyteller, one of the earth’s interpreters, Hogan tells of how she “entered the country of the past so the future would hold healing,” so that difficult histories could be addressed and forgiveness could surface (178 – 179). The ability to know oneself and heal relies in part on a person’s attention to their own body and the stories it has recorded.

Hogan also identifies the healing power of dreaming, distinct from but closely related to storytelling as dreams weave together images and narratives while humans sleep. She writes, “Dreams are the creative store that is true wealth. They reside at the human edge of the holy”

(*The Woman Who Watches* 130). Dreams engage the human mind in epic undertakings: “worlds are charted, wounds healed, illnesses reversed” (130). For Hogan, dreams play a significant role in a person’s spiritual development. She writes, “Dreaming articulates . . . the geography of the holy, and draws a path to the divine. It is a map of sorts, one unknown to us by day. Dreaming is the point at which we begin to know” (136). She indicates that many people “follow maps of dreams” (142). Hogan even locates in dreams the possibility for healing in the wake of colonization, “Perhaps dreams and a good heart are the antidote to a poisonous history” (142). They are a form of storytelling, a language participating in bringing healing to humans and the earth.

In her memoir, Hogan explores the role of storytelling in her own personal healing. She identifies both the power of language and the transformative human ability to change stories to bring about newness: “we transform [our histories] into something better, if we can, something beautiful” (*The Woman Who Watches* 111). Hogan does this by telling her own personal story while admitting that “self-telling is rare for a Native woman” (14) perhaps because of the risks associated with story and the precarious position of American Indian women in the context of racism and sexism. While Hogan celebrates the powerful healing story can bring about, she also acknowledges the danger of misinterpretation and misuse. Writing about European misunderstandings of new places, animals, and people, Hogan explains, “in history, stories were changed to accommodate what was familiar, sensational, or desired” and this alteration often resulted in the killing of a species or the apprehension of land from its inhabitants (199). “Self-telling,” then, is dangerous because it releases the stories into a space where listeners can misinterpret and miss-tell them. Even without the dangers of willful or accidental misinterpretation, narratives risk both the storytellers’ and listeners’ increased exposure to pain.

Stories have the ability to “throw down a certain slant of light across the floor each morning, and they throw down, also, its shadow” (*The Woman Who Watches* 114). Writers like Hogan must determine whether the risk is worth it, whether she “should let our lives sit in silence, undisturbed, disappearing, or if I should shake them, search them, and speak them so they are not lost, our lives not passing without meaning, or without telling” (114). At the outset of her memoir, Hogan admits that story itself seems insufficient when the world is so broken: “as humans we’ve thought . . . that if we find a story, tell it well, it will contain a thread out of the dark human labyrinth into light and wholeness. . . But when the world itself is sick, there are no stories and there is no place to retreat” (20). Storytelling, then, involves perseverance, courage, and discernment. Ultimately Hogan decides that it is worth the risk. With vulnerability, she reveals her own life story, putting her hope in “memory [as] a field of healing that has the capacity to restore the world” (15). She constantly asserts that while “all the elements of ourselves and our world are more than can be held in words alone” there is “power” in storytelling through both spoken and written word (16).

Telling her own story means recounting Hogan’s early disconnect from language. When she was a child she “was at a loss for words” (*The Woman Who Watches* 36). “Silence had been my way of being,” she explains: “I had a fear of speaking, and it had been a problem in school” (36). This was a shared experience. As part of cultural genocide, “Native languages . . . were forbidden and changed, spiritual traditions banned” (60), leading to the silencing of many Native American children who were separated from their languages at boarding school or at home because parents feared their children would not succeed in the world without knowing English. During her own childhood, Hogan was immersed in silence: “I first grew into my remembered life in a house without words, and as a child, I became wordless outside of home” (92). She

continues, “It wasn’t the kind of quiet I would later value as that place of human regeneration and peace. It was a powerless silence” (92). This disconnect from language presented Hogan with a double silencing: “As a young person coming from silences of both family and history, I had little of the language I needed to put a human life together” (56). Without the words she and others needed to express their pain, Hogan describes how, “we hurt ourselves; our own bodies became our language” (56). Just as the aftermath of violence and removal from land resulted in generations of physical illness, separation from language causes bodily harm.

Hogan describes a subsequent transition from silent childhood to an adulthood marked by her use of words. She writes about her reconnection to words at the dawn of adulthood as though it were a conversion: “But something did come in, and it saved me: a love for all nature, all life, a place created by words; I live in a place words built” (*The Woman Who Watches* 58). This dwelling place made of words gives her the power to see beyond the pain of history to the possibility for survival: “I saw a soul worth living in spite of flaws and imperfections and history” (58). She describes the transformation she experienced: “As a child I became like my mother, with my own inability to speak. And yet, ironically, I became a woman who uses words for a living” (*The Woman Who Watches* 101). Identifying the first time words became accessible to her and how they connected her to the natural world, Hogan writes,

One day the words came. I was an adult. I went to school after work. I read. I wrote.

Words came, anchored to the earth, to matter, to the wholeness of nature. There was, in this, a fall, this time to a holy ground of a different order, a present magic, a light-bearing, soul-saving presence that illuminated my heart and mind and altered my destiny. Without it, who would guess what, as a human being, I might have become. (57)

She came to see words as “the defining shape of a human spirit” (56), a spirit “anchored to the

earth” and “to the wholeness of nature.” She understood words as integral not just for telling her story to others but also for the shaping of the self and the world around her. She explains, “Without them, there is no accounting for the human place in the world. Language is intimacy not only with others, but even with self. It creates a person” (57). Throughout her work, Hogan creates herself, carving out a space between heritages and grounding her own existence in the utterances of the natural world.

Having pushed back against the silence that is a shared experience for so many Native Americans, Hogan turns to words to explore the world around her, make sense of it, and produce change. As an author, Hogan functions as an artist translating the language of the earth into story and song. She describes herself as a writer “who has a need to create beauty, for remaking the world, a part of it, a corner, like a woven web just repaired with a new line of silk” (*The Woman Who Watches* 101). Storytelling, the use of words to bring wholeness to both earth and people, is a high calling, one that brings its practitioners and the people who listen to them back to the human race’s origins, to a time of peace. Hogan writes that the “first humans” spent their time “pray[ing and] tell[ing] stories” before people became corrupt and greedy (*Dwellings* 81). Because the stories come from the earth and the creatures that dwell on it, an artist who will interpret and then relay the stories to the rest of humankind must listen attentively so that he or she can hear “the ears of the corn [that] are singing . . . telling their stories” (62).

Mean Spirit

In her novel *Mean Spirit*, Hogan shows her Native American worldview in conflict with westernized Christianity among early twentieth century American Indians. Hogan records injustice after injustice committed by European Americans against the Osage and other Native American communities in Pawhuska, Oklahoma. Her fictionalized account of real-life events

uncovers the depth of corruption driven by greed and fear that terrorized Native Americans during the oil boom. The novel follows the Graycloud family after the death of Grace Blanket, an Osage woman murdered after oil was discovered on her land. The family lives in fear as one member after another dies mysteriously. Hogan highlights the injustices faced by so many American Indians whose persistence living in harmony with the land was continually disrupted by European-American greed for financial gain. In the midst of the chaos of murder and oil discoveries, Hogan portrays the presence of the Christian church in the lives of her Native American characters, ultimately asserting the church's inability to bring about justice or provide solace for hurting communities because of its association with greed and colonization. In contrast, Hogan showcases the land-based ethics of Native Americans; she both critiques Christianity and suggests adding to it by replacing a human versus earth power dynamic with one of harmony and mutual respect.

In *Mean Spirit*, Hogan describes a community in the grip of fear, unable to seek justice. Most of the aggression by white Watona residents is prompted by fear of difference. Hogan notes that “clerks and agents became afraid” anytime “an Indian didn’t fit their vision” (60) of what they thought an American Indian was or should be. The actions of Native American characters are also guided by fear but instead of perpetuating violence, the people who are not in a position of power become entrapped. Belle, the Graycloud family matriarch, finds herself doubly bound. She fears for the safety of her granddaughter Nola, who will inherit her mother Grace’s fortune when she comes of age. Though Grace is unsafe in Watona, where the Grayclouds live, Belle cannot send her away because government agents will locate her, as a child under the age of 16, and send her to boarding school where Nola will be especially vulnerable outside the Native American community (35). Nola effectively becomes trapped in

her own home, the corruption in Watona and her family's desire to protect her preventing them from seeking justice. Though she witnessed her mother's murder and could shed light on the identity of the killers, Nola cannot come forward to testify because such visibility would place her in danger in a society where neither government agents nor local authorities can be trusted (35). In much the same way, another American Indian community member Ona Neck chooses not to report the looting of Grace's grave because she is worried that white people will dig up the entire cemetery after discovering that it is common Native American practice to bury valuables with the dead (43). Throughout the novel, Hogan demonstrates the inability of the American Indian community to seek justice for themselves because of the layers of corruption present in the society around them. When Nola nearly commits suicide Hogan comments, "A history of fear had come undone in the child" (106). Fear confines the American Indian community both physically and psychologically.

Hogan uses light imagery in *Mean Spirit* to create a contrast between the seeming positivity, marked by conspicuous opulence, of Watona American Indian lifestyles and the dangers and injustices plaguing their lives. Around the town, light frequently reflects off of or illuminates symbols of Western culture and wealth like a gold cross worn by a churchgoer (13), the white dresses and black suits of congregants (15), and a car that "shined bright as a brick of bullion" (12). Hogan calls the residents of Watona the "sunlit Indian people" (15). As the Native American women gather under red umbrellas outside the local store, they stand "in ruby circles of light" (15). In stark contrast to the brightly lit town, the marsh where Grace Blanket is murdered is shrouded in tall grasses, "heat and wind" making it difficult to either see or hear clearly (25). The light that so frequently illuminates the lives of Watona American Indians operates as an ironic comment on the darkness of their circumstances. In part two of the novel,

light becomes a symbol of fear. As the number of suspicious murders rises, Native American residents in and around Watona begin to string white lights on their houses and barns to create a sense of safety at night, equating visibility with security. But the safety is false. Even when the Grayclouds add more white lights to their house after they discover oil on their land, they still feel fearful knowing the inevitability of danger finding them (229). Light, so often a symbol of hope and the presence of God in American Christian culture, reveals the ever present danger faced by the Native Americans in oil country.

Hogan uses light ironically to draw attention to incongruities and brokenness. On the day of John Stink's funeral, light contrasts the Christian society that typifies Watona and the death that results from the greed and fear that have the town in its grip. Hogan writes, "The funeral took place that afternoon when the sun shone through the stained glass window of Jesus and his lamb, and cast light across the wooden pews" (99). The church is filled with "rays of gold light" that even illuminate Stink's dogs, "sitting like sentinels" (99). Whether or not the allusion to Jesus as the sacrificial lamb is sincere, the light that illuminates both the stained glass window and the church signals an almost empty hope. Stink's funeral is one of many to come. This reference to Jesus is not followed by restoration or salvation but by continued corruption and suffering.

As multiple murder plots unfold, Hogan records the presence of Christianity in the lives of Watona residents focusing on the work of a Baptist Native American minister. The Oklahoma Indian Baptist Church in town is populated by both four-fourths and mixed-race American Indians. Rev. Joe Billy preaches a sermon about how "the Indian world is on a collision course with the white world" (13). Inhabitants of the white world create conflict over more than racial difference, he says, "waging a war with earth" (14). While Rev. Billy preaches against the

warlike actions of white people and asserts hopefully that “our tears reach God” (14), Hogan’s narrator remains critical, indicating that Billy can have such hope because he was educated in the East and married “a white society woman” (14). Though his father had been a medicine man who converted to Christianity, the text suggests that Billy is too far removed from current American Indian struggles to effectively claim how hard it is to suffer injustice and how present the hope of healing is (14). The text implies that Christianity acts as a sort of buffer, not protecting him from experiencing hardship, but making him less aware of the difficulties facing Native Americans in Watona. Even with his distance from the injustices, however, critic Andrea Musher notes, in “Showdown at Sorrow Cave,” that “despite his marriage and his Christian training at a white institution” (30), Billy is still able to identify and preach against the conflicts with white Americans. He lives in between two cultures in conflict, part of himself rooted in each one.

Many of the Native American residents of Watona live in between two traditions, practicing a mixture of Christianity and traditional American Indian religion. For example, Belle prays with a “sacred heart candle, a cross and an eagle prayer feather” (67). Karsten Fitz notes that this “choice of items clearly symbolizes the transcultural character of Belle’s religion” (3). Such blended practice persists in the Graycloud family even late in the text. Nola’s wedding takes place in the church (*Mean Spirit* 179) but reflects Native American values through the way people dress and the events that take place throughout the day (180-82). Similarly, Benoit’s funeral is performed by a white minister but the American Indians dress and act according to traditional ways (202-3). These events demonstrate the extent to which Christianity is integrated into the fabric of Native American life in Watona. Perhaps such integration is why Hogan depicts American Indians revising the Christian scriptures at the end of the novel instead of dismissing

them altogether.

By highlighting the interreligious practices in Watona, Hogan draws a contrast between traditional American Indian spiritual practices and Christianity, ultimately suggesting that Christianity is inadequate to help Native Americans overcome the struggles brought by white greed for money and power. Even more than inadequate, Hogan accuses some Christians of being manipulative, complicit in the deception. For example, early in the narrative, Hogan juxtaposes a Pentecostal Brethren revival with a peyote ceremony. Both occur simultaneously in the story and significantly take place on the night that Benoit's house mysteriously explodes and his wife Sara dies in the fire. Unaware of the impending disaster, as Moses Graycloud walks to the peyote ceremony that night he passes the Pentecostal revival. The revival functions as an outlet for grief: "in religion . . . all their sorrow came out" (71). However, Hogan indicates that the ministers see this outpouring of sorrow as an opportunity to take advantage of people in compromised circumstances, in this case "mostly mixed-blood people" (71). Hogan narrates, "Pentecostal preachers appealed to the lost, cash-filled Indian souls who had been suffering from spiritual malnutrition" (71). While undoubtedly hoping the "cash-filled Indian[s]" will fill the church's coffers, the evangelist speaks a message of hope, asserting that when the spirit touches people there will be "No mean spirits walking this land" (71). Significantly, the title of the novel comes from this Protestant sermon. But the remainder of the narrative undermines the sermon because "mean spirits" do indeed walk the land leaving death, injustice, and destruction in their wake. Ironically, on the very same night that the preacher speaks hopefully of "mean spirits" no longer being allowed to wander the land, someone sets fire to Benoit's home, killing his wife Sara and casting a shadow of suspicion around Benoit himself (75, 77, 80). The messages of hope preached both in the Baptist Church and at the Pentecostal revival are empty in the novel,

deceptive even. Hogan parallels the false promises offered by Christians with the deception performed by land agents and oil magnates who continually break promises to Native Americans.

During the Pentecostal revival, several prominent characters in the narrative participate in a Native American Church peyote ceremony that produces more comfort and hope than the revival. Reverend Joe Billy, who himself practices both Christian and Native American spirituality, not only attends the ceremony but leads it. Dressing according to tribal customs, he assumes his role as the “road man” who “shows Indian people the path of life” (73). His fellow ceremony participants see him as “a different man than the one who wore the black suit on Sunday mornings” (73). Significantly, serving as a Baptist minister does not disqualify Billy from being a leader in the Native American Church. As Karsten Fitz notes, there is no conflict here over his desire to be involved in both (2). Something about the peyote ceremony resonates with Billy, “and even his prayers were different, deeper somehow, or heartfelt, or physical as if they came through the body and not just the mind” (*Mean Spirit* 73). Hogan indicates that the services of the Baptist Church do not reach to the same depth that the peyote ceremonies do.

While the Pentecostal revival stirs up emotions, the peyote ceremony anchors those emotions in the body itself. On this particular evening, as the explosion at Benoit’s house erupts near the ceremony grounds, young Ben Graycloud makes a moving speech, speaking out against the injustice of the “landmen coming round to tap the earth for oil” (75). He goes on to describe how physically anchored the suffering is: “We have so much pain, it’s on our faces and in our eyes. It’s in the clothes we wear” (75). Though the preaching at the Pentecostal service causes “sweating and weeping and wiping” of eyes (71), Ben’s simple words, contextualized by the physicality of the peyote ceremony itself with the beating of the drum, the shaking of the rattle,

the lighting of cigarettes, creates a physical reaction: “one of the women began to sob. Michael Horse’s throat went tight. Moses covered his face with his aging hands” (75). Rather than preaching words of promise and idealistic hope, the ceremony participants both give voice to a longing for justice and stop to acknowledge the pain they experience. Hogan contrasts these two spiritual responses to the dark circumstances in Watona, suggesting that the people find more long-term healing in the peyote ceremony than they do at the Christian revival.¹⁶

Unlike Joe Billy, Michael Horse, an honored older member of the Watona Native American community, is “not a Christian Indian” (13) and remains both an observer and a critic of Christianity from outside the interreligious community. Horse has strong spiritual and cultural attachments aligned with traditional American Indian ways. He is “the last person in Indian territory to live in a teepee,” and he is the community’s fire watcher, making sure the sacred fire does not stop burning (32). In *The Woman Who Watches Over the World*, Hogan describes dreams as “part of the spiritual condition” and notes that most “great leaders” among American Indians are known for their dreams (141). Horse, a leader in his community, is known for his dreams and ability to predict future events (*Mean Spirit* 12). As the narrative opens, however, Horse is wooed by white ways and wealth. The stronger his attraction to mainstream America, the weaker his dreaming abilities become (40). Louise Graycloud reminds Horse that his “predictions [have] been mighty wrong of late” (94) and Horse self-doubts his “prophetic abilities” (96). His interactions with Western culture dilute his special gifting.

In the midst of Hogan’s portrayals of interreligious practices, the greed-driven influx of

¹⁶ Hogan also appears to critique the church by suggesting that its parishioners are superstitious with little real substance to their faith. When a tornado sweeps through town, “It destroyed the Catholic Church, but it left the Baptist Church untouched” and the parishioners respond by converting from Catholicism to Protestantism believing that it is God’s will for them to go to the church left standing (161). The priest, Father Dunne, eventually convinces many of his parishioners that they are meant to worship where the carvings of the saints and the Virgin Mary came to rest after the storm (162).

Western culture, and the unsettling rise of violence in Watona, cultural negotiation develops as a theme throughout *Mean Spirit*. As the number of suspicious deaths increases and more money is withheld from both full and mixed-blood American Indians, a current of change sweeps through Watona and people begin to realign themselves culturally. American Indians start to become fascinated by “white heaven” and a white female employee of the local boarding school “began dyeing her hair black, and asked if she could attend the peyote church” (171). In the midst of this season of change, Horse and multiple other characters become increasingly drawn to traditional American Indian culture. Reacting against the dilution of his prophetic abilities because of Western influences, Horse moves into the hills, wanting “the old ways back. He wanted the white people gone” (149). The Osage and members of other tribes try to recover and survive by “going back into the heart of their lives, back into the hills and back to older ways” (211). Violence and greed are disorienting, dislodging some from their cultural moorings and binding others more tightly to their origins.

Joe Billy and his wife experience perhaps the greatest transformation, growing more distant from Christianity and closer to Native American ways. Hogan writes, “The Reverend Billy wore braids and moccasins to deliver his sermons and he finally wrote the main church offices that he was resigning from the ministry” (170). Andrea Musher notes that while Joe Billy “helps people to pray within the spirit of both traditions,” he ultimately turns toward his Native American roots after the murders indicate not only corruption but a plot against American Indians in and around Watona (30). The narrator describes how “Joe Billy returned to his people a little at a time” beginning with his resignation from his preaching post at the Baptist Church so that “now his closest proximity to white religions was an occasional visit with Father Dunne who’d lived throughout the winter in a copse of trees” (*Mean Spirit* 212). Whether because he

found insufficient hope and healing through Christianity or because he came to associate the religion with the greed of Euro-Americans, Billy sheds his ministerial robes. When matters continue to worsen and Nola is assigned the same guardian who functions as Benoit's corrupt defense lawyer, Belle seeks Joe Billy's help. But instead of asking him for Christian guidance she wonders if he can help her recall the old medicine his father used when he practiced traditional healing (136-7). Billy confesses to Belle that the suspicious deaths and difficulties are "killing my faith . . . I hardly believe in my own sermons anymore" (137). Unbeknownst to his wife, the reverend sits up late at night praying while "holding his father's bat medicine bottle in his hands" (137). His interest in bat medicine confirms his distance from Christianity; he no longer finds it sufficient to have faith that the Christian God will hear and respond to their suffering. Though he hides his interest in the bat medicine from his wife, "Martha had begun to look, in some peculiar way, like an Indian" (175). The change is good for her. The narrator comments that her face looks "stronger" the more she adopts American Indian ways (175). The couple increasingly invests in the lifestyle and values of this community under attack.

Simultaneous to Joe Billy's transformation, the Catholic priest, Father Dunne, also retreats from the church and begins to learn about American Indian beliefs and values. When an oil fire erupts beneath the surface of the earth, Father Dunne witnesses the flames and thinks they are the voice of God speaking to him as though through a burning bush. In response to this supernatural message, he "put[s] aside the Bible and the rosary" (188) and seeks out Michael Horse, believing that he will "know the meaning of this sacred event" (189). The priest wants Horse, who has never associated with Christianity and is growing ever closer to old traditional ways, to interpret the "voice" of "God's earth" (189). The narrative contrasts the two men, positioning Horse as wise and Father Dunne as misunderstanding the earth. Horse "didn't

mistake [the fires] for the voice of creation” but tells the priest that the fire is “the rage of mother earth” (189). After this experience, the priest leaves the Catholic Church and begins blessing animals, chickens and pigs: “The Indians began to call him the hog priest. And they said it was the year when the priest went sane” (189). Father Dunne retreats from town and when he reappears to attend Lettie Graycloud’s wedding, he looks like a man of the wilderness (196). The priest aligns himself increasingly with an American Indian emphasis on the value of the natural world.

The priest is a key figure in discerning Hogan’s attitude toward Christianity in *Mean Spirit*. He is harmless; he is even helpful in revealing yet another piece to the puzzle of the murder mystery by sharing confidential information from the confessional (239). He is also unknowing, though, coming late to the knowledge of things that are second nature and fully known by his Native American acquaintances. Late in the narrative, the priest is dependent upon Horse’s hospitality for shelter in Sorrow Cave (235) having “forgotten how to be with people” after an extended period of time living in the wilderness (236). While there he encounters Stace Red Hawk, the Native American government agent, and asks how he “escape[d]” becoming Catholic. Stace replies, “my family hid me” (237) most likely to keep him from being kidnapped and taken to a boarding school where he would have been forcefully assimilated. In a narrative full of people hiding from murderers, Stace’s family felt the need to hide him from Catholics coming to convert Native Americans. Hogan embeds this particular critique of Christianity in the narrative just as numerous characters are pressing deeply into traditional American Indian culture and fleeing the violence that has become increasingly abundant in Watona. The priest then describes his own spiritual transformation, telling “how he now realized that the life spirit lived in hogs and chickens as well as inside churches and cathedrals” (238). The text does not indicate

that the priest has ceased being Catholic. It does indicate, though, that he has adopted a perspective on nature shared with the American Indians who live in the vicinity of Watona.

While Father Dunne is a harmless Catholic interested in Native American culture, he is also portrayed as a laughable character. He travels to the Hill People's village hoping to share some of his newly acquired knowledge. He is greeted with friendliness and then announces that he has a new revelation to impart. He tells of having been bitten by a poisonous snake and then of experiencing a vision of himself as the snake, expecting the Hill People to be grateful and in awe of his acquired insights. Throughout his story, the people respond by encouraging him to continue, waiting for the important revelation. When he acknowledges his fear of death, one of the Hill People assures him that "we are like that too" (261). When he describes becoming "one with the snake," the people "nod" in understanding and prompt him to continue (262). When he finally reaches the climax of the story, asserting that "the snake is our sister . . . This is what I came to tell you," a child replies, "Yes, so what did you learn?" (262) The priest himself is like a child, coming late to the knowledge that the Hill People already have. The priest's own self-importance and lack of knowledge about the beliefs and ways of American Indians make him a comic character.

In contrast, Martha and Joe Billy move from town to the Hill People's village but because of Joe Billy's medicine man father and his own position of authority and respect at peyote meetings, the Billy's are not comic. Martha, even though she is white, assimilates quickly: "Martha Billy took fast to the Indian ways. She was like a convert to another faith, and she dropped so fully into this world, that she gave not even a single glance backward at her past" (256). Though she still looks like "a yellow-haired angel of religious paintings" (258) in the light of the fire at night, she even becomes a dreamer who has a prophetic vision about bats (256) that

aligns with Joe Billy's search for bat medicine and guides them to settle with the Hill People. He tells Martha that like themselves bats "are a race of people that stand in two worlds" (257).

Andrea Musher explains that Hogan's characters see "the bats' survival as emblematic of their own" (30). Musher continues, "Reviled and misunderstood by whites, both the bats and the Indians preserve ways of living that are far more ancient than white, Christian culture" (30).¹⁷

Musher compares Joe Billy with Stace Red Hawk who like Billy, went "East to the institutions of white power" but instead of aligning himself with the church he sought employment with the federal government (31). Just as Joe Billy withdraws from Christianity, by the close of the novel, Red Hawk has resigned his position with the US Bureau of Investigation.

Through Joe Billy and Red Hawk, Hogan parallels Christianity with the United States government. Both systems are aligned with white culture which is antagonistic toward Native Americans. The church in *Mean Spirit* offers false hope and is unable to transform the American Indian experience into one that is both life-giving and safe in Watona while the government also fails to provide safety. But instead of remaining ineffectual, the government participates as an aggressor in the plot to steal both money and the breath of life from Native Americans.

When Joe Billy, like the hog priest, enters the village with a new revelation, in this case about planting a late crop of corn, the Hill People question his wisdom but eventually follow his guidance rather than mocking him (260-61). Both the Catholic priest turned wilderness man and the Native American Baptist minister who leaves the church to return to traditional ways are welcomed into the American Indian community, but the latter gains respect because of his Native American connections. The practice of Christianity does not make them enemies of the

¹⁷ Both Musher and Hogan's narrative portray Christianity from an American Indian perspective. Christianity is, indeed, an ancient religion but the belief system brought to the Native Americans by Euro-American colonizers was contextualized in a more recent perspective.

Hill People. Instead, it represents a way of life that both Father Dunne and Joe Billy leave behind.

In spite of Father Dunne and Joe Billy's acceptance by the Hill People, Hogan does portray Christianity as firmly aligned with Western Euro-American values that work against Native American ways of life. On the night that the underground oil reserves catch fire, Hogan's narrator makes the following comment: "it burned and roared like God's wrath against the Baptists" (185). The narrator offers no explanation or point of reference for this indictment of the Baptists. In all other ways, the Baptists remain innocuous, harmless though ineffectual throughout the text. But Christianity is repeatedly associated with the white Western culture that Hogan soundly indicts. Father Dunne reports to Horse that Nola has "Catholic leanings" (181) and decorates her house with "anemic-looking statues of saints, Jesus, and the blonde Virgin Mary" (190). The "anemic" appearance of the statues and Mary's blonde hair link these "Catholic leanings" to white culture. In *Mean Spirit*, Christianity is a religion brought to the Americas by white Europeans. The novel separates Christianity from its ancient past in North African and Middle Eastern cultures and realigns it with European culture, depicting the religion from the perspectives of Native Americans who were taught that it was superior to their own cultures. Karsten Fitz also conflates the two, consistently reading adoption of any part of Western culture in *Mean Spirit* as a corollary adoption of or willingness to adopt aspects of Christianity (5). Fitz describes such "transculturation" as a tool for survival employed by characters in Native American novels as they negotiate the mutual influence of Christian beliefs and Native spirituality upon one another (2). Hogan appears to portray such interreligious negotiation as detrimental. Her indictment of both the Catholic and Baptist churches comes as she highlights the oil hungry disrespect for the earth, the conflict between white people and the

earth itself that drives the murders and corruption in Watona. As China, Hale's young white accomplice, watches the blaze she realizes that "the earth had a mind of its own. She knew the wills and whims of men were empty desires, were nothing pitted up against the desires of the earth" (186). The fire roaring like "God's wrath" indicts Christianity for its complicity in disregarding earth's desires.

The conflict between Western and Native American values comes to a head when white residents of Watona begin shooting the bats that live in Sorrow Cave. Writing about the resulting standoff, Andrea Musher contends that this incident specifically brings into sharp contrast Judeo-Christian and Native American values. She explains that the Hill People's protection of the bats results in "mainstream, Judeo-Christian values [being] subverted" as

Hogan [causes readers] to question [the] automatic privileging of human life over other life forms, thereby removing the biblical concept of human dominion; she ties [readers] into a webwork of existence where all beings . . . have their importance, their stories, and their language from which we can learn. (24)

Musher asserts that the protection of the bats at Sorrow Cave "becomes a ritual center in the narrative, an affirmation of Indian spiritual values, a vital act of resistance" against Eurocentric and Judeo-Christian values (24).

Hogan also indicts Native American religions that are not rooted in relationship with the earth. For example, Lionel Tall, who accompanies Stace Red Hawk to Watona, remembers when he believed the message of the Ghost Dance, that "a new Messiah, a mixed-blood Indian, had gone north and west out of the bottom and preached a new faith" (220). This new Messiah had both an American Indian and a "Christian name," Wevokah and Jack Wilson respectively: "he was an Indian who was thought to be Christ, and he preached that if the people danced and

believed the buffalo would return, life would return to what it had been before settlers and hunters, and the ancestors would return” (220). The narrator describes devotion to Wevokah as “a faith of survival, of the desire for life” (220). Tall had wholeheartedly believed in Wevokah and had himself become a missionary to the Cree in Canada. The Cree, however, rejected this new faith. On the day that Tall began his journey home, his wife and son and the rest of the villagers where he lived were massacred (221). This tragic loss causes him to “no longer place . . . stock in any belief except for the laws of nature and wilderness” (221). The placement of the massacre on the very day that Tall began to return from a failed mission makes even an American Indian Messiah look ineffectual. Tall, the faithful servant of Wevokah, lost everything he had without gaining a single convert and devoted himself to nature in response.

While Hogan critiques the presence of Christianity in the lives of early twentieth century American Indians as ineffectual and even manipulative in response to the tragedies suffered by Native Americans, in the final third of *Mean Spirit* Christianity is virtually absent. It fades into the background as though it has no potency to bring healing to the people or justice in the midst of corruption. Toward the close of the novel, the light that is finally most hopeful and transformative is that which comes from the moon, not that which is reflected off the stained-glass windows in the church. As Belle sits in the entrance to Sorrow Cave,

the moonlight was an entrance into still another land. She went out from the cave and stood before it, in the light of earth’s reflected face. She raised her head and looked up at the sky. It was beautiful and enormous, the world that lived far beyond theirs, beyond the stars, and beyond even the constellations buffalo and deer. (344)

Belle finds “hope in the land, hope and tomorrow living in the veins and stones of earth” (344). Stace, too, turns to nature for answers and hope. When he prays, Stace directs his prayers to the

sky: “He held the pipe up to the air and offered it to the sky. He prayed. He prayed for justice, for change, for a world grown kinder to her little ones” (348). Hogan contrasts the messages and promises of hope and healing preached from Protestant and Catholic pulpits with this message of hope that resonates from the land itself.

Hogan’s ultimate critique of Christianity at the end of the novel is not one of total dismissal but of revision. When Horse announces that he has finished writing a new portion of the Bible, *The Book of Horse*, he significantly describes the Bible to the Hill People as “a holy book for the European people, like those who live in the towns” (361). Against the backdrop of government corruption and white greed for oil and land, Horse announces that this European holy text is incomplete: “I’ve added what I think is missing from its pages” (361). The book he writes centers not on people but on nature. Instead of admonishing listeners to honor father and mother, Horse instructs them to “honor father sky and mother earth,” encouraging people to care for the natural world around them because “life resides in all things” (361). Horse continues, “Everything on earth, every creature and plant wants to live without pain, so do them no harm. Treat all people in creation with respect; all is sacred, especially the bats” (361). Every effort made by Native American characters in the novel to care for the earth and protect it from white greed and corruption either meets with strong resistance or fails. The land is overused by cattle, drilled open for oil, and left barren. Writing *The Book of Horse* allows Michael Horse to assert authoritatively that the land should be protected, treated kindly because “we are one with the land” and “all life is sacred” (362). Horse connects his words firmly to biblical teaching when he says, “This is the core of all religion. It is the creator’s history, the creator who spoke to a white man as clearly as he spoke to me, and said to him, ‘As you do unto the least of these, my brothers, you do unto me.’ The creator said this and we abide by it” (362). In this way, he

weaves the American Indian land ethic into the Christian scriptures rather than dismissing one for the other. Father Dunne protests Horse's addition to the Bible and Horse responds by asking mockingly if he needs "more thou shalt?" (362) The novel resolves as Horse revises the sacred text of Christians and humorously dismisses the priest who wants to protect that very text.

Because Native American and Western worldviews are so disparate in many ways, some literary critics question the plausibility of Horse's revision rather than replacement of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures. Catherine Rainwater is one such critic. In "Inter-Textual Twins and Their Relations: Linda Hogan's *Mean Spirit* and *Solar Storms*," Rainwater explains her skepticism about the potential for real revisionary change as a result of Horse's new text: "Seeking a non-Eurocentric 'truth' that would include Indians and their worldviews in history, Michael for a while thinks that his *Book of Horse* might be added to the Bible. A thoughtful reader quickly sees the futility of such a plan, however, for Native American and Judeo-Christian worlds do not easily mesh" (98-99). Rainwater explains the reason for this seeming exclusivity:

Neither secular nor biblical accounts of Judeo-Christian reality can be expanded by the simple addition of nonwestern views. On the contrary, through the ending of *Mean Spirit*, Hogan equates Michael's prophetic writing—writing that translates the language of the bats and predicts apocalyptic destruction—with fire based on their radically transformative powers. Fire does not expand what it touches, but consumes it; it leaves a blank space, like an empty page, to be filled anew. (99)

In contrast, Karsten Fitz thinks combination is possible. She asserts that Horse wants to "add – not to *substitute* for something else" the text he created (5). Fitz notes that adding Horse's written text (as opposed to oral tradition) to the Bible "is not a corruption of genuinely Native culture, but an expression and addition" (5). Fitz reads Horse's desire to write "for those who

would come later . . . as if the act of writing was itself part of divination and prophecy, an act of deliverance” (*Mean Spirit* 341) as a sign that transculturation is at work, bringing together both the old and the new, Native American and Western ways (Fitz 5). Fitz goes one step further and claims that “the originally culturally alien technique of writing even assumes the potential of liberation” signaling successful transculturation (5). Because Native American life ways are misunderstood and disrespected by white culture, Horse turns to the printed word, a medium understood by and accepted by mainstream America. As though symbolically emphasizing the injustices rampant in Watona, he uses Grace Blanket’s typewriter to record words revealed by God in response to the tragic devastation of both land and people in Indian Territory. He steps out of his cultural comfort zone by becoming an artist who uses the written word to create a text that has the capacity to reach a European American audience.

Horse is one of the artists about whom Hogan writes,¹⁸ an imaginative individual who listens to the earth and shares its words with the people who so desperately need to reconnect with the land. The close of Horse’s book records the pain and loss of the American Indian people, their dispersion into other territories, and the promise that “a time will come again when all the people return and revere the earth and sing its praises” (362). Catherine Rainwater notes that Horse functions here as a prophet (98), foretelling the tragic hardships and migration to other lands experienced by Native Americans in Watona and finally predicting a time of restoration and healing. By writing *The Book of Horse*, he expresses a Native American land ethic that restores spiritual health by signaling the importance of and prophesying the coming of connection between people and the natural world.

¹⁸ In *Solar Storms*, Hogan depicts a woman as the mouthpiece of the earth. Significantly, the women of *Mean Spirit* are under siege and while women like Belle Graycloud demonstrate care and concern for the earth, it is a man, Michael Horse who advocates openly for nature.

Solar Storms

Just as Christianity's influence fades at the end of *Mean Spirit*, it never occupies the foreground in *Solar Storms*. In fact, instead of suggesting revisions to the Christian tradition, *Solar Storms* appears to replace it with Hogan's land-based model of healing and reconciliation. In this later novel, Hogan puts into action her Native American land ethic and the role artists and story play in interpreting the earth to help bring about healing. The absence of a focus on Christianity throughout suggests not just the author's preference, but her assertion that healing and reconciliation depend not upon a harmonious inclusion of Christian perspectives in American Indian life but rather on the assertion of Native American ways in place of Christianity. The novel celebrates the connectedness of humans with nature and positions the protagonist as an interpreter for the earth.

In the novel, mainstream Americans and their companies establish an economically-driven presence in the borderlands between Canada and the United States where Dora-Rouge's tribe, the Fat Eaters, live. The white people seek to alter the landscape, creating increased opportunities to harvest the power of water for monetary gain. In the words of Angel, Hogan's protagonist and narrator, "it was their desire to guide the waters, narrow them down into the thin black electrical wires that traversed the world. They wanted to control water, the rise and fall of it, the direction of its ancient life. They wanted its power" (268). Angel mourns "the million-dollar dreams of officials, governments, and businesses, thinking about the lengths to which they would go" (279). The dam builders are driven by greed and fear, unwilling to listen to any argument establishing the dependence of Native American and First Nations people upon land for survival or the synergistic relationship between the two. Angel speculates that "unlike us they were afraid of what no money, no home, no job might mean" (288). The dam builders have

no communal understanding of nature; they have no land ethic and, therefore, no positive relationship with the land.

In the space of a novel, Hogan is able to fully articulate the indigenous relationship with the land and the consequences of breaking that bond. Angel and her companions have no need to fear lack of provision as long as nature is honored and respected. Once the trust is broken, however, all parties, even the innocent, suffer. Not only does the disruption of land and water threaten the Native American people's ability to gather food and medicinal herbs, it also threatens the very ability of humans to be just that, human. In her essay "The Great Without," Hogan writes, "Soul loss is what happens as the world around us disappears" (156). Angel recognizes this. After the dam building project has already begun, she mourns, "Our lives in that place were being taken from us, the people removed from the land, water, animals, trees, all violated, and no one lives with full humanity without these elements" (*Solar Storms* 324). Angel learns this principle from Tulik, a sage old patriarch among the Fat Eaters. He instructs her, "You know, Angel, here a person is only strong when they feel the land. Until then a person is not a human being" (235). Later Tulik reflects on the devastation, "I've been meditating. But I don't have inner peace. I can't find it again. I think it would be better to have never had it than to lose it this way . . . This is what happens to humans when their land is destroyed . . . they lose their inside ways" (342). N. Scott Momaday echoes these concerns when he writes, "There is no alternative, I believe, if we are to realize and maintain our humanity, for our humanity must consist in part in the ethical as well as in the practical ideal of preservation" ("An American Land Ethic" 47). As the dam builders ravage the landscape, they wound the Native American and First Nations people who consider nature so integral to being human.

While the dam builders are driven by fear and the desire for economic gain, the

indigenous people are motivated by love, a mutual affection between themselves and the land. This love is possible because, in their eyes, all of nature is sentient. Dora-Rouge sees nature as a “dense soup of love, creation all around us, full and intelligent” (81). As Angel experiences personal healing during her journey to find her birth mother, she develops a strong sense of relationship with nature, feeling both affection and empathy for it. She narrates, “While walking the island, I felt its life. I remembered and loved it. I suffered for the felling of this world, for those things and people that would never return” (81). As a sentient being, or a group of sentient beings, nature loves in response to being loved. Miss Nett, an honored matriarch among the Fat Eaters, asserts, “The earth loves our people. Even in a hard place. The water loves us” (306). As humans draw close to it, the earth responds with tenderness. Sitting at construction sites late at night, the men who protest the dam building “began to sing the oldest hunting songs. The songs made the wind rise” (303). Angel continues, “I felt it on my neck, my face, my hair, a cool-fingered breeze touching me” (303). The caresses of wind in response to human affection and honor demonstrate the mutuality and strength of the relationship between people and nature.

The bond that results in such affection for nature reflects more than people’s physical dependence upon the land for survival: the connection is deeply emotional and spiritual. At the center of it is the individual’s and the community’s quest for wholeness. Paula Gunn Allen notes that “the natural state of existence is wholeness . . . Health is wholeness. Goodness is wholeness” (*Sacred Hoop* 247). Angel herself is indebted to nature for much of the personal restoration to wholeness that she experiences. She travels to Adam’s Rib so she can learn about her past and hopefully experience some release from its pain. In the process of healing, she grows close to female relatives and learns the broken and tragic history of her family, including details of her abusive mother’s past. Much of her healing comes as a result of learning to love

and listen to nature. She discovers early on that “Our beginnings were intricately bound up in the history of the land” (*Solar Storms* 96). This is true of her mother, Hannah,¹⁹ with whom Angel must connect in order for full healing to occur. Her “beginning was Hannah’s beginning, one of broken lives, gone animals, trees felled and kindled” (96). Recalling Hogan’s assertion in *Dwellings* that all things are connected (40), if Angel does not engage fully in relationship with the environment, she will fail to experience healing for the wounds of her past.

As she begins to heal, Angel acknowledges the likeness between nature’s desire to restore and the wholeness occurring in her own heart. While living on Fur Island with Bush, she observes, “Those hungry reaching vines . . . wanted to turn everything back to its origins—walls, doors, a ladder-back chair, even a woman’s life” (73). She sees the correlation with her own personal transformation: she “knew, [her past] was about to be dismantled, taken apart and rewoven²⁰ the way spiderwebs on the floating island changed every night” (74). Here Hogan’s words echo Joy Harjo’s admonition that healing requires “changing the story” (“MNN Column for December 2009”). This process of reweaving results in an experience of wholeness that Angel describes close to the end of the novel: “I began to understand who I was. Every piece of myself was together anew, a shifted pattern” (*Solar Storms* 325). As Hogan explains in “The Great Without,” “The cure for . . . soul sickness, is not in books. It is written in the bark of a tree, in the moonlit silence of night, in the bank of a river and the water’s motion. The cure is outside ourselves” (157). Angel owes much of her healing to the land and water, the trees and animals.

¹⁹ Silvia Schulterman and other critics read *Solar Storms* through an ecofeminist lens, arguing that the “construction of a mother-daughter relationship that counters patriarchal hierarchies” is just as necessary for healing as is reconnection with the land (76). Schulterman writes, “Angel locates her matrilineal heritage within the frames of an ecofeminist philosophy envisioning a convergence of human and nonhuman nature” (79).

²⁰ This notion of being “rewoven” is one common to other American Indian writers as well. It is central to the work of Joy Harjo. During a poetry reading at Lebanon Valley College (Annville, PA) in spring 2007, Harjo suggested that we are all “taken apart” and we “put ourselves back together” throughout life.

Having received so much health and hope from nature, Angel and her relatives willingly risk their lives to protect nature and restore it to its own wholeness. Silvia Schultermantl suggests that nature is fragmented as long as it is divorced from the people who inhabit it. She writes, “Angel learns to understand that in order to restore the peace within her self, within her family, and within the biosphere, she must restore the interconnectedness between human and nonhuman nature” (70). Paula Gunn Allen goes so far as to say, “We are the land” (*Sacred Hoop* 191). Angel, Bush, and the Fat Eaters attempt to maintain and revitalize the link between nature and people by protesting the dam building project. They become activists, beginning by presenting a petition to the developers at a town meeting (*Solar Storms* 278). When their diplomatic efforts are rejected, the Fat Eaters and the visitors from Adam’s Rib begin to engage in physical resistance. Angel narrates, “As certain as it was that the bulldozers would move earth, it was equally certain that we would stand in their way” (314). The people work together to create steady opposition: “Some of us would stand in the way of the workers. If we were removed, others came in to take our places” (315). Angel concocts her own plan of resistance. She speculates that perhaps the land, in opposition to dishonor and mistreatment, “would starve” the white workers (315), and so Angel determines to “starve out the soldiers and police” by breaking into their food supply (322). The pattern of living established by Hogan’s characters, who experience destruction of land close by their houses, cannot continue in the face of bulldozers and guns.

In spite of, or perhaps because of the threats they face, the Native American and First Nations people continue to act as a unit. In the midst of resisting the dam building, Angel revels in community: “At times I felt so joyful that I forgot our purpose” (314). She celebrates, “now I was one of the Beautiful People. I know this bone-deep, in my blood. So did the others” (314).

Hogan's characters act as one in defense of their way of life. Angel reflects that long after the conflict ended she remembers, "What it felt like to persist that way in the heat and the rain, to be wet and cold, to stand up with my people. We had pride. We were in something together" (313). As their closeness to the land sets them apart from mainstream America, so does their commitment to one another, their choice to work for communal good rather than for individual gain.

Ultimately, in *Solar Storms* activism fails to continually sustain community and prevent irreparable destruction. The hunger for profit overrides the indigenous people's refusal to participate in a greed-driven economy. Profit maims their sense of cohesiveness and of preservation in general. Angel notes that as resistance becomes more difficult and economic gain more attractive, "We fought among ourselves. Within our own ranks, there were divisions as quick and malignant as cells" (324-5). And as for nature, Angel laments, "It was too late for the Child River, for the caribou, the fish" (344). The Native American and First Nations communities are ones whose cultural structure and values do not translate economically into mainstream American society.²¹ This is true largely because their attitude toward the land is spiritual rather than economic. In much the same way that the church aided the American government in separating Native Americans from their land, the dam builders in *Solar Storms* disturb the very building blocks of American Indian society by taking control of the land.

As the novel concludes, however, Hogan sounds a note of hope, a promise of renewal. This renewal has nothing to do with a plan for financial or material recovery. It does not

²¹ This is true in part because the economic base of communities like that at Adam's Rib and in the north is so foreign to mainstream American society. Not unlike non-Native populations, individuals within each Native American community perform some sort of specialized task. The tasks, however, are mystical giftings, having little to no economic value outside of the Native American world. For example, Geneva can "replace illness with a song of mending" (261) and Bush can heal burns by speaking to them (262). Angel's own gift, her role as "plant dreamer" (262), also has no mainstream equivalent.

promise shelter, a place to hunt, herbs to gather. Instead, it is located in the capacity of the land to give birth. As Angel reflects on her experiences with the people at Adam's Rib and in the north, she observes the sky, "Sometimes the aurora borealis moves across night, strands of light that remind me of a spider's web or a fishnet cast out across the starry skies to pull life in toward it" (349). The spider's web recalls Angel's earlier recognition that her own life story was being "rewoven" and Harjo's suggestion that healing involves "changing the story." As Angel continues to contemplate the sky, the aurora borealis "reminds [her] of the lines across a pregnant woman's belly. It leaves [her] thinking that maybe our earth, our sky, will give birth to something, perhaps there's still another day of creation" (349).²² The earth's ability to give birth after much suffering proclaims new life and regeneration. To the American Indians this signifies the spirituality of nature. Angel calls spring "a statement of faith" (134). Angel and other members of her tribe affirm that "the world was alive and that all creatures were God" (139). Angel's perception of the earth's readiness to give birth at the close of the novel, then, serves as a message of spiritual renewal and a reminder that nature cannot suffer to be reduced to purely economic uses.

By communicating her vision of the aurora borealis, Angel becomes nature's primary spokesperson in *Solar Storms*. Throughout the narrative, Angel discovers that she is uniquely capable of communicating with nature. Early on she notes, "As seasons changed, I thought I heard voices in the wind, the wind which returned there each night, the wind that lived on the island and sometimes talked to us through the organ pipes" (93). She longs to be near water, to

²² In the novel, the promise of new life through the earth's birth-giving parallels Angel's decision to "take . . . care of her baby half-sister [poignantly named Aurora] after Hannah's death" (Schultermandl 78). By doing this, she "assumes the responsibility of keeping her tribe alive" (78). That Angel's infant sibling is female suggests that nature's renewal coincides with the restoration of "an inter-female nexus in a society dominated by patriarchal institutions" (77).

hear whatever it has to say, “My mind drifted off to water . . . Perhaps it would tell me, speak to me, show me a way around these troubles. Water, I knew, had its own needs, its own speaking and desires. No one had asked the water what it wanted” (279). Angel’s ears are attuned to nature. So is her mind. Sylvia Schultermadl suggests that the older women of Angel’s tribe, through storytelling, “initiate Angel into the knowledge of an inner language humans share with the nonhuman world of nature” (72). Angel accesses this language most distinctly when dreaming. She eventually comes to understand herself as a “plant dreamer” (*Solar Storms* 262), recalling Hogan’s assertion in *The Woman Who Watches Over the World* that “dreaming is the point at which we begin to know” (131) and the “antidote to a poisonous history” (142). The earth conveys knowledge to her in the form of visions. She learns to sketch these images and identify the plants and their uses (*Solar Storms* 189). Angel understands dreams as “earth’s visions . . . earth’s expressions that pass through us” (119). Dora-Rouge instructs her, “if you dreamed it, it’s what we need” (189). She is an artist, like the ones Hogan identifies in *The Woman Who Watches* and *Dwellings* and like Horse in *Mean Spirit*, who interprets the earth’s messages for humankind.

As Angel experiences healing and her capacity to dream increases, her knowledge of nature becomes more intimate. As she and her companions travel through the wilderness, she and the other women cease to keep track of days. Angel describes the experience as one of being “taken in by water and by land, swallowed a little at a time” (170). In the context of a culture that resists a consumer economy, nature functions ironically here as the consumer: it “take[s] Angel] in.” This particular relationship between consumer and consumed, however, is one based on love and community, not on individual profit or the desire for power. Angel relishes the physical experience of being consumed by nature when she contemplates, “my mind drifted off

to water, to wetness itself, and how I'd wanted so often to hold my breath and remain inside the water that springs from earth and rains down from the sky" (279). The relationship is positive and mutual and it is deepened through the experience of dreaming.

Though she knows she is gifted as a dreamer, Angel frets over her inability to communicate through song. She encounters tribal singers Geneva and Jo who use their melodies to heal the sick, and she laments that she is not musically talented. The two women even attempt to teach her, failing to register in Angel the ability to produce a pleasing and effective sound (262). Still, as the story concludes, Angel longs to sing. She reflects:

Tulik once said there are still those of us who can travel to the past and return with something of value, a knowing, a cure, or a song. I wanted to be one of those, to return from the far regions having retrieved a song, a scared bundle, a box of herbs, anything I could take to the future. But I wasn't. I had to leave the songs behind with their owners . . . (345)

Angel underestimates her own importance. Though she does not assume the role of singer, she does become the mouthpiece of hope in the novel. Instructed to look for new life during her journey towards healing, a process that includes reconnecting with an abusive mother and then raising a newborn baby sister, and accustomed to communicating with the land, Angel is readily able to recognize earth's birth pangs. As narrator, she is the storytelling artist, weaving together family history, the language of the earth, and encounters with the outside world into one cohesive story of personal and communal movement towards wholeness.

In *Sacred Hoop*, Paula Gunn Allen defines the role of artists in American Indian culture: "The tribes seek—through song, ceremony, legend, sacred stories (myths), and tales—to embody, articulate, and share reality . . . to actualize, in language, those truths that give to

humanity its greatest significance and dignity” (242). Much like her protagonist Angel, Linda Hogan participates in this tradition. As an artist she becomes an activist on behalf of nature. A decade before the publication of *Solar Storms*, Hogan told Laura Coltelli in an interview, “The people will listen to the world and translate it into a human tongue” (72). She affirms, “That is the job of the poet” (72). As a writer, Hogan works in harmony with nature, expressing what Allen calls a “truth” of Native American culture, the land ethic that promises hope and renewal.

Through powerfully indicting Christianity’s participation in colonization and simultaneously articulating a land-based Native American understanding of reconciliation and healing, Linda Hogan uses words to try to heal the world. She writes, “In order to heal, this outside life and world must be taken in and ‘seen’ by the patient as being part of one working system” (“At One” 155). The reconciliation Hogan envisions lies in putting the broken pieces of the system back together, creating harmony between humans and nature: “The cure for soul loss is in the mist of morning, the grass that grew a little through the night, the first warmth of sunlight, the waking human in a world infused with intelligence and spirit” (158). The artists like Michael Horse, Angel, and Hogan herself are the ones who translate this “intelligence and spirit,” making them accessible for the rest of humanity. Hogan uses the written word to encourage reconnection between people and the land, while alternatively calling for revision of or the very eclipse of Christianity as the religion historically allied with the efforts of America’s colonizers.

The next chapter will consider how, like Linda Hogan, Louise Erdrich simultaneously celebrates Native American culture while criticizing Christianity’s participation in colonization. She focuses much of her critique on the church’s sexism. She undermines Catholicism’s dependence on patriarchy, exposes its limitations as a male-dominated system, and expands the

boundaries of what the church considers sacred. In contrast to Hogan, Erdrich revises rather than dismisses Christianity while showcasing the strength and flexibility of Native American culture.

Chapter 2

“Here I am a Methodist pastor . . . I’ve thoroughly enjoyed my journey, but I still hear my brothers and sisters still – I don’t know the word I want to use . . . I feel like they don’t know who they are as a person. Like me, they’ve grown up in a Christian home [and] don’t know their culture . . . but I always believed that God gave us Christianity, at least for myself, to enhance who I am . . . I still hurt with my brothers and sisters who have not really gotten to that point to enjoy Jesus Christ. I accept all those who practice in the traditional ways because I believe God gave that to us. God gave that to us for who we are. And God, to me, let the Europeans bring Jesus to us, but they used Christianity to say, ‘You can’t practice your ways. You have to become like us in order to be a Christian.’ So with elders in my churches, that’s what they still go by. My young people want to go dance . . . their tribal tradition. Come Sunday morning, they’d love to come and be in church. But I have elders still in the church, who say, ‘You don’t mix.’ . . . I always say, ‘God made me a full blood Mississippi Choctaw.’ I [say] nobody can take that away from me . . . I have no problem with going to a traditional ground, whereas some of my people get upset if I do. So my question is always, ‘If God gave that to them, why is it wrong?’”

“[At] my first church, the men would not accept communion from me, and if they were sick they would never tell me. But when I found out, I went to their houses. I went to the hospitals. And some would not let me come in and pray with them. But I said, ‘Your family has asked me, so I will stand at the door and pray in honor of your family.’ But praise God, those very people at the very, very end of their life encouraged me . . . My biggest struggle has been with the women because they’ve been brought up to have a man pastor.”

“I go to church and there’s a few people in there. I always say, ‘Why can’t this be beautiful like being at a powwow?’ But one day it will be. That is my hope that one day it will be.”

– Sarah, Mississippi Choctaw

Introduction

While Linda Hogan’s fiction suggests the inefficacy of Christianity, indicting its complicity in colonization and proposing in its stead an American Indian view of the world rooted in harmony with the earth, Louise Erdrich also offers critique but does so while imagining more fully integrated cross-cultural negotiations between Native Americans and Christians than the limited possibilities posited by Hogan. Erdrich’s deep engagement with multiethnic characters and circumstances arises from her own experience growing up, like Hogan did, in a

cross-cultural family; her mother was Chippewa²³ and her father German-American. She is a member of the Turtle Creek Band of Chippewa who inhabit North Dakota lands where much of her fiction is set. Her own literary journey parallels the growth of Native American studies as an academic discipline. Erdrich started college at Dartmouth the same year the school created a Native American Studies department in which her future husband and co-author Michael Dorris taught (“Biography”). According to a *Writer’s Digest* interview with Michael Schumacher, working odd jobs while in college introduced Erdrich to a larger community of “people with mixed blood, lots of people who had their own confusions” (“Louise Erdrich/Michael Doris: A Marriage of Minds” 29). This experience helped Erdrich realize that being multiethnic “was part of my life — it wasn’t something that I was making up — and that it was something I *wanted* to write about (29). At Johns Hopkins University where she completed her MA, Erdrich began writing poetry and fiction about her multiethnic culture (“Biography”). She collaborated with Michael Doris on several short stories and their first novel, *Love Medicine* (1984). She has since written three collections of poetry and more than a dozen novels. Cross-cultural heritage remains central to her work along with an exploration of multiethnic spirituality. In an interview, Erdrich shares that her grandfather “was able to both worship in his traditional Ojibwe religion and at the same time be devout Catholic” (“NPR’s Liane Hansen” 9). Having grown up practicing a blend of Roman Catholicism and Ojibwe religion (“Biography”), Erdrich investigates the conflicts and confluence of beliefs that arise from this experience in her second poetry collection *Baptism of*

²³ Is As Dr. Anton Treuer, an Ojibwe language scholar, notes, “Chippewa” is the official name of the Ojibwe people according to the United States government. Treuer offers this example of Americans misunderstanding and dismissing, often willfully, Native American culture and language. Even though it represents a misspelling of the actual name, “The term Chippewa was incorporated into the bureaucratic mechanism of the US government and never changed” (9). Ethan Ojibwe has many variant spellings (e.g. Ojibway). After discussing Erdrich’s biography, I drop the use of Chippewa and adopt Ojibwe, reflecting her own preference for the term in *The Last Report*.

Desire (1989)²⁴ and several of her novels, perhaps most predominantly in *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* (2001), the text featured in this chapter.

I intend to investigate the role of Catholicism, a relatively static system, at Little No Horse, a fictional reservation that functions as a place of transformation in Erdrich's novel *The Last Report*. While Erdrich shows the dangers of conversion, she revises rather than dismisses the Christian religion. She does this primarily through her critique of the church's treatment of gender. The struggle over cultural and religious identity intersects with an exploration of gender identity, showcasing the role of the Virgin Mary and suggesting that an Ojibwe approach to gender, which allows room for flexibility and non-binary categorization, exposes a Catholic emphasis on masculinity and contributes to an expansion of what the main character, a priest, experiences as sacred. While mourning the harm done by Christianity, Erdrich's novel argues for the fluidity of gender, religious, and cultural identity, suggesting that imaginative spaces create the possibility of such negotiations which the world of socioeconomic and political forces makes so difficult.

I argue that by foregrounding the role of imagination (in the form of dreams and visions) and text (in the form of letters and the novel itself), Erdrich's novel creates an environment in which seeds of reconciliation between disparate cultures and communities can grow. Recalling Echo-Hawk's *In the Light of Justice*, these seeds are not ones that dismiss the harm caused by Christianity and encourage further assimilation of American Indians. On the contrary, Erdrich soundly indicts Christianity's role in colonization at the same time that *The Last Report* engages with and revises Christianity on the reservation. The protagonist, Agnes, questions and redefines

²⁴ Jennifer Andrews notes that Erdrich is particularly "known for her creative use Christian – specifically Catholic – symbolism" along with "her sustained interest in depicting differing perspectives within colonial relationships" ("Native American Women Poets 85). *Baptism of Desire* is one collection that centralizes this interaction with Catholic symbols (85).

what is acceptable and sacred from both Catholic and Ojibwe perspectives. She engages in this revision process while exercising an authoritative female voice in a usually masculine role. The priestly identity that she adopts, that of Father Damien, is simultaneously transgressive, since she holds the office in disguise, and sacred as she offers sacraments including communion and confession to the Ojibwe community. For Agnes the priesthood is not about stating what is doctrinally right. Instead, she is committed to upholding the sacredness of relationships, the coherence of a community. The novel exposes the destructiveness of Catholic patriarchalism and hegemony while celebrating one woman's ability to subvert patriarchal structures, redefine the sacred, and adopt a multiethnic identity anchored in both Christian and Ojibwe practices.

I intend to participate in the growing conversation²⁵ about gender in *The Last Report*. Lisa Tatonetti²⁶ argues in her essay "From Wallace to Wishkob" that while much scholarship has focused on Agnes's/Damien's gendered performance in *The Last Report*, Erdrich's "representation of Anishinaabe²⁷ acceptance of two-spirit identities invokes indigenous understandings of sex and gender that both exceed and predate . . . those offered by theorists such as Butler, Sedgwick, Berlant, and Warner" (225). J. James Iovannone, Deirdre Keenan, and Pamela Rader all analyze Erdrich's treatment of gender in relation to the "two spirit" tradition.²⁸

²⁵ While the body of scholarship produced in response to Louise Erdrich's *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* pays direct and robust attention to religion and gender, several scholars attend to the political dimensions of Erdrich's novel, treating the tension-fraught relationship between the United States government and Native Americans, and other scholarship applies both postcolonial and race theory to analyses of power dynamics in the novel.

²⁶ For a thorough discussion of queer Native American literatures, see Lisa Tatonetti's introductory paragraphs in "From Wallace to Wishkob: Queer Relationships and Two-Spirit Characters in *The Beet Queen*, *Tales of Burning Love*, and *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*" and her essay "The Emergence and Importance of Queer American Indian Literatures, or, 'Help and Stories' in 30 Years of SAIL."

²⁷ Anishinaabe "is a collective term that refers to the Ojibway, Odowa and Algonkin peoples, who all share closely related Algonquin languages. There are many variant spellings of the name 'Anishinaabe' which essentially means 'First-' or 'Original-People'" ("Anishinaabe"). While Erdrich uses both Anishinaabe and Ojibwe throughout *The Last Report*, I choose to use the latter term more frequently as an acknowledgment that the Little No Horse reservation is occupied primarily by the Ojibwe.

²⁸ Additional studies on gender in Erdrich's work include "The Construction of Gender and Ethnicity in the Poetry of Leslie Silko and Louise Erdrich" and "The Construction of Gender and Ethnicity in the Texts of Leslie Silko and

I acknowledge the role of the two spirit in Erdrich's novel while departing from this discussion by responding to Erdrich's portrayal of gender specifically in relation to the Catholic Church.

By addressing the role of Catholicism on the reservation, Erdrich takes part in a larger ongoing dialogue about the tense relationship between Catholicism and Native American religions. Erdrich's protagonist occupies a space I characterize using Mary Louise Pratt's term "contact zone."²⁹ Later in the chapter, I will explore the reservation and more specifically the sweat lodge as contact zones in which Native American and especially non-Native beliefs are challenged and transformed. Karsten Fitz notes that "the issue of whether or not it is possible to negotiate a middle ground, a balance between traditional tribal and Christian religions, largely remains untouched by literary scholarship" (1). Erdrich's direct treatment of this "middle ground" between Christianity and the Ojibwe has garnered her negative attention from within the community of Native American authors. According to John Carlos Rowe, "Erdrich has been criticized by other Native American writers, notably Leslie Marmon Silko, for what appears to be her friendly negotiation of the boundaries between Native American and Euroamerican cultures" (204). Rowe writes, "In *Last Report*, Erdrich focuses on the fortuitous consequences of the hybridization of these two cultures in ways that seem to dare her critics to link her own identity as a writer, perhaps even as a psychological subject, to just such dangerous crossings" (204). Some critics would likely identify these "dangerous crossings" as signs of resistance and

Louise Erdrich" by Susan Perez Castillo, "Blurs, Blends, Berdaches: Gender Mixing in the Novels of Louise Erdrich" by Julie Barak, "Power and Authority in the Realms of Racial and Gender Politics: Postcolonial and Critical Race Theory in *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*" by Mark Shackleton, and dissertations by Mary Mae Ryan and Eileen Quinlan analyzing Erdrich's work in the light of feminism and womanism.

²⁹ In *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Pratt identifies the "contact zone" as the place "where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination" (4).

subversion whereas other scholars would argue that the contact zone can only produce destruction of the Native culture. In recent years scholars such as Catherine Rainwater, Susan Friedman, Mark Shackleton, Maria Orban, and Alan Velie have critically analyzed Erdrich's responses to Christianity and its intersections with Ojibwe belief. Most of them assert that Erdrich does not show a preference for either cultural or religious system. In contrast and most recently, Brian Ingraffia's 2015 article, "'Deadly Conversions': Louise Erdrich's Indictment of Catholicism in *Tracks*, *Love Medicine*, and *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*," asserts that "Erdrich clearly demonstrates her belief in the superiority of Native American spirituality over Catholic Christianity" (314). Ingraffia's article is important, drawing attention to Erdrich's criticism of the church, but he focuses on multiple novels by Erdrich and so provides only a cursory reading of *The Last Report*, not fully taking into account the nuances at the end of this particular novel. I agree with Ingraffia that Erdrich soundly indicts Christianity's presence on the reservation and expresses a preference for Native American spirituality in *The Last Report*, but this same novel does not demonstrate the wholesale dismissal of Christianity.

Through the novel's German-American protagonist, Erdrich's text acknowledges that tensions between mainstream America and Native Americans cannot be oversimplified. Agnes comes to the Ojibwe not as a colonizer but as an individual seeking refuge from a world of tragedy. Erdrich inverts power dynamics, positioning Agnes, who lacks power as a woman in both society and in the patriarchal Catholic Church, in a position of power as a priest. Similarly, Erdrich identifies the Ojibwe not as the priest's subjects or subordinates, but as spiritually vibrant individuals who minister to Agnes in her time of need. Even as she instructs the Ojibwe in the ways of Catholicism and performs the sacraments, her power is not that of an oppressor

effacing Native American culture. In fact, Agnes's life as Father Damien ironically leads her deeper into conflict with Catholicism. However, rather than participating in the rhetoric of conquest, repaying Catholicism in kind with its own effacement for participating in colonization, Erdrich negotiates with and revises Catholicism.

Erdrich's novel does not simply propose that there is both danger and possibility in the contact zone nor does it dismiss the Christian faith entirely. The novel posits that perhaps a peaceful coexistence of religions and cultures that are historically opposed to one another must find its beginning not in the reality of political, social, economic, and religious boundaries but in the imagination where those boundaries become flexible. In *The Last Report*, Erdrich signals the complexity of the contact zone between Euro-American Catholicism and the Ojibwe of North Dakota by embedding it within dreams and visions, ultimately creating an imagined space in which the protagonist experiences a combination of Catholicism and Ojibwe religion each of which speaks to her complex gendered identity.

In *The Last Report*, coexistence between Ojibwe culture and Catholicism depends upon the subversive undermining of the patriarchal nature of the Catholic Church and the exploration of both the complexities and potential of female leadership. On the reservation, Agnes negotiates gender in the context of her religious identity as a Catholic priest. She pushes the boundaries of Catholicism, performing a male identity in order to access the holy Mass and the sacraments through which she constructs community with the Ojibwe. A male identity allows the protagonist access to the sacramental elements of Catholicism, while Agnes herself is ministered to by the Ojibwe. Simultaneously, Erdrich's female priest and Mary Kashpaw the female Christ figure

suggest not just a critique of the patriarchal structure of the Catholic Church but also the expansion of Catholic understandings of sacrament and sacred place. Doctrines and boundaries are prohibitive and cause the protagonist to act secretively and to wrestle continuously with gender and religious identity. Maleness appears to be a prerequisite for offering the sacraments rather than merely experiencing them as a parishioner. Otherwise, Agnes would not need a disguise in order to bless the Eucharist and hear confessions. But in the imagination or dreams, sacred roles and spaces are marked by inclusion and peace. In imagined spaces, the protagonist is both male and female, both Catholic and Ojibwe, and there is no conflict between them. This redefinition of the sacred hinges on Damien's experience of community and family among the Ojibwe – community and the actions that promote it are what he comes to see as truly sacred. Erdrich's novel suggests that imagination transforms the contact zone by redefining transgression and emphasizing grace and healing, making this imagined alien place subversively sacramental, offering a space where people experience the grace of God outside the confines of institutional religion.

The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse

Religious and Gender Identity

In *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, Louise Erdrich tells the story of a German-American woman who disguises herself as a male priest and serves for decades on an Ojibwe reservation in North Dakota. Before she moves to the reservation, the protagonist identifies as Sister Cecelia, a nun who struggles with temptation. She is drawn to sensual pleasure through the music of Chopin and even by the imprint of the word "Fleisch" (German for "flesh") on the bricks out of which the convent is built (13). Her time at the convent is also

marked by the absence of ease: “There is no rest,” says Cecelia (16). When forbidden to play Chopin on the piano and therefore cut off from the sensual pleasure the music prompts, Cecelia sheds her habit and leaves the convent behind, identifying by her birth name, Agnes Dewitt (17). Upon meeting Berndt Vogel, a farmer, Agnes takes up residence on his property accepting his offer of food and a place to sleep. Her life with Berndt allows Agnes to embrace sensual pleasure both through sleeping with Berndt and once again playing the music of Chopin (17 – 21). She tragically loses Berndt during a violent bank robbery (32) and, not long after, her home and piano are swept away in a devastating flood (38 – 39).

Following the flood, Agnes undergoes the physical and spiritual transformation that realigns her with the Catholic Church and begins her connection to the Little No Horse reservation. She discovers the body of the drowned priest, Father Damien, who had offered her communion just days earlier. She exchanges her clothing for his cassock and so becomes a priest headed for an appointment on an Ojibwe reservation (44 – 45). Ironically, the former nun motivated to leave the convent by pursuit of sensual pleasure dons the uniform of a chaste officer of the church signaling a tension that persists in Agnes throughout the text. This radical transformation signals the beginning of Agnes’s³⁰ lifelong devotion to and struggle with Catholicism as well as her transgression of Catholicism’s prohibition of women in the priesthood. This journey leads her to a multicultural experience of Catholic and Ojibwe culture and enables her to speak and act with unprecedented authority, discovering the sacredness of community and binding herself together with the Ojibwe on the Little No Horse reservation.

³⁰ I will refer to the protagonist as both Agnes and Father Damien interchangeably, following Erdrich’s rule for pronoun usage: “When Father Damien is with other people, people see him as Father Damien. So he’s Father Damien. And when shocked back into an awareness of Agnes, there’s Agnes. When alone, unless she is thinking something specifically only Father Damien could think, then Agnes is Agnes. The pronouns carefully reflect the shift in identity” (“NPR’s Liane Hansen” 7 – 8).

In other novels, Erdrich chooses to focus on the emotional and spiritual journeys of Native American characters. In this novel, however, she interweaves tribal voices with those of the German-American woman. In fact, this Caucasian woman's voice is primary – the narrative is framed by her perspective and the majority of it is told either by or about her. While Agnes does not experience the same hardships as her Native American friends, she is marginalized.³¹ While the Ojibwe endure cultural, ethnic, and gender oppression Agnes's sex disqualifies her from serving as a priest. As an individual who chooses to seek society among the Ojibwe and as someone who does so by transgressing Catholic teaching, she operates outside of mainstream American culture and in danger of having her ties to the Catholic Church broken upon the revelation of her identity. Agnes enters the reservation having assumed a position of influence not through the assertion of racial or political superiority but through disguise and transgression in the eyes of the Church.

Before her arrival at the reservation, the flood marks Agnes's renewal of her commitment to God. After reaching shore, Agnes has a vision of herself cared for by a man with "strong arms" and a "broad and open face" (42). He treats her with a sense of intimate familiarity and answers the desire for sensual pleasure that drove her from the convent: "He stroked her hair, smiled at her. She felt warmth along her thighs, hovering elation. Bands of rippling lightness engulfed her when he moved closer. And then his hand, brutalized and heavy from work, fell gently as he held her arm and took away the empty bowl, the horn spoon, and wiped her lips" (43). Upon awakening from the vision, Agnes knows the man's identity: "Through You, in You, with You. Aren't those beautiful words? For of course she knew her husband long before she

³¹ I want to be careful not to equate the suffering and marginalization experienced by Native Americans with that experienced by non-Native women. The situations are distinct and each carries with it a set of issues peculiar to the experiences of the individuals concerned.

met Him, long before He rescued her” (43). The man to whom the capitalized pronouns refer is known as the one with the “horn spoon” throughout the rest of the narrative and is later identified directly as Christ (123). Ironically, now that Agnes has adopted the identity of priest she experiences the sensuality she longed for but was forbidden at the convent.

Though the vision is brief, it makes a profound impression on Agnes, helping her articulate her renewed commitment in terms of marriage to Christ. When Agnes looks to the convent for God, she finds only impossible temptation, reminders of the flesh through the structures built around her and music that she plays on the piano and strict prohibition of the desire these reminders provoke. When she sees God in the vision apart from church, she finds an invitation she wants to answer. After moving to the reservation, she confesses in a letter³² to the Pope, “having met Him just that once, having known Him in the man’s body, how could I not love Him until death? How could I not follow Him?” (43) She receives the vision as an invitation to “attend Him as a loving woman follows her soldier into the battle of life, dressed as He is dressed, suffering the same hardships” (44). As a woman unwilling to deny her body’s sexual pleasure through the music of Chopin and with Berndt Vogel, this vision of intimacy with Christ in the form of a human man resonates with Agnes. Instead of offering more prohibitions like the ones she encountered at the convent, the vision serves as a reminder of her marriage to Christ within which sexuality and sensuality are good.

Read in a Catholic context, the vision initiates Agnes’s devotion to what Pope John Paul II³³ calls “spousal love,” the means by which a celibate “becomes ‘one spirit’ with Christ the

³² Throughout the novel, Agnes writes a series of letters to the Pope. While all of them are delivered, none of them are answered during Agnes’s lifetime and some are even purged from the Vatican’s records as though they were inconsequential. Agnes attempts to gain the Pope’s ear, but she is never presented with evidence that he actually reads her words. Still, in the act of writing to the Pope Agnes transfers her daily performance of masculinity into writing and joins it with her desire to learn and lead spiritually.

³³ This is the same Pope who writes a single letter to Damien following Damien’s death in 1997. See pages 69-70 of this chapter for a discussion of this letter.

Spouse” (“On the Dignity” 28). Agnes’s recommitment to marriage with Christ, achieved through her assumption of Damien’s identity, marks both a permissive experience of sensuality with Christ and Agnes’s first willingness to restrain her sexuality.³⁴ The vision she receives of herself as bride and Christ as her sensitive and sensual husband initiates her into a life of Catholic service characterized in part by a commitment to celibacy.³⁵ Agnes’s entry into the priesthood recalls what John Paul II refers to as “voluntary celibacy, chosen for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven” (27). He explains that this commitment “serves as a way to devote all the energies of soul and body during one’s earthly life exclusively for the sake of the eschatological kingdom” (27). Ironically for Agnes, this commitment, imagined as a holy marriage, is also a transgression. The Church would condemn Agnes’s act of disguise, her blatant disregard for the exclusion of women from the priesthood. But Agnes describes the experience of becoming Damien as a conversion. Before the flood, Agnes’s relationship to Christ was broken. She was “existing in a state of mortal sin, [and she] took no communion” (22). But when she discovers Damien’s body, she marks the totality of her commitment by cutting her hair and burying it along with the priest, calling him “the keeper of her old life” (44). Agnes writes to the Pope, “I drowned in spirit, but revived. I lost an old life and gained a new . . . I had new eyes” (41). In describing her transformation as a conversion experience, Agnes asserts her own belief in the legitimacy of her new identity as priest.

Readers might puzzle over why Agnes responds to the vision of Christ by assuming the identity of a priest rather than returning to life as a nun. My primary concern here, however, is

³⁴ She wrestles with this restraint later in the narrative when she realizes her attraction to a fellow priest. Though Agnes reacts to her brief affair with the priest by imposing abstinence on herself. Alison Chapman goes so far as to say that “sexual experiences form part of Cecilia/Agnes's encounter with the divine” (159).

³⁵ It also marks the beginning of Agnes experiencing spiritual visions. Previously, “God had never sent a spirit, never spoken to her directly, never employed a visible shape or touched Agnes with a divine hand” (42). Agnes’s post-flood life is punctuated by dreams and visions.

not in speculating about Agnes's personal motivation for becoming Damien but in questioning why the novel features a former nun becoming a priest. This transformation gives *The Last Report* a voice in the contemporary Catholic feminist debates about the role of women in the church at the same time that it brings Western and Native understandings of gender into conversation with one another. Erdrich's novel illuminates the Catholic tradition's wrestle with gender roles. Agnes's ability to put on and off various gender identities contrasts sharply with the Catholic Church's teaching. In "On the Dignity and Vocation of Women," a statement issued by the former Pope John Paul II in 1988, the second and most recent Marian year in the history of the Church, the Pope asserts that God created masculine and feminine, male and female distinct from one another. He indicates that by honoring these gender distinctions people can both honor God and comprehend his plan of redemption. While God might exhibit both masculine and feminine traits (9), man and woman, says the former Pope, are meant to exhibit only one or the other: he asserts that God made a "decision that the human being should always and only exist as a woman or a man" (2). Furthermore, only in the "discovery of all the richness and personal resources of femininity"³⁶ can woman practice her destined vocation to draw others into the love of Christ (16). And yet for Agnes the only way that she can actively call others into this love is by disguising herself as a man. Her need to cloak her identity, her femininity, by disguising both her person and her voice underscores the oppressive masculinity of the church.

Unlike John Paul II, Erdrich portrays gender identities as constructed, performative by nature. The narrator describes Agnes's painful process of transforming into Damien every day on

³⁶ John Paul II describes this femininity: Woman "*represents the humanity* which belongs to all human beings" (emphasis original, 4). And furthermore, "*a special sensitivity . . . Is characteristic of their femininity*" (22). He continues, "It is commonly thought that the *women* are more capable than men of paying attention *to another person*" (25). Agnes does interact with the Ojibwe with sensitivity and attentiveness, but she does so while masquerading as a man.

the reservation. She begins “each morning with a feeling of loss that she finally defined as the loss of Agnes” (76). As she sheds her former life, “her thoughts becoming Damien’s thoughts. Her voice his voice” (76), she begins to wonder who she truly is. The narrator poses the question burning in Agnes’s mind: “between these two, where was the real self?” (76) As she considers her previous life, Agnes realizes that “both Sister Cecelia and then Agnes were as heavily manufactured of gesture and pose as was Father Damien” (76). The motifs of disguise and putting on and off clothing further illustrate this reading of gender identity in the novel. Agnes does this first at the convent when she removes her habit in front of the mother superior, second when she becomes Father Damien, and then repeatedly every evening on the reservation when she enters the cabin as Damien and slides into bed as Agnes without the garb of the priest. The putting on and off of clothing symbolizes Agnes’s deliberate taking up and putting down of different identities.

By taking up masculine clothing and mannerisms on a daily basis, Agnes practices what Judith Butler³⁷ calls “subversive repetition” (*Gender Trouble* 32): “repetition of the law which is not its consolidation, but its displacement” (30). The “law” in this case is the religious edict that only men can be priests. Agnes repeats this law every day on the reservation as she modifies her gestures and voice to appear masculine. The narrator explains:

In the convent, [Agnes had] been taught to walk with eyes downcast. Now, Father Damien tipped his chin out and narrowed his gaze, focused straight ahead. As a farm wife, Agnes had leaned out with a hand on her hip, carried things on her hip, nudged doors open and shut with her hip. Men didn’t use their hips as shelves and braces. Father

³⁷ For a related discussion of the relationship between Agnes's performance of gender and Judith Butler's theory of performativity in *Bodies That Matter* see "Religion and Gender in *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*" by Maria Orban and Alan Velie.

Damien walked with soldierly directness and never swayed. (*The Last Report* 76)

Agnes's performance of gender demonstrates Butler's assertion that an individual can only operate from within "existing power relations" (30). Agnes must follow a set of culturally constructed "rules" that make her performance successful. For example, she reminds herself daily to "make requests in the form of orders," "give compliments in the form of concessions," and "ask questions in the form of statements" (*The Last Report* 74). While the Ojibwe are baffled that Agnes "would have to giv[e] up [her] sexuality in order to be close to God" ("NPR's Liane Hansen" 9), her gendered performance does not confuse the Ojibwe. Nanapush deftly identifies Agnes as a "man-acting woman" and notes that he and other Ojibwe had previously discussed her gender identity (*The Last Report* 232). Agnes does, however, unsettle fellow priests Father Gregory Wekkle and Father Jude Miller. Gregory is surprised by his sexual attraction to Damien, which he experiences before he realizes Damien is biologically female (200). During Jude's stay at the reservation, his eyes appear to play tricks on him. When looking at Father Damien, "a strange thing happened. He saw, inhabiting the same cassock as the priest, an old woman. . . He shook his head, craned forward, but no, there was Father Damien again" (139). During a later conversation with the priest, Jude again doubts his eyes asking Damien if he has a twin and dismissing the "troubling sensation" that Damien looked like a woman as "a problem of perception" (146). Agnes creates what Butler calls "gender confusion" that has the potential to "operate as [a site] for intervention, exposure, and displacement" of normative constructs of sexuality (31). The character of Agnes/Damien intervenes in Catholic doctrine, questioning the necessity of maleness for the priesthood, suggesting that women can as effectively perform the role of the priest.

While Agnes's gender bending performance succeeds in confusing two Catholic priests

who rely on a Western understanding of gender as male or female, she finds sympathy among the Ojibwe who have a broader conception of gender. Pamela Rader notes that “Unlike European-American binary constructions, Native American gender is not exclusive to a male or female construction, nor is it linked to sexuality” (227), hence Nanapush’s use of “man-acting woman” as a gender category. Deirdre Keenan, who reads *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* exclusively “in the context of mainstream attitudes about transgender identities and Native American gender systems,” argues that Agnes belongs to the Native American “Two Spirit”³⁸ tradition (2). Two Spirit refers to a multiplicity of gender categories: “as Anguksuar [a Native American activist] explains, the term in no way determines ‘genital activity’; *Two Spirit* determines ‘the qualities that define a person’s social role and spiritual gifts’” (qtd. in Keenan 3). Keenan asserts that Agnes is not a lesbian (7); instead her choice to disguise herself as Damien is an indicator that eventually “Damien [will be] able to realize a true Two Spirit identity” (8):

Agnes’s new identification as Father Damien is no mere whim where she chooses to pass as a Catholic priest merely to enter the land of the Ojibwe. Nor is she transgendered in the sense of feeling that her female body is a mistake of birth that belies a fully masculine psyche . . . As Father Damien, Agnes becomes both male and female, masculine and feminine, and in claiming this identity she responds to a spiritual (not a religious) calling. (4)

Keenan rightly distinguishes between transgender in a bodily sense and transgender in a spiritual and behavioral sense. Agnes never expresses a desire to be biologically male instead of female.

³⁸ J. James Iovannone offers a concise history of Native American understandings of gender in his article “‘Mix – Ups, Messes, Confinements, and Double Dealings’: Transgendered Performances in Three Novels by Louise Erdrich.” He explains that the scholarly world has gradually left behind the term “berdache” which was originally used by colonizers as a derogatory term referring to a homosexual male. Iovannone traces the advent and proliferation of the term “Two Spirit,” coined by Native Americans to describe a nontraditional nonwestern understanding of gender characterized by inclusivity, multiple gender categories, and an honoring of transgender individuals (39 – 41).

Just as Damien refers to the priesthood as his “calling” (7), so Keenan says that among Native Americans gender identity is often thought of as a “spiritual calling” (8). She asserts that Agnes’s transformation into Damien is “spiritually ordained” (8) and makes it likely that she will participate in the Two Spirit tradition of acting as a mediator (9). Significantly, priests also function as mediators. Rather than disqualifying Agnes for religious service, the space she inhabits between Western gender categories offers her spiritual significance among the Ojibwe.

Patrice Hollrah rejects the use of Two Spirit to refer to Agnes/Damien altogether, asserting that it is “incorrect and inappropriate” to apply this Native American designation to a non-Native individual (99). But the novel itself challenges this stance of exclusivity. The Ojibwe adopt Agnes into their families and their culture. However, I agree with Hollrah that “Erdrich places no labels or rigid paradigms on her characters’ gender identity and sexual orientations but demonstrates how they cared deeply for other people” (105). Agnes’s care is manifested through her work as a priest and it is this work which both challenges the Catholic Church’s teaching on gender and eventually leads to Agnes’s adoption by the Ojibwe and her own adoption of a multicultural Catholic/Ojibwe identity.

Simultaneously it is Agnes’s Catholicism that poses the strongest challenge³⁹ to the Ojibwe’s acceptance of Agnes’s complex gender performance. John Paul II, understanding gender distinctions as both essential and determined by God, warns that women who do not live into “their own feminine ‘originality’” will ultimately “*deform and lose what constitutes their essential richness*” (emphasis original, 14). He insists “that the whole ‘ethos’ of mutual relations

³⁹ Though I write about Agnes's experience of Catholicism and Ojibwe culture in the context of a project on reconciliation, I am not suggesting that the two traditions are not still at odds in the novel. They are. In fact, this is why Agnes needs imagined and dream spaces in which to experiment with and experience a blend of Catholic and Ojibwe practices. Particularly concerning gender, the Catholic Church clings to gender specific roles that contradict or rub against the fluidity of gender in Ojibwe culture.

between men and women has to correspond to the personal truth of their being” (31). What then is the personal truth of Agnes’s being? Does she have an essential self? The Pope would say she will find herself in the enriched fulfillment of her femininity by pursuing virginity and motherhood (9).⁴⁰ Agnes actually experiences a reversal of these values. While she renews her vow of celibacy, she does so only after breaking it with Gregory. And in an ironic reversal of the “spiritual motherhood” admonished by John Paul II, Agnes “mistakenly” signs Damien’s/her name as “both priest and father” on Lulu Nanapush’s baptismal certificate (184).

Agnes’s Priestly Identity

While Agnes’s sense of self is not rooted in Catholicism’s teaching on gender, her consistent practice of Catholicism plays a role in developing the protagonist’s own sense of self even in the midst of her wrestle with gender. In spite of her anxiety over the temporary and constructed nature of her multiple selves, Agnes does lay claim to one essential identity. Her commitment to the identity of “priest” is manifested most strongly when love tempts⁴¹ her away from it. While maintaining her disguise on the reservation, Agnes falls in love with a visiting priest named Gregory. Ironically, their affair ends when Agnes refuses to leave the reservation with him because she finds her purpose and meaning in Catholic practice. She confesses to Gregory that she maintains her disguise as a man because without the ability to “say the Mass” she has “nothing” (207). She declares, “I am a priest” (206), and with these words Agnes asserts her identity in religious terms, locating her essential⁴² self in relation to God.

⁴⁰ John Paul II writes, “in vocation understood in this way, what is personally feminine reaches a new dimension: the dimension of the mighty works of God” (22). The document identifies motherhood and virginity as the primary “dimensions of the vocation of women in the light of divine Revelation” (9). The writer calls “*the true order of love*” the “*woman’s own vocation*” (40). Agnes fulfills that true order.

⁴¹ Temptation here functions as part of the Catholic framework within which Agnes attempts to live. She knows that priests are meant to be celibate, but she feels sexually drawn to Father Gregory. Her Catholic context labels such passion as forbidden and her desire for it as temptation.

⁴² By essential, I mean the part of Agnes that she considers most necessary or basic. In spite of the Catholic Church treating the priesthood as a social construction by requiring maleness, Agnes’s vocation as priest transcends gender

Agnes is not the only character in the novel who assumes the identity of a priest; Erdrich underscores Agnes's devotion to the priesthood by drawing a contrast between her and a criminal disguised as a priest. Earlier in the narrative, the criminal who shoots Agnes and kills Berndt during the violent bank robbery is a man named the Actor who dons a priest's cassock in order to enter the bank undetected. Agnes boldly challenges the Actor's use of priestly disguise. She confronts the Actor, "loudly and clearly, in an amused tone of voice" asking him why he keeps up the "pretense" (25). In contrast to her own later declaration, "I am a priest," (206) she shouts to the Actor, "You are not a priest!" (25) Agnes does not just assume the identity of a priest; she becomes one in contrast to the Actor who uses the guise of priest for personal gain. Ironically, like the Actor's, Agnes's journey as a priest begins with the putting on of clothing, costume. But unlike the bank robber, Agnes refuses to make choices that would jeopardize her participation in the priesthood. The contrast between the Actor's violence and Agnes's extreme kindness and compassion also highlights Agnes's determination to act in harmony with the office of priesthood. The comparison Erdrich draws between the results of each "priest's" actions is striking: the Actor's "flock" is made up of "blank eyed sheep" (26) while Father Damien's parishioners are caring and aware, extending themselves to offer sustenance and peace for the priest. Both of them may rely upon disguise, but the Actor's disregard for the office of priesthood and the value of human life only serves to showcase how deeply Agnes/Damien strives to preserve both the priesthood and the community around her/him.

Agnes refers to her vocation as a "calling" (7), one that she answers in response to the vision of Christ as her husband. She articulates that calling with the declaration in which she verbally claims "priest" as her identity. N. Scott Momaday contends that "in a profound sense

and culture. She has "nothing" (207) without her priesthood. This most basic facet of her identity is essential for her survival.

our language determines us; it shapes our most fundamental selves; it establishes our identity and confirms our existence” (“The American West and the Burden of Belief” 103). At the moment that Agnes declares herself a priest, she determines, shapes, and establishes her “most fundamental” self through language, choosing an identity that signals her vocation rather than what sex she is. Similarly, Melanie Wittmier asserts that Damien “realize[s] himself through words” (242), ultimately becoming “man – woman, priest – shaman, holy sinner, and woman made of words” (243). When Agnes asserts her religious identity to Gregory, she repeats the declaration three times, adding to the final repetition these words: “I am nothing but a priest” (*The Last Report* 207). At this moment, she both ends her relationship with Gregory and confirms a break with those previous identities.⁴³ She names not only who she is but what she must do: she must minister to the Ojibwe as a priest. She positions herself simultaneously as one who transgresses Catholic doctrine (as a woman in a man’s role) and as one firmly committed to Catholic practice (“nothing” without the Mass) ultimately choosing religious over gender identity as her primary and only descriptor. Though she notes that she must recall and even study the doctrine and practices of the church, when she leads Mass she does so effortlessly as though born to it. For Agnes, the Mass is intuitive: “the Mass came to Agnes like memorized music. She had only to say the first words and all followed, ordered, instinctive. The phrases were in her and part of her” (68). Even on her first day as Father Damien the words of the Mass come to her naturally and she experiences the miracle of transubstantiation (69). The novel suggests that while Agnes must *learn* to act like a man in order to be a priest, she intuitively *knows* how to engage in priestly Catholic practice. She embodies, rather than learns how to offer the sacraments. This contrast between gender and vocation is pivotal. It suggests that while gender

⁴³ This break is not total. The narrator continues to refer to the protagonist as Agnes throughout the remainder of the novel.

may be performative, the spiritual office of the priesthood is received as a gift, something a person is rather than does.

As Agnes presses into her vocational identity, it is important to note that she does not escape or put aside gender. The role of priest is strongly gendered. Agnes does not simply leave behind the limitations that arise within the Western gender binary, male/female. As Father Damien, Agnes adopts a different set of limitations than the ones associated with femininity that she encountered as Cecelia or Agnes. Instead of facing the restrictions that come with being a woman, she must modify her actions and voice in order to appear as a man. In order to be priest Agnes has to learn ways she can transform her speech so that it resembles a man's. Otherwise, the Catholic Church could declare all of her service as a priest invalid. As a woman performing masculinity in order to remain in the priesthood, Agnes redefines what it means to be a priest. She challenges the notion that the sacraments must be carried out by a man but does so while acknowledging the church's insistence on the priest's maleness. Setting out perhaps to escape her own sorrows and answer a call to marriage with Christ, her performance of masculinity in order to maintain her link to the sacraments ultimately critiques the church from within. Simultaneously, she embraces, and often endures, a role that requires continual sacrifice and elaborate performance. Anyone called into the priesthood has to make sacrifices, but Agnes's sacrifices, giving up the possibility of a marriage with Gregory and daily having to hide her own bodily identity, have such force because they are unexpected, counter to the church's emphasis on celibacy and motherhood. In contrast to Catholicism's insistence on the maleness of priesthood, Agnes answers a call and presses into an identity she considers so essential that she thinks of herself first as a priest rather than as a gendered individual.

Returning to Momaday's assertion that an "idea is realized in language" before a "Man

[can] take possession of himself” (168), Agnes realizes her commitment to the priesthood not only by verbally asserting “I am a priest” in opposition to Gregory’s assertion that she is a woman, but she asserts her priestly identity also in writing. Throughout the novel, Agnes/Damien pens a series of letters⁴⁴ to the Pope sometimes seeking advice, a listening ear, and at other times asserting indignation. Father Damien is bold in his writing, addressing every one of the popes who held office since 1912 (2). He also writes other missives, “fierce political attacks, reproachful ecclesiastical letters, memoirs of reservation life for history journals, and poetry” (2). His numerous letters or “reports” are written with an attitude of deference to the Pope. Early on, they contain apologies for Damien’s own “awkwardness” (2), and bold appeals for guidance and aid in carrying the burden of weighty confessionals. Eventually Damien uses the letters to affirm his commitment to the faith. He asserts that his words should “confirm my lack of doubt,” “my endurance, my beliefs” (4). In his final letter, which opens with the direct address: “Pope!” (344), Damien offers a confident appraisal of his own accomplishments. He does not speak as one unsure of his identity. Instead he asserts, “I have vanquished the devil,” “I have willingly exchanged my prospects for eternal joy in return for the salvation of the soul of one of the more troublesome of my charges” (48). By the end of the novel, Damien’s writing voice is bold, witty, and unapologetic while his tone alternates between familiar and frustrated. His identity as a priest is manifested, shaped, and strengthened in writing.⁴⁵

Damien, however, is never able to read a validation of his priestly identity. Ironically, Father Damien’s body of correspondence to the Pope is “inadvertently destroyed in an update

⁴⁴ Erdrich gives readers access to these letters by printing many of them within the text of the novel. This recalls Diane Glancy’s method of giving voice to Kateri Tekakwitha in *The Reason for Crows*. She writes Kateri’s journal entries and juxtaposes them alongside journal entries made by Jesuit priests. She thereby gives the woman’s voice an equal hearing with the words of men.

⁴⁵ While both letter writing and dreaming are forms of imaginative expression throughout the novel, letters offer Agnes an opportunity to assert her priestly identity without being questioned about her appearance, and dreams offer a landscape in which her religious and cultural identities are malleable, fluid.

and purge of the Vatican's filing system" (354). This "update" eliminates evidence of Agnes's choice to cross gender and cultural boundaries in response to a vision from Christ. Not knowing that the letters had been destroyed, Damien laments, "Apparently, one couldn't hope for a reply, although, that would be all too human, wouldn't it! An actual response from the Pope after a lifetime of devoted correspondence" (3). Damien's voice, even though transformed to meet the gender criteria of the Church, still goes unheard by the Pope during his lifetime. At the very end of the novel, after Damien's death, the mission at Little No Horse receives a mysterious delivery: a fax machine that receives a transmission as soon as it is plugged in. This single letter from the Pope is dated 1997 making the writer John Paul II whose "On the Dignity and Vocation of Women" I reference throughout. He praises Damien's work and expresses an interest in hearing the entirety of his story. He hopes Damien can "*pass [his] days now in pleasant contemplation of all the good [he has] accomplished*" (emphasis in original, 355). The same Pope who insists on distinct gender categories and a place for women outside the masculine hierarchy of leadership inadvertently approves the work of the imposter female priest.

Father Gregory's critical response to Agnes's insistent declarations that she is a priest underscores the judgment Agnes expects from the Catholic Church. Gregory exclaims, "A woman cannot be a priest" (206) and then, "you're sacrilege" (207). Her act of disguise itself is transgressive, but Gregory takes his condemnation a step further and calls Agnes herself sacrilege. The man passes judgment on the woman, not just on her act. He makes his declaration as though he has the authority to name her as the opposite of sacred. In fact, it is in Gregory that Erdrich represents the persistent and limiting masculinity of the Catholic Church. What John Paul II says about the relationship between women and the Church is contrary to what Catholic characters evidence in Erdrich's novel. The former Pope argues that the "domination"

of men over women “indicates the disturbance and loss of the stability of that fundamental equality which the man and woman possess” in the garden (13). He continues, “The equality resulting from their dignity as persons” must be restored and is restored under the new covenant established by Christ (13). Therefore, within the Catholic Church especially, men and women are to be different but equal, with men showing no sign of “domination.” This is not Agnes’s experience. Furthermore, Agnes notes an imbalance in society in general. Once disguised as a man, Agnes encounters proof that women are treated as inferior: “the driver treated her with much more respect as a priest than she’d ever known...” (62). She continues, “as Agnes, she’d always felt too inhibited to closely question men. Questions from women to men always raised concerns of impropriety. As a man, she found that Father Damien was free to pursue all questions with frankness and ease” (62). Her voice finds an additional level of freedom when she is disguised as a man. When Agnes acts as woman, Gregory acts as domineering man, not her equal. The Catholic system as portrayed in the novel is broken. It does not exhibit the gender equality the Pope declares is so necessary in the kingdom of God.

The behavior of male priests toward women later in the novel further underscores Erdrich’s portrayal of the Catholic Church as marked by gender inequality. When Gregory returns to the reservation in old age, his assumption of masculine authority takes Agnes by surprise. She comments that though she had not noticed it before, Gregory was condescending toward her now that he knew she was female. Gregory “was unaware of it, but in all worldly situations, where they stood side-by-side, he treated her as somehow less” (303). The narrator continues, “when they were together, he spoke first” (303). Father Jude’s response too is

influenced by the patriarchal hierarchy of Catholicism. When Jude tries to trick Marie Kashpaw⁴⁶ into talking about her experiences with Pauline Puyat, a controversial candidate for sainthood, Marie calls out the priest, uncovering his “use [of] the holy body of God as bait” (317). She speaks with authority that surprises the priest. The narrator notes, “In what he now thought of longingly as his ‘regular life,’ he was routinely in charge of every human exchange ... not one of the Catholic Daughters, nuns, or Theresians, would have challenged him. This elderly Ojibwe woman did so with a perfect ease” (317). Erdrich illuminates an anxiety over the relationship between gender and authority in the Catholic tradition. When Father Jude speaks as a priest only to have his voice overshadowed by that of a woman, he is unsettled; he “go[es] silent” (317).

In contrast to these masculine voices, the novel repeatedly calls attention to Agnes’s voice. As a young German-American nun, Agnes uses the language of her forefathers to express her most basic needs for food and shelter (13, 17). She speaks in German “with a low, gravelly abruptness” and “her voice [is] husky and bossy” (13). When she arrives at the Ojibwe reservation, disguised as Father Damien, Agnes works hard to learn the Ojibwe language. Agnes so successfully learns to speak the language that she, according to Deirdre Keenan, “mediates between mainstream and traditional Ojibwe cultures [offering] translations [which] serve to displace mainstream concepts with Ojibwe meanings” (9).

Cross-Cultural Negotiation and the Imagination

Throughout the narrative, Agnes has experiences that transform her both into a participant of the Native American community and into a person with authority. This transformation is marked by Agnes’s easy familiarity with the Ojibwe language by the end of the

⁴⁶ Brian Ingrassia offers an insightful reading of Marie Kashpaw’s character throughout Erdrich’s novels, arguing that Marie “sets out to use the religion of the colonizers in order to overcome them at their own game” ultimately “negat[ing] and repudiate[ing]” Christianity (320).

narrative and also by her confident tone in written correspondence with the Pope. As she speaks and writes confidently, her voice eludes categorization: “Agnes’s speech had always been husky and low for a woman. Father Damien’s voice was musical, for a man” (76). During her life as a priest, the protagonist’s voice represents the female voice changed, the female voice performing the male voice in order to assume a position of authority. Agnes exerts this authority by performing the sacraments on the Ojibwe reservation, by initiating members of her new community into Catholicism and binding families together in marriage. She also exerts her authority through her letters to the Pope, which begin as expressions of need for guidance and end as often sarcastic assertions of indignation that the Pope has failed to respond. The Ojibwe respect Agnes and the teachings she offers not because her voice sounds like that of a man but because they appreciate her wit, the way she advocates for the Ojibwe, and they see in her a person who needs help from them. Agnes uses her voice to build bridges between her Catholic experience and her new Ojibwe family, successfully becoming a multicultural and multilingual member of the community.

While the Ojibwe welcome Agnes, she struggles in her own Catholic context to receive the same hospitality. As practicing Catholics, Agnes and Gregory are automatically members of the same community but from Gregory she experiences not welcome but condemnation. For Agnes, Gregory’s rejection of her attachment to the priesthood signals a climax in her wrestle with gender and religion and results in both a very personal sense of loss and a season of doubt. The condemning tone of Gregory’s response and the finality of their separation send Agnes into the throes of great physical pain and an internal struggle that makes her wonder if she is possessed. Damien questions his faith, “Have I invented my God?” (207) Agnes dreams “obsessively of shedding the priest’s clothes and donning a frilly hat, a gown of figured lilac”

(207). The depth of Agnes's personal suffering in the wake of her sacrifices causes Father Damien's work to suffer: "each Mass . . . was duller than the next, and he dreaded genuflecting before the crucifix" (208). The "womanness" she denied "crouched dark within her – clawed, rebellious, sharp of tooth" (209). The sacrifices she makes in order to maintain her life as a priest nearly drive her to suicide. On one desperate evening, she turns to the medicine cabinet and removes a combination of opiates and poisons, these only for a last resort (210). A month later, utterly exhausted and incapable of fighting any longer, she falls into a sleep that lasts for days.

During this long sleep prompted by grief and loss, Father Damien⁴⁷ explores his interior struggle with loyalty to the Catholic faith and his growing curiosity about Ojibwe religion. Significantly, the narrative signals that the exploration is undertaken by Damien, not Agnes. Even Agnes's subconscious recognizes the prohibition against her priestly activities. The dream takes the form of a journey. Erdrich explains that although Damien's body is "heavily sleeping," the priest is actually "wandering mightily through heaven and earth" (211). His dream journeys are ones of religious investigation: "He was exploring worlds inhabited by both the Ojibwe and Catholic" (211). In his dreams, both religions coexist. The terrain is complex and bewildering: "The countries of the spirit... were accessible only via many dim and tangled trails" (211), recalling the difficulties of syncretic religious practice in the waking world with its myriad complex political, religious, and social boundaries.

Into this dream of religious exploration, Erdrich interjects Mary Kashpaw, Damien's most faithful Ojibwe companion and a convert to Catholicism. Mary watches over Damien

⁴⁷ It might seem as though feminine pronouns are more appropriate when speaking about the protagonist's long sleep. Though these are private moments experienced by Agnes, the novel's narrator adopts the perspective of Mary Kashpaw who enters the sleep of "her priest" (213) and becomes Damien's guide. The male pronouns in this paragraph reflect this shift in the text of the novel.

during his illness and while caring for him discovers his secret identity. Her sympathy for him only grows, and she determines to join the priest by falling into a deep sleep and entering his subconscious. Instead of passing judgment on Damien as an imposter, she chooses to honor his station as priest. The dream world subverts the patriarchal hierarchy of Catholicism. The woman serves as the priest's (man's) guide, offering assistance to Damien, acting as his protector. She travels through the "overgrown country" and meets Damien, guiding him through the wilderness, preventing him from becoming lost entirely and waking up insane (213). Mary's presence and role as guide in this religiously synchronous dream world emphasizes the novel's subversion of patriarchal hierarchies along with its refusal to supplant Catholicism with Ojibwe religion.

Throughout the narrative, Mary Kashpaw serves as a link between the Church and the Ojibwe, locating a place for Catholicism within the Native community of Little No Horse.⁴⁸ Simultaneously, she suggests the equality of man and woman by representing both the Virgin Mary and Christ. Orphaned as a child, Mary later becomes devoted to Father Damien, and Catholicism itself. Her name, Mary, and the use of the word "immaculate" to describe her freedom from envy, link her to the Virgin Mary. Her acts of compassion, grace, and mercy outstrip those of others in the community. Even more than that, she sustains Damien's commitment to Christ and belief in Christ's presence. During an influenza epidemic, Damien and Mary partner together to reach as many of the afflicted as possible. Mary paves the way for Damien as they trudge through the snowy woods. On one particular day, the priest has a vision of Mary as Christ:

As Mary Kashpaw walked before the priest, thrashing through slough grass . . . Agnes

⁴⁸ Brian Ingrassia's inattention to Mary Kashpaw causes him to miss Erdrich's most positive depiction of Catholicism on the reservation.

finally saw the one she had hoped for and cursed . . . In that strange light, Agnes saw beneath the girl's disguise. She saw that the face of her constant companion, Mary Kashpaw, was the face of the man with the horn spoon. Then she knew. Christ had gone before the priest, stamping down snow. Christ had bent low, and on that broad, angry back carried Father Damien through sloughs. Covered him when he collapsed at the bedsides of the ill. Christ had fed him hot gruel from a spoon of black iron. Protected him so that he never sickened even when the dying kissed his hands or coughed their last prayers into his face. Christ was before him right now, breaking the trail. An amazed strength flowed into Agnes's legs and she stumbled through the snow, reaching. Crying out, 'wait, wait, I am coming!' (123)

This passage connects Mary's acts of kindness and provision to that very same treatment Jesus bestows upon his followers whether they called on him or cursed him. Significantly, Mary represents not only an American Indian Christ but a female Christ. Together, she and Agnes in her priestly garb risk their lives to visit and care for the ill. This female Christ works alongside the female priest, transgressing Catholic doctrine but fulfilling the Catholic mission to love one another.

Mary's role also illuminates Father Damien's humility and humanity, key components of his character that separate him from historical religious figures who were, according to Carol Berg, seen by the government as agents of assimilation (161). Earlier in the narrative, when warned in a dream that Mary is in danger, Damien "rescues" Mary and brings her to live at the convent (118). He quickly learns, however, that it is she who will rescue him. Damien's "theory of rescue was upended by an acute intuition. The girl's presence was all of a sudden reassuring. As Agnes approached and took the girl's hand she understood, with a positive prescience, that

Mary Kashpaw had come to shield her and heal her – how, there was no saying” (118). Agnes approaches Mary and the Ojibwe with an attitude of wanting and even needing to learn new strategies for surviving the tragedies of life. Agnes is in need. Father Damien recognizes his own humanity. She learns from them and becomes an effective Catholic priest because of it. Damien questions his own belief in Catholicism, Mary is a constant reminder of both his commitment to Christ and his own need for help.

Mary’s story also asserts the importance of women in Catholic practice while critiquing the faith’s insistence upon male leadership. She inverts⁴⁹ the traditional gender alignment of salvation. In this case, the woman/congregant rescues the man/priest. Mary’s devotion to Damien suggests that Agnes’s commitment to the priesthood though she is not a man receives divine approval. Mary devotes her entire life to serving Damien, even protecting his disguise when she discovers that Damien is a woman. Mary, often appearing as Christ, covers Agnes’s transgressions and facilitates her service as a priest.

In the section immediately following the dream sequence, Erdrich underscores the mutuality of Damien’s interaction with the Ojibwe as the priest receives spiritual care from Nanapush. Father Damien again wanders through the woods, this time with poison in hand. Plagued with mental anxiety and physical pain and intending to kill himself, he encounters his close friend Nanapush. Nanapush, intuiting Father Damien’s intention to end his life, prepares a sweat lodge, traditionally a place of healing and restoration among Native Americans. In spite of the church’s doctrine prohibiting “a priest to undertake God’s worship in so alien a place” (214), Damien enters into the comfort of the sweat lodge and experiences profound clarity and peace.

⁴⁹ Alison Chapman notes that another character, Marie Kashpaw, achieves a similar disruption of the accepted order of things. When young, Marie aspired to be a saint (*The Last Report* 137). Chapman remarks, "in a quintessential inversion of the social order, [Marie] imagines the white priests, bishops, archbishops, and cardinals praying to a poor Ojibwe girl from a remote reservation" (154).

In contrast to the Catholic prohibition, Nanapush declares, “this is our church” (214). Once inside the lodge, Damien sees the “glowing rocks,” the “healing smoke,” and hears Nanapush’s prayer, agreeing with him that this is “indeed her friend’s true church” (215). He “surrender[s]” (215) to the experience and receives the sudden peace and comfort of this Ojibwe sacred space. The protagonist has now doubly transgressed, assuming the garb of a priest while a woman and worshipping in an “alien” place.

In Gregory’s absence, the voice of judgment recedes from the narrative⁵⁰ and Erdrich challenges the Catholic notion that the sweat lodge is “alien” and profane. She embeds the protagonist’s experience in the lodge within a section of the novel titled “Sacrament.” Immediately following the narration of the sweat lodge episode, in the same section Agnes recalls being offered bread and carrot juice as a young girl by an old woman. She identifies this as her earliest experience with salvation, with the “vast comfort of a God who comforted her in a language other than her own. The bread of life. The gold orange of washed carrots and the taste of salt” (216). Both of these experiences that Erdrich labels sacramental take place outside of the Catholic Church and without the intercession of a priest. Erdrich redefines what is sacred rather than dismissing it. Agnes identifies the “vast comfort” that God offers with the luxuriant peace she experiences in Nanapush’s sweat lodge. The unbidden construction of the sweat lodge for the priest acts as a manifestation of Ojibwe kindness and love toward an individual they have adopted into their families and culture. The mutual care, the building of new family relationships, these communal bonds are what Damien experiences as sacred.

⁵⁰ On the one hand, the fact that judgment comes specifically from Gregory, a man, suggests the link between Catholicism's overbearing dogmatism and its masculinity. Erdrich counters this masculinity by portraying Christ himself as female through Mary Kashpaw. While Nanapush does not appear to Damien as Christ, he does offer Damien/Agnes compassion, comfort, and healing. Among the Ojibwe, the religious system is not exclusively masculine or feminine but a combination of both.

The sweat lodge functions as a contact zone in which Ojibwe beliefs facilitate (while transgressing) Damien's Catholic practice. They do so by welcoming Damien's complex gendered identity. Inside the sweat lodge, Agnes is at ease with herself, not worried about maintaining disguise and no longer concerned with transgressing Catholic prohibitions. This is the place where she is most comfortable with the fluidity of her identity. The narrator consistently refers to Agnes in the feminine throughout the sweat lodge experience until Agnes begins to reflect upon the work of the priesthood and then she once again becomes Father Damien. While separated from her own priestly duties, and the recipient of Nanapush's services as her Ojibwe priest, Agnes experiences "the luxuriant stretching of an utterly relaxed spirit" (215). The Ojibwe accept Damien as a female priest rather than passing judgment on his obvious transgression of Catholic doctrine. The peace Agnes experiences in the sweat lodge recalls the description of the vision in which Christ appeared to her as husband. Recording the vision, the narrator notes the presence of "sheer kindness, a radiance from within him [that] fell upon [Agnes] and it was like a pool of warm sunlight" (42). When her husband lies down next to her and holds her close, she welcomes the release, "comfortable, curled up against a sweetly sleeping man" (43), able to give in to her desire for sensual contact rather than struggling against it. Significantly, both the security and comfort of the man's care for her in the vision and the restful atmosphere of the sweat lodge bring peace to Agnes and Father Damien respectively, signaling a harmonious coming together of her/his diverse religious experiences.

Even at the end of Agnes's life, she associates the Ojibwe with sustenance and peace. In her final moments she associates struggle with "the priest, the first Damien, [who] visited me with his doubts and stories" and relief from the tedium of life with Nanapush who she calls a "visionary, a strange servant" of the spirits (349). The Ojibwe are pivotal in helping the priest

achieve peace in the midst of mourning the loss of Agnes and all of the personal trauma that happened prior to his adoption of the disguise. The peacefulness with which the Ojibwe respond to Damien's identity crisis critiques the prohibitive and masculine nature of Catholic tradition while enabling Damien's commitment to the priesthood.

Yet outside of the sweat lodge Agnes continues to struggle, tortured by thoughts of Gregory and by her own internal wrestle with her secretive identity. Even late in the novel when Agnes realizes that her life is coming to an end, she refuses to risk the discovery of her female body. In her final letter to the Pope (a letter that she burns before sending) Agnes writes, "there is no way around the fact that beneath these clothes I am a shocking creature, to be prodded, poked, and marveled at when dead" (342). She recognizes that even after she is gone the world in which she lives is populated by people who will see her body as that which transgressed by crossing boundaries fixed by religious doctrine.

Agnes's boundary crossing occurs in an imaginative space – one full of possibilities that the political, social obstacles of the waking world make nearly impossible. Significantly, Erdrich does not make it clear whether Father Damien is still dreaming or is in the waking world when he encounters Nanapush and enters the sweat lodge. The narrator's lack of specificity and refusal to identify a clear boundary between dream life and waking life suggests that perhaps this kind of multicultural experience, this coexistence of Catholicism and Ojibwe practice and of masculine and feminine selves, must originate in the imagination where there is room to experiment and interpret and where religious and gender identity are fluid, without consequence. Negotiation and redefinition occur in a contact zone that is neither dream nor clearly rooted on earth. Spaces like this make possible the coexistence of Catholic and Ojibwe religious narratives and create room for dialogue about gender roles, both of which constitute essential steps toward reconciliation

between disparate cultures.

While Erdrich creates space for dialogue between Ojibwe spirituality and Catholicism, she uses the character of Sister Leopolda to extend and deepen her critique of the Church. She does this most clearly through the introduction of Pauline Puyat. She uses Pauline as a foil to Agnes, demonstrating both the dark and light sides of Catholic practice. Paralleling and opposing Mary Kashpaw's comforting and Christlike presence, Pauline, who joins the church and is renamed Sister Leopolda haunts Father Damien with her "great, dead, appalling eyes" (109) and causes significant trouble on the reservation. The juxtaposition throughout the novel of Damien the imposter priest with Leopolda the malevolent nun undermines traditional Catholic roles, unveils their weaknesses. Erdrich's novel accomplishes this while making it clear that Damien's humility and Agnes's position as a marginalized individual make the outsider priest a welcome Catholic friend.

When Father Jude travels to the reservation to investigate Sister Leopolda's character because she is under consideration for sainthood, Damien attempts to protect the Catholic tradition by preventing Leopolda's canonization. Jude searches for validation of the miracles and devout behavior reportedly attributed to Leopolda by others on the reservation. Father Damien goes to great lengths to oppose her canonization, identifying Leopolda as a source of great anxiety. Leopolda's character is complex. She is devout just as Mary Kashpaw is devout. During the influenza outbreak, the narrator comments, "with the sick to attend to, Pauline was transformed . . . The ugliness of death brought out of her an angel" (122). She struggles persistently to convert the Ojibwe: "All day in the drizzle, Pauline Puyat had left her teaching post to stubbornly pray in the birch grove, for she wanted to effect conversions" (124). And she even perceives Damien as an obstacle to her mission. The narrator writes, "[Leopolda] believed

that she was blocked in her vocation to work among her people. Blocked by Father Damien” (124.) But Leopolda’s influence is ultimately deadly and disruptive. Because of the secrets voiced in the confessional, Damien knows Leopolda is a murderer, not a saint.

Such a comparison between Father Damien and Sister Leopolda traces back to Erdrich’s 1988 novel *Tracks*. Though written nearly 20 years prior to *The Last Report*, the events in *Tracks* take place simultaneously to the ones in *The Last Report*. The episodic narration is shared by Pauline Puyat and Nanapush. Close to the end of the novel, Nanapush narrates his efforts to conduct a healing ceremony for Fleur. The space that he prepares, an enclosed tent with a fire in the center, herbs and other natural substances creating an atmosphere of calm, are reminiscent of the sweat lodge that he prepares for Damien in *The Last Report*. The two episodes sharply contrast Father Damien with Pauline prior to her renaming as Sister Leopolda. In *The Last Report*, Damien is invited into the sweat lodge which Nanapush prepares for the priest’s benefit. In *Tracks*, however, Pauline enters the healing ceremony for Fleur without invitation. Her presence is not welcome nor, however, is she forced to leave. Nanapush comments, “It is not our way to banish any guest” (*Tracks* 189). Margaret calls her “a harmless, half-mad thing” (189). Significantly, Pauline enters the healing ceremony as a nun who, according to Nanapush, “could sniff out pagans because they once had been her relatives” (189). Both she and Damien represent a Catholic presence in an Ojibwe sacred space. However, where Damien is welcomed and experiences relaxation, healing, and comfort, Pauline’s presence is greeted with frustration and she experiences nothing but disappointment and torture. Nanapush intends to make her uncomfortable: “I built the blaze hot, hoping that the heat would penetrate gray wool, torment Pauline, drive her through the flap” (*Tracks* 189). Damien remains silent in the sweat lodge, the recipient of Nanapush’s spiritual guidance and healing, but Pauline interjects herself in the midst

of the ceremony “blurt [ing]” a proclamation, “I’m sent to prove Christ’s ways” (*Tracks* 190). Believing that God will protect her, Pauline thrusts her bare hands into the kettle of boiling water: “She lowered them farther, and kept them there. Her eyes rolled back into her skull and the skin around her cheeks stretched so tight and thin it nearly split. If she opened her mouth, I thought, pure steam might blast into the air” (190). When she can no longer stand the pain Pauline runs from the tent and seeks refuge at the convent where her hands are bandaged and she spirals into doubt. She resurfaces fully convinced that she, not Christ, is the Savior God appointed (195). Pauline’s arrogance contrast with Damien’s humble desire to be helped and welcomed by the Ojibwe.

The contrast between Father Damien and Sister Leopolda emphasizes Erdrich’s condemnation of the Christians who want to purge Native American culture from converts. Brian Ingraffia argues that in *Tracks* Pauline “represents Native Americans who have converted to Christianity in order to assimilate into white, Euro-American culture” (316). Pauline expresses a desire to be more like her white relatives and ignores her father’s warning that if she spends time with the nuns at the convent she “won’t be an Indian once [she] return[s]” (*Tracks* 14). Ingraffia, responding to these same passages, argues that Pauline’s “motivation for joining the convent is clear: she wishes to become white, to escape the Native American culture in which she was raised” (317). In contrast to Damien who is a white individual expressing interest in Ojibwe culture, Pauline is an American Indian participating in the colonial pattern of using Christianity to erase Native American cultures. Ingraffia explains that through Pauline’s “adoption of white, Christian ideology, Erdrich criticizes the colonizing of Native Americans that caused them to internalize the values of Euro-American Christianity” (317).

In contrast to Pauline’s attraction to white culture, Damien’s experience in the sweat

lodge fosters his practice of Catholicism while it solidifies his affinity for Ojibwe spirituality. The latter brings him a peace that allows him to continue as both a priest and an adherent to Ojibwe ways. Pauline, on the other hand, is driven to the madness of which Margaret suspected her, and her efforts to convert the Ojibwe are made ineffective by her devilish behavior. Erdrich contrasts the welcome Catholic presence with the unwelcome. By the end of *The Last Report*, when Pauline the nun is revealed to be a murderer and a fraud, Damien (the imposter priest) is placed under consideration for sainthood. As Pamela Rader notes, Pauline and Agnes both “undermine and transgress the standardized Catholic church’s expectations” but the comparison of the two women makes Father Damien “a quizzical but steadfast figure” (222). The juxtaposition of these two characters across both novels emphasizes Damien, against the backdrop of Pauline’s extreme commitment to penance and self-mutilation, as a hopeful and peaceful presence on the reservation.

This is not to deny Damien’s own struggle with and even sometimes complicity in the power dynamics that accompany the propagation of the Catholic faith on a Native American reservation. Shortly after arriving, Nanapush, the community’s trickster, welcomes the priest by telling him the story of a man who poisoned a group of wolves, convincing them to eat tainted fat as a sign of their commitment to Jesus (84 – 85). Nanapush reveals the hypocrisy and deceptiveness of so many missionaries who have gone before Father Damien. Carol Berg writes of Catholic missionaries:

To them the Indian rites and corresponding dances were pagan and had to be stopped. One priest described requiring baptismal candidates to turn over their medicine bags to him: another time he burned a wagon full of such ‘heathen’ items. Converts to Catholicism who went back to these Indian dances or to the medicine man were refused

the sacraments. (161)

Damien's influence does cause hardship and disruption. Nanapush manipulates him into dispersing Kashpaw's accumulation of wives, thus breaking up an Ojibwe family unit (98-99). When the influenza breaks out on the reservation, Damien innocently helps to spread the disease: "it was waved off the trader's hands, and dusted tongue to tongue with the Communion Hosts served from Father Damien's fingers" (120). But as demonstrated by both Mary Kashpaw and the sweat lodge, Erdrich refuses to condemn Catholicism outright. Damien embraces the office of the priesthood while setting himself apart from individuals who had sometimes approached the very same office with an arrogance that led to harm for indigenous populations like the Ojibwe. He shows his selfless devotion to the community by trudging through the snow with Mary Kashpaw to attempt to nurse back to health the ailing Ojibwe. Agnes's care for the Ojibwe recalls what John Paul II calls "spiritual motherhood," or "concern for people, especially the most needy . . . people on the edges of society" (29). What is key in Father Damien's experience, however, is that he is also able to see himself as the recipient of such spiritual motherhood from the Ojibwe. The priest demonstrates his own humility by recognizing his weaknesses as evidenced through his dependence on Mary Kashpaw and Nanapush. Agnes turns away from what Pamela Rader calls "exclusive Catholic ultimatums" (232) and trades exclusion for an openness to Ojibwe ways. Agnes shows her cultural sensitivity by resisting the flippancy of Sister Hildegarde, one of the nuns, when the sister says, "you could easily baptize them while they are tranced": "Agnes ignored the nun's avidity regarding souls" rather than participating in it (71). Instead of tricking the Ojibwe with the sacraments or refusing to perform them altogether, Damien develops a respect for Ojibwe culture while continuing to teach Catholic practice.

The Ojibwe respond to Damien's humility and openness by welcoming him into their community and so drawing Damien into what he values as sacred. He not only receives care from the Ojibwe; he also becomes family with them. The narrator refers to the Ojibwe as "*his people*," and asserts that Damien "was proud to say he had been adopted into a certain family, the Nanapush family" and that "Lulu, was as his own daughter now" (5). Damien/Agnes develops an affection for Lulu Nanapush, visiting the Nanapush clan with increasing frequency. Damien even risks the well-being of his soul for Lulu's sake. One night, the devil visits Agnes in the form of a large black dog. When the dog demands Lulu's soul, Agnes offers her own in exchange because "a priest puts the welfare of his flock above all else" (191). Demonstrating that it is not just Damien who feels accepted by the Ojibwe but Agnes also, the narrator explains, "Slowly and inevitably, she [Agnes] fell in love with each person in the [Nanapush] family, only she didn't know what to call it. She simply found herself related" (184). Nanapush reciprocates this familial love and even the inimitable Fleur "accepted the priest fondly" (184) and the prickly "sour-tongued" Margaret "loved Father Damien in spite of herself" (185). The affection his Ojibwe friends develop for him assuages the loneliness of the priesthood and brings Damien into contact with what he finds truly sacred, relationship.

Agnes becomes so deeply intertwined with the Ojibwe that not only do they consider her family but she also begins to adopt some of their spiritual practices. For example, when Agnes prays, "She asked for answers, and for the spirit of the language to enter her heart" (182). The Ojibwe words alter her prayers and she "began to address the trinity as four and to include the spirit of each direction" (182). Supporting the claim that Agnes is a Two Spirit, in these prayers she also experiences an unprecedented unity of gender identity: "Agnes and Father Damien became that one person who addressed the unknown" (182). Instead of shunning Native

American culture, Father Damien learns and participates, receiving as much as he gives.

As Agnes becomes integrated with the Ojibwe, she works to redefine what it means to be a priest. She acknowledges the culturally masculine nature of the role by modifying her voice, dress, and behavior, but she transforms the role by resisting traditional missionary power dynamics, receiving grace and healing from the Ojibwe rather than seeing herself as in charge of them. She bases her idea of the priesthood on community building, doing so as what Nanapush calls “a man-acting woman” (232). The values that constitute Agnes’s idea of the priesthood transcend both gender categories and distinctions between Catholic and Ojibwe beliefs. They are the building up of community based on self-sacrifice, humility, and love, all of which are both vital teachings of Jesus and part of the fabric of Ojibwe culture. Ultimately, Agnes subverts the male patriarchy of the Catholic Church in order to live according to values shared by both Catholics and the Ojibwe. And the Ojibwe soften boundaries of belonging, welcoming her as one of their own.

In many ways, Damien redefines not just the office of the priesthood but what is sacred. The words of Mass are sacred but the edicts of the church are not. As a woman disobeying the church, Agnes refuses to give up the priesthood to answer an offer of marriage because she values Mass more than the fulfillment of the love that she has for Gregory. Agnes’s deep commitment to the Mass reflects her intimate connection to Christ as her husband manifested early in the narrative during the post-flood vision. Agnes’s refusal of Gregory’s proposal is a sign of her spousal love for both Christ and the community of the Ojibwe. In celebrating the Mass, repeating the words that lead congregants in adoration of Christ, Agnes embraces her true husband. By adoring Christ through the Mass and by performing the sacraments, Agnes experiences the formation of community beyond her relationship with Christ to include her

Ojibwe neighbors. Her commitment to forgiveness and the sacrament of confession persists even though some of the strongest anxiety that Father Damien experiences results from hours spent in the confessional. He tells the Pope in his “last report” “of the nights of soul-wrenching argument” within himself over whether or not to break the confidentiality of the confessional and reveal information that would help convict a murderer (4). And yet the priest relishes the opportunity to minister to a person by “hearings sins, chewing over people’s stories, and then with a flourish absolving and erasing their wrongs, sending sinners out of the church clean and new” (5).

Agnes’s commitment to community is demonstrated by her lasting devotion to the sacraments. Earlier in the narrative, she is presented with perhaps the strongest temptation to reveal her identity and yet she refrains. When Pauline Puyat⁵¹ finally confesses to the murder of Napoleon Morrissey, she blackmails Father Damien by threatening to reveal his gender identity if he breaks the confidentiality of the confessional to report Pauline as a murderer (275). Agnes “could not bear the prospect of Damien’s uncovering” (275). The reluctance to reveal herself is both personal and communal. The narrator reveals, “As a priest, as a man, after the long penitential years and the challenges of her own temperament, she was at ease” (275). For Agnes’s own sake, she must remain Damien. She has also done much for the community as a priest in disguise. Father Damien had “blessed unions, baptized, anointed, and absolved friends in the parish” (276). Agnes contemplates how “the priest was in the service of the spirit of goodness” on the reservation and now “practiced a mixture of faiths, kept the pipe, translated

⁵¹ Deirdre Keenan writes, “the only Ojibwe person on the reservation who scorns Father Damien and attempts to blackmail him on the basis of gender is Leopolda, a converted religious zealot turned nun” (7). Keenan uses this evidence contrasted with the “respect” with which the other Ojibwe approach Damien as proof of the Catholic Church’s exclusion of transgendered identities. While I agree with Keenan that the Church does indeed adhere to a solidly traditional understanding of gender, Pauline Puyat/Leopolda is not a reliable representative of the Catholic Church. Even Damien argues against Pauline’s canonization and in *Tracks*, the more zealous Pauline becomes as a nun, the more she becomes obsessed with the heretical idea that she is Christ himself.

hymns or brought in the drum, and had placed in the nave of his church a statue of the Virgin” (276). In risking the exposure, “all would be lost. Married couples Father Damien had joined would be sundered. Babies unbaptized and exposed to the dark powers. Deaths unblessed and sins again weighing on the poor sinners” (276). And worst of all, “If . . . Sister Leopolda should expose him and cause him to leave, there would surely be no one who would listen to the sins of the Anishinaabeg and forgive them – at least not as a merciless trained puppet of the dogma, but in the spirit of the ridiculous and wise Nanabozho” (276). Damien’s adoption of Nanabozho’s characteristics evidences Ojibwe culture revising but not canceling out Catholic practices. Pamela Rader asserts that, “his love for his people offers a fundamental cohesion” (232). Damien’s love for the Ojibwe manifests in his refusal to allow someone else who might act and think more dogmatically to minister to the people. By the end of her life, Agnes has offered the sacraments to an entire community of people and sees these sacraments as a web of connections that holds the community together.

By the end of the novel, Father Jude begins to investigate Father Damien for sainthood. This is both an irony that mocks the Catholic Church (by seeking to canonize an imposter priest and one who has adopted the Ojibwe religion) and an honor bestowed on Damien who, though he talks of converting and prays to the spirits, never fully shuns his identity as a priest. Erdrich both exposes the hypocrisy of the church and redefines what it means to be a saint. Her saint is not sinless but rather selfless. Alison Chapman’s “Rewriting the Saints ‘Lives: Louise Erdrich’s *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*,” traces numerous parallels between the lives of Catholic saints and the characters in Erdrich’s novel. She argues that in each case Erdrich rewrites the story of a saint demonstrating, “that the Catholic and Anishinaabe religious systems can be made compatible primarily by allowing Ojibwe beliefs to rework the canonical stories of

Western spirituality” (150). They do this, suggests Chapman, by emphasizing the importance of an individual shaping his or her own spiritual experience in contrast to the doctrinal piety of the saints (165). When Father Jude considers Damien for sainthood, he contemplates the canonization of an individual whose spiritual experiences led him/her to see community that grows even or especially across religious and cultural boundaries as sacred.

A small group of scholars argue that Father Damien entirely abandons Christianity by the end of the novel. Pamela Rader argues that the priest “subverts the conversion process . . . by aligning his own belief system with” Ojibwe spirituality (226). Similarly, Deirdre Keenan contends that Father Damien “personally rejects Christian dogma” (9). And Brian Ingrassia argues that Damien clearly prefers Ojibwe spirituality over Catholicism by the end of his life, having come to see proselytization as harmful (326). Damien does draw closer to Ojibwe teaching than to Catholicism by the end of his life, but I argue that he does not leave the latter behind altogether.

Instead, the text evidences Damien’s simultaneous rejection of and commitment to Catholicism. He identifies Nanapush as “my teacher, my confidant, my priest’s priest, my confessor, my friend” (310). Nanapush, his closest spiritual advisor, teaches him how to live according to Ojibwe cultural and spiritual principles. Because of his love for Nanapush, Damien even goes so far as to declare, “There is no one I want to visit except in the Ojibwe heaven, and so at this late age I’m going to convert . . . And become at long last the pagan that I always was at heart before I was Cecilia, when I was just Agnes” (310). Ingrassia cites this very same evidence when constructing his argument about Damien’s rejection of the faith. But this passage is both preceded and followed by affirmations of that same faith. Agnes makes her declaration against Christianity to a spirit who she identifies as the devil in the form of a “black dog” (309).

The dog appears to the priest woman to torment her declaring that it “can kill every person you love” and taking responsibility for the deaths of both Berndt Vogel and Father Gregory (309). The dog then attacks Agnes’s vocation saying that the forgiveness she has offered parishioners is a weakness having “opened many a door to” the dog (309). This attack strengthens Agnes instead of increasing her fear. She feels “assured that her Father Damien had done the right thing in absolving all who asked forgiveness, and the realization filled her with a sudden and buoyant strength. Here it was – the reason she’d been called here in the first place” (309). Agnes is able to “shut the dog out and [draw] strength from the massive amounts of forgiveness her priest had dispensed in his life” (309). Agnes distances herself from her priestly identity when she speaks about Damien in the third person, “her Father Damien.” This simultaneous distancing of herself from Damien while embracing the value of the forgiveness he offered immediately precedes Agnes’s declaration that she will convert to “pagan” religion (310). Assurance about the value of her priestly service and the decision to embrace Ojibwe spirituality both come as Agnes realizes how personally meaningful receiving forgiveness has been for her. As Damien offered absolution for nearly everyone on the reservation, Nanapush offered forgiveness to Damien for all of the ways in which he “wrong[ed] . . . all of the people he had wanted to help” by “stealing so many souls” (309-310). Damien clings to the community created by sacramental experiences whether offered in or outside the church. Agnes’s conversion to Ojibwe spirituality is not a clear-cut and total rejection of her Catholic priesthood.

Even after her conversion to “pagan” spirituality, Agnes chooses to maintain her identity as Damien the priest. For example, when Father Damien recounts the story of the dog’s visitation to Father Jude, he does not mention his preference for Ojibwe spirituality. Instead, he asserts, “I am a priest. All that I am is based upon belief” (314). He also still wants to protect the sainthood,

ensuring that Jude will not endorse the canonization of Sister Leopolda by revealing her stigmata and miraculous fast as evidence of murder with a rusty rosary and her subsequent bout with tetanus (328). Leopolda makes a mockery of Catholicism just as Damien adopts Ojibwe spirituality while still honoring the office of the priesthood and the sacraments he has performed. Erdrich's critique is not an entire dismissal but rather a troubled illumination of both the harm and the potential beauty of Catholicism.

Though she converts, questioning God's presence and the validity of Catholic doctrine, Agnes ultimately decides that even in death she will retain her priestly garb, ensuring that her identity will remain a secret and that the community bound together by the sacraments will not be undone. Agnes goes to great lengths to make sure that her identity as a woman is not discovered after death. She relies on Mary Kashpaw who knew and faithfully "kept her secret" for decades (345), leaving money and a note instructing Mary to bury her at the bottom of the lake (342-3). Mary honors the request (351), helping Agnes maintain her identity as priest without the scrutinizing eyes of the church discovering the female form underneath the priestly robes. According to Alison Chapman, this suggests that "the nature of the body underneath the cassock . . . is fundamentally irrelevant to Agnes's identity as a priest" (160). However, the extraordinary lengths to which Agnes goes to keep that body undiscovered suggest that it has great significance to her identity. Its discovery would invalidate all her priestly service while the existence of her body makes her priestly acts subversively powerful.

Regardless of the controversy surrounding his life, and of the multitude of transgressions he committed, Father Damien's final legacy is that of love. The Pope's letter to the now deceased priest blesses his "love for the people" and "all the good you have accomplished" (355). At the very close of the novel, Mary Kashpaw rereads the following line from "a long-ago

sermon she saved”: “*what is the whole of our existence but the sound of an appalling love?*” (355) Damien’s love is indeed appalling, expressing itself through the practice of proselytization that so often threatens the integrity of Native American culture. And yet it is still love. Damien both offers and receives love, constructing community through the practice of the Mass and sacraments and receiving acceptance and healing from the Ojibwe. The final sentence of the narrative underscores the strength of the community he experiences: the narrator calls Damien Mary Kashpaw’s “priest, her love” (355). When Agnes is asked early on in her experience as Father Damien, “what makes you walk behind this Jesus?” Agnes responds, “It is love. . . That is the sole reason. Love” (99). Though Agnes has transgressed, she fulfills her vocation by loving and being loved by the Ojibwe.

Erdrich soundly criticizes Christianity and identifies the dangers of conversion, while Agnes as Father Damien expresses love through the very Catholic forms and traditions the author critiques. No doubt Ingrassia would categorize me as one of the critics who has a “tendency to mitigate Erdrich’s indictment of Catholicism” (325), but indictment does not necessarily mean dismissal. While Linda Hogan identifies Christianity as ineffectual, even laughable in *Mean Spirit*, Erdrich indicts while revising, perhaps even rescuing Christianity from the sexism and racism at work in its own institutions by giving it a non-patriarchal path forward through the examples of Mary and Agnes. Through her portrayal of Mary Kashpaw, Erdrich celebrates the female Christ and in Agnes she exposes the problems underlying Catholicism’s insistence on a patriarchal priesthood. Ingrassia insists that “readers, especially readers affiliated with the Christian tradition, have a responsibility to hear rather than to mute [Erdrich’s] expressions of anger” toward Christianity for its “destructive” and “deadly” influences in Native American communities (326). Ingrassia is right. Such a responsibility does exist but it exists in tandem with

the responsibility to see all and not just part of what is at work. I do not intend to mute Erdrich's critique of Catholicism but rather I hope to illuminate the role that critique plays in an already ongoing dialogue of negotiation between Christian traditions and Native American cultures. Erdrich's *The Last Report* operates as a Native American text that comments on and revises the Christian tradition. Her words play a powerful role in subverting colonial power dynamics, placing the Native American voice in the position of authority with the ability to either entirely dismiss the religion brought by the oppressor or offer a critique that both indicts and recuperates that very religious tradition. *The Last Report* does the latter.

Like Erdrich, Diane Glancy foregrounds Christianity in her writing though she does so from the perspective of a Cherokee Christian. The next chapter explores how Glancy, similar to Erdrich, critiques the church's sexism and racism but does so alongside her struggle to navigate the complexities of being both Native American and Christian.

Chapter 3

“I’ve always been a Christian. I was brought up in the Catholic Church. However, my grandparents, my mother’s family, they were very involved with the Oklahoma Indian Methodist Conference. In fact, my grandfather was the one that founded the land where they have . . . the district center . . . We are very deeply rooted in . . . the Methodist Church. And then I’m also a member of the Native American Church which has a Christian foundation as well. I can’t think of any time I ever was not a Christian.”

– Anna, Oteo-Missouria

“I know Cherokee believe in the creator just as much as the Methodist people do. And I think my artwork has reflected that. I’ve tried to demonstrate through my artwork that I am a Christian, I am cultural, and that I have combined the two, and that I’m very comfortable with it. I have no problem with that whatsoever. I really don’t.”

– Lynn, Cherokee

Introduction

While Linda Hogan indicts Christianity’s complicity in colonization and Louise Erdrich explores both the pitfalls and benefits of interreligious negotiation, Cherokee author Diane Glancy boldly asserts both a Christian and Native American identity in her writing. Like Hogan and Erdrich, she also critiques the church’s agenda of assimilation and exposes the sexism perpetuated through male dominance. She is, however, the only one of the four authors featured here to publicly declare herself a Christian. Glancy has chosen to represent not just Native American voices in her writing but also those of Christians who have historically experienced persecution and silencing. This chapter will examine how Glancy navigates the fertile but controversial terrain of multiethnic identity, how she gives voice particularly to underrepresented women who identify as Christian and/or Native American, and how her position as a Christian allows her to critique the church from within while simultaneously asserting the potential for vibrant Christian practice in the Native American community.

In her award-winning collection of creative nonfiction, *Claiming Breath* (1992), Diane Glancy writes, “I was born between 2 heritages and I want to explore that empty space, that

place-between-2-places, that walk-in-2-worlds” (4). From childhood on, Glancy experienced cultural conflict between her English/German mother and Cherokee father. In an interview titled “Walk-in-2-Worlds,” Glancy meditates on both the sense of distance she sometimes feels between herself and her Cherokee heritage and the role writing plays in her own journey to deeply engage her culture and her Protestant Christian faith. Through her countless volumes of fiction, poetry, plays, short stories, and essays, she demonstrates that “the wholeness of writing . . . emerges from the fragments” (*Claiming Breath* 9). Glancy pieces together past and present, exploring her cultural heritage alongside her religious identity. At the heart of this exploration is Glancy’s simultaneous indictment of Christianity’s involvement in colonization and celebration of Christian voices heretofore silenced by the power dynamics of American patriarchal mainstream society. According to Jennifer Andrews, Glancy “prob[es] the seeming tenuousness of her position as a Native Baptist who is well aware of how Christianity was used to colonize Indigenous peoples throughout the Americas” (86). Andrews asserts that Glancy’s poetry presents a particularly “irreverent . . . voice and vision” as the author uses “humor . . . and iron[y]” (86) to offer a perspective that is simultaneously Cherokee and Christian. Throughout her writing, Glancy grapples with a God who both judges and loves in a world where the marginalized still experience systematic gender, religious, and cultural oppression. Glancy uses writing to create a new reality, one that is inclusive through its storytelling of both Christian and Native perspectives, making room specifically for the voices of Native women.

Glancy’s use of storytelling to write a new reality highlights the capacity of imagination to create space for dialogues of peace where there is otherwise conflict. In “Diffusionism,” which appears in *The West Pole*, Glancy writes, “in the act of imaging you create a reality. Not the images you make. Because they disappear. But the process of making” (2). With the word

“imaging” Glancy refers to the work of the imagination in helping the mind to see pictures. She continues, “So in creating, you *story* a life force in which there is existence independent of the reality of hunger, fear, disease, death, and the inexplicable happening” (2). Like the dream world Louise Erdrich creates in *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, the life force that results from the process of imagining images and telling stories allows space in which reconciliation, normally prevented in the waking world by politics, socioeconomic concerns, and prejudice, can occur. Glancy believes in a close link between art and the capacity of the human mind to imagine alternative experiences through dreaming and hallucination. In *Claiming Breath*, Glancy writes, “You know how in sleep people dream. / & how during sensory deprivation we hallucinate. / I think I would define art as spiritual/hallucination. / . . . The impersonal line that I carry in my head / longs for the heart” (60). Glancy recognizes the spiritual nature of the imagination, that intangible aspect of human beings which creates a world of possibilities in the mind. The language of “life force” also recalls the role story plays in Joy Harjo’s poetry as it actively leads people to choices that promote community. Glancy exercises her own imagination through writing poetry and novels, using language to “*story*” a new reality that is simultaneously complex and unapologetically inclusive of Christian voices in Native American experience. In his close reading of poems from Glancy’s *Coyote* series, Jerry Harp writes, “stories have lives of their own beyond what any teller might intentionally do with them. Our interaction with them brings shape to the world and ourselves” (44). In this chapter, I examine the active life of story in Diane Glancy’s writing, how it brings shape to the world by performing reconciliation between disparate cultures from the perspective of an outspokenly Christian Native American writer.

Glancy’s work as a peacemaker is in some ways ironic. She writes from the position of

an outsider, at times ostracized because of her strong and controversial identification as Christian. She is not the only writer featured in this dissertation who has an overtly political perspective. Linda Hogan represents the polar opposite of Diane Glancy. She writes in strong opposition to Christianity, a position which could alienate her from members of the contemporary Native American Christian community. However, voices like those of Hogan, Erdrich, and Harjo all align with more traditional Native American culture and speak from a place of acceptance and belonging. Calling Glancy marginalized within that community is itself ironic since the Native American population as a whole is marginalized within mainstream America. Still, Glancy writes from an unpopular perspective. This does not disqualify her in any way from doing the work of reconciliation. In fact, her identification as both Native and Christian allows her to call two sometimes warring worldviews together from within.

Glancy works to establish herself as situated within Cherokee culture by highlighting certain values that resonate with Native American perspectives. For example, Glancy identifies language as spiritually charged and powerful and she calls this “the Cherokee understanding of the spoken word” (“Speaking the Corn into Being” 66). In “Walk-in-2-Worlds,” she elaborates on the importance and sacredness of language: “Poetry means sound and means breath, life, Christ. Did not God speak the world into being? It is holy. Language is holy. It is the spirit” (117). She continues, “We are our language. It’s one of our most important possessions. It’s a spiritual being” (116). This being “is intricately intertwined with what we are and can be” (“Speaking” 66). “Words [function] as transformers,” Glancy writes, “as makers of the things that happened” (66). Glancy asserts that separating Native children from their languages was the key ingredient in boarding schools’ ability to create an unhealthy dependency among Native Americans. Without their language, she asserts, they “were isolated and without [their] bones,

without [their] spirit” (115). They lost their past and the possibility of shaping the future.

Glancy identifies language as providing the link between herself and her cultural community. She explains in an interview, “when I write, I feel like I am walking on a tightrope across an empty space without the rope. But language becomes the rope that stretches from mooring to mooring. It is the connective to the culture within me” (“Walk-in-2-Worlds” 111). Making connections is the primary work of her writing. She takes fragments of culture, experience, identity, religion and weaves them together like “a spider spinning a web” (111). Still she calls her identity an “elusive” one (111). Language helps her journey toward deeper knowledge of that identity because language itself is a “belief system,” “a spiritual spine” (115). Through writing Glancy works to atone for the jarring separation of Native Americans from their languages. While she writes primarily in English, the creative non-fiction, poetry, essays, and plays that explore Native American culture from a Native perspective function as an attempt to firmly root the American Indian experience in a language, the language of the conqueror appropriated by the resisting culture.

Glancy uses language to reclaim an important spiritual history, that of Christian Native Americans who, though they were often converted by missionaries functioning as vehicles of colonization, integrated that faith into their indigenous culture. In fact, Jerry Harp draws a connection between the importance Christianity places on language and the religion’s acceptance by many Native Americans. Harp writes, “as Glancy . . . points out in ‘Speaking the Corn into Being,’ the missionaries also ‘found similarities in Yahweh and the great spirit because the Judeo-Christian God also spoke the world into being. He had the power to join mind and word. He knew the wholeness of being.’”⁵² Glancy harkens back to God speaking “the world into

⁵² Harp quotes this passage on page 46 of his article. It appears originally on page 68 of Glancy's "Speaking the Corn into Being."

being” by herself speaking into being voices of women who have long been unheard, asserting that “we are creators when we speak” (68). She creates an expansive community by speaking with the written word. Some of these women are imagined representatives of the many women who lived in oppressive patriarchal households, and some of them are historically specific like Kateri Tekawitha who lived in the 17th century. Glancy gives each of them a voice, using language to powerfully incorporate lost voices into the contemporary Native American community.

Significantly, Glancy has access to these voices because of the land, and this connection to land is one distinctive hallmark of her Cherokee perspective. In an interview, she explains that she accesses the stories of the past through the land because it holds a record of history (“Walk-in-2-Worlds” 117). In a similar conversation with Jerry Harp, Glancy notes, “in the work that I do, moving across the land is vital” (qtd. in Harp 49). Harp explains that “the idea of the land’s living memory and voice does not leave many traces in biblical texts,” so it is safe to conclude that “it is an idea and sense of the world [Glancy] has taken from Cherokee tradition” (49). Glancy is careful to explain the experience of hearing from the land so that it does not contradict her Christian tradition: “I don’t believe in ghosts,” she cautions, “and when we leave this earth when we die, we are gone. But somehow, something of what happens, a dust or an energy or a pocket of something is there because I’ve gotten ideas from traveling on the land that I would not have in my study. It just opened up my imagination” (“Walk-in-2-Worlds” 117). In fact, she firmly connects the land’s active retention of voices with her faith: “The Bible says there is a cloud of witnesses. They leave a cloud behind, and the history leaves a cloud. And the carrier of that cloud is the land” (118). Like Linda Hogan, Glancy exercises her ability to listen to the land and translate the messages for a broader audience. Unlike Hogan, Glancy sees this connectedness

to the land as compatible with Christian faith.

Perhaps because of her foregrounding of Christianity, Glancy remains underrepresented in scholarly criticism. Only one volume of criticism, *The Salt Companion to Diane Glancy*, directly addresses her outspoken Christianity in her literary works. Glancy herself attributes her marginality to her identification as both Native American and Christian. Though she is widely published primarily with small independent presses, in an interview she notes having had difficulty finding any publishers for her more overtly Christian work (“Walk-in-2-Worlds” 114).⁵³ Editor James Mackay observes that Glancy has been excluded from a number of major collections of Native American writing (9) and he notes that “several writers in this *Companion* (and elsewhere) remark on the surprise they feel that such a prolific, complex, multifaceted writer has been the subject of so little academic scrutiny” (8). According to Mackay, before *The Salt Companion to Diane Glancy*, Frederick Hale’s “The Confrontation of Cherokee Traditional Religion and Christianity in Diane Glancy’s *Pushing the Bear*” was perhaps “the only sustained attempt . . . to approach Glancy from a specifically Christian critical perspective” (10). The bulk of the scholarly criticism produced on Glancy’s work focuses on *Pushing the Bear*,⁵⁴ which chronicles Cherokee experiences on the Trail of Tears. While this most famous of Glancy’s novels certainly takes up and even centralizes the presence of Christianity among Native Americans, this dissertation is concerned primarily with the 2015 interview “Walk-in-2-Worlds” and lesser-known novels like *The Only Piece of Furniture in the House* (1996) and *The Reason*

⁵³ While Glancy's difficulty finding more established presses to publish her work undoubtedly stems from her outspokenness as a Christian, Jennifer Andrews suggests that many Native American women have been forced to publish primarily with smaller, lesser-known presses. Andrews writes, "the publishing industry in the United States continues to reflect [a] sexist and racist bias as many Native women writers find themselves turning to alternative presses with limited distribution to publish their work" (76).

⁵⁴ For a complete review of scholarship on *Pushing the Bear*, see James Mackay's introduction to *The Salt Companion to Diane Glancy*, pages 10-11. Other scholarship on Glancy looks at theology in *Claiming Breath* and investigates her poetry.

for Crows (2009) both because these texts have received less critical attention and because they demonstrate Glancy's decision to represent not just Native American but also Christian voices whether or not they speak from an American Indian perspective.

Multiethnic Identity and Religion

In order to situate textual analysis of *The Only Piece of Furniture in the House* and *The Reason for Crows* within Glancy's specific context, this chapter will first examine Glancy's multifaceted identity and how it comes to bear on her publishing efforts and standing within the Native American community. Later, the chapter investigates how, in spite of her sometimes ostracism among American Indians, Glancy enacts multiple steps in Echo-Hawk's reconciliation process including the acknowledgment of wrongdoing, atonement, and healing through the building of community. She indicts Christianity's involvement in colonization in both the interview "Walk-in-2-Worlds" and her creative nonfiction essay collection *Claiming Breath*, in which she also writes about the difficulty of living "between two heritages" (4). In both of these texts she addresses contemporary society's refusal to acknowledge the intertwining of Christian and Native identities. Glancy acknowledges wrong in *The Only Piece of Furniture in the House*, where she records both the hope and despair that results when Christianity is paired with oppression. In *Reason for Crows* (2009) Glancy gives voice to Kateri Tekakwitha, a young Mohawk woman who was converted by the Jesuits in the 17th century and quite recently canonized in the Catholic Church (2012). Glancy records Kateri's struggle with the ravages of smallpox and her enduring faith that persists in spite of hardship. Kateri is gifted with spiritual sight, frequently experiencing visions from Scripture. Glancy uses these visions both to indict the arrogance of early Catholic missionaries and to celebrate Kateri's devout faith. Glancy moves toward atonement and healing through the building of community by giving voice to those

previously unheard and telling their stories. She does this from the margins, asserting both the importance of the multiethnic and interreligious voice in seeking reconciliation. Both because of the resurgence of Christianity in contemporary Native America as itself an indigenous religion and because the community of multiethnic American Indians is only increasing, Glancy's assertion of her marginalized perspective is vital.

In recent years, Glancy has had more publishing success and publicity. As she entered retirement, the University of Nebraska picked up a number of her novels, the Christian academic press Wipf and Stock is committed to her work, and Glancy was recently honored with two lifetime achievement awards, one from the Native Writers Circle in December 2015 and one from the Oklahoma Center for the Book in April 2016. Still, Glancy's insistence upon challenging existing identity categories and bringing together controversial identity markers makes her simultaneously one of the more provocative and controversial contemporary Native American authors. James Mackay notes that her commitments to postmodern perspective, evangelical Christianity, and her "allegiance to her Cherokee forebears" create "an unstable and uneasy mix for critics to deal with, especially when there are Native playwrights, or Christian novelists, or feminist poets, or experimental writers of all descriptions to fit more easily into preformed critical discourses" (9). Positioning herself as she does in the margins, Glancy does not shy away from being difficult to categorize and critique. She exudes complexity, ambiguity, and devotion to the messiness of identity formation outside received categories.

In her writing, Glancy explores her often controversial religious identity, denying any conflict between being Cherokee and Christian. In 2014 Glancy served as Elder in Residence at West Virginia University. Speaking to a room full of undergraduates, Glancy responded to a student who showed frustration because she was talking about her belief in Jesus and he wanted

her to talk about what it was like to be Native American. Glancy replied by explaining that she cannot share with him what it means to be Native without speaking about what it means to be Christian. In her experience, the two identities are intertwined. In fact, it is currently more common among the Cherokee to be a Christian than to not be one. Some sources estimate that anywhere from 60% to 90% of contemporary Cherokee identify as Christian.⁵⁵ Glancy notes that Christianity was widely accepted by the Cherokee because the Baptists sought commonalities between the two belief systems rather than taking a more forceful approach. Jerry Harp explains the connection the missionaries learned between a traditional tribal story about a woman named Selu and Christ:⁵⁶ “Selu . . . fed her grandsons from corn harvested from her own body . . . When she dies, corn grows from her grave and feeds the people. The Baptist missionaries made a connection between Selu’s self-donation and that of Christ” (45). As Harp later notes (45) and as Glancy explains in “Walk-in-2-Worlds,” the connection goes beyond self-donation and lies in blood being a source of life. In the interview, Glancy explains the significance of self-sacrifice:

What was really great about the Baptists was that they studied the Cherokee myths and stories. There was a woman named Selu who died. And where her blood was on the ground, corn began to grow and corn is the staple food of the Cherokee . . . And the Baptists came in, and they said, ‘You know how your life source, your food source comes from blood? . . . There’s another type of blood that gives you life, a spiritual life that is eternal.’ So they used that entry point, not punitive, but a bringing in. (114)

Christianity has such a long history with the Cherokee that it is difficult to separate this particular religious identity from this particular cultural orientation. Harp notes that for Glancy being a

⁵⁵ Diane Glancy estimates that 60% of contemporary Cherokee are Christian while Betty Donohue speculates that the number may be as high as 90% (“Question”).

⁵⁶ For a detailed history of this story, see page 45 of Jerry Harp's article, "Claiming Faith: Border-Crossing Theology in the Writing of Diane Glancy."

Christian Cherokee means “maintain[ing a] careful balance within more than one tradition, and across the complex geographies of the human and natural worlds” (45). In other words, Glancy’s evangelical Christianity does not cancel out her Cherokee tradition; nor does the opposite happen. In fact, says Harp, Glancy’s brief essay on faith in *Claiming Breath* titled “A Confession or Apology for Christian Faith” includes “a litany of parallels between American Indian ways and those of followers of Christ” (46). Glancy’s decision to make a case for the likeness between these two belief systems suggests that she is responding to questions about their compatibility among her readers or perhaps within herself. Among non-Native Americans, it is not uncommon to accept generalizations that fail to take into account tribal specificity. Glancy is specifically Cherokee, but to most Americans she is a Native American writer. It may be difficult for the large majority of Americans who are uneducated about tribal differences to accept that most Cherokee are Christian while the belief system is less popular among certain other American Indian cultures like the Creek. Glancy’s persona as a Cherokee Christian does not meet the expectations most people have of Native Americans and so individuals in both mainstream America and Native America question her authenticity.

Glancy crosses borders of many kinds. She crosses borders of faith persisting in her practice of Christianity and simultaneously embracing Cherokee traditions. She crosses borders of genre as a writer creating fiction, poetry, drama, essay, and film. She crosses borders of ethnic heritage having been raised by a German mother and Cherokee father. This frequent border crossing allows her to inhabit, in her writing, a liminal space "between-2-places" where she can negotiate and explore combinations and interweavings that are often silenced or criticized in what I have come to call in this dissertation "the waking world." Jerry Harp has something to say about these border crossings in relation to theology. He focuses specifically on "Glancy's

writings about faith as engaged deeply with the crossing of boundaries, and with maintaining fluidity of discourse and experience" (52). This type of border crossing, Harp continues, relies in part on Glancy's understanding of Jesus "as a kind of trickster, a border-crosser par excellence" (51).⁵⁷ This is just one example of how Glancy uses her border crossing experiences to create her own Christian faith contextualized by Cherokee culture.

This intertwining of the Christian and Native identities has pushed Glancy to the margins in the contemporary literary climate. She describes a certain prejudice against her religious beliefs in academic circles, explaining encounters with people in academia who thought she and other Christians were "not quite smart enough to get over Christianity" ("Walk-in-2-Worlds" 112-113). "There was really a stigma," she explains: "I think they have an old idea about the history of Christianity, that it's like this cap on your head [and] you're not free to hear and see and think and imagine and whatever else" (113). Dr. Betty Donohue, author of *Bradford's Indian Book*, confirms Glancy's observation that there is a strong stigma against Christianity⁵⁸ among Native academics that contrasts sharply with the wide acceptance of Christianity among many non-academic Native Americans ("Grad Student Doing Interviews"). This dissertation endeavors to broaden academic understandings of Native cultures to include the voices of both academic and non-academic Native American women who embrace Christianity and see no conflict between it and their cultural practices.

Glancy also asserts, "Not only is Christianity out in education, also in the publishing

⁵⁷ For a full discussion of Jesus as trickster see pages 50 and 51 of Harp's essay "Claiming Faith: Border-Crossing Theology in the Writing of Diane Glancy."

⁵⁸ Much of this animosity stems from Christianity's entanglement with the history of boarding schools which were so often run by missionaries and frequently involved assimilation paired with force and intolerance. Glancy recalls hearing "horror stories" about boarding schools run by Christians voiced at conferences on Christianity and Native heritage ("Walk-in-2-Worlds" 113). She remembers one man in particular who "talked about a priest who had a rubber band, pulled back and flung it against his mouth, and the pain that he remembered" (113). She blames boarding schools for breeding the "disease" of "dependency" (115) because they were designed to be "punitive" and they prevented Native children from speaking their languages (113).

world” (“Walk-in-2-Worlds” 114). She describes meeting with resistance from her literary agent who “only wanted my Indian material” (114). Glancy herself does not see a distinction between her Christian and “Indian material” (“interview Question”), but she was cornered between two markets that did. Christian publishers were not interested in “literary fiction” while secular publishers only wanted Glancy to represent her Native heritage. Glancy persists in representing both aspects of herself and has in recent years met with some success because of Wipf and Stock, a Christian publisher committed to literary fiction (“Walk-in-2-Worlds” 114). Still she encounters resistance within her own community, often felt at conferences when she speaks openly of her beliefs, and frequently in Native American communities that are not predominantly Christian where Glancy believes she is viewed as “a traitor to Native culture” (114). Quoting Glancy’s “Sun Dance,” Harp suggests that even this “marginalization and constant searching makes sense to her in relation to her biblical faith: [Glancy writes,] ‘The Bible is full of journeys. It’s why I think its home’” (qtd. in Harp 48). As an outsider, as an alien – to borrow language from the apostle Paul, Glancy continues to be ever-searching and yet confident within and between her Christian and Native identities.

While Glancy centralizes her religious identity in her writing, she simultaneously and very deliberately presses into multicultural experience, embracing both her German and Cherokee backgrounds rather than retreating from one into the other. She writes in *Claiming Breath*, “I was born between 2 heritages & I want to explore that empty space, that place-between-2-places, that walk-in-2-worlds” (4). In an interview, Glancy describes the distance between herself and her Cherokee heritage that often causes people to question the authenticity of her Native American identity.⁵⁹ Some of this distance arises because Glancy “grew up in

⁵⁹ This questioning may lead some to assert that Glancy is not qualified to call for reconciliation between Christianity and Native American cultures if her membership in the latter group is tenuous according to some

Kansas City rather than a Cherokee community in Oklahoma” (“Walk-in-2-Worlds” 110). She continues, “My Cherokee great-grandfather fled Indian Territory just before the Civil War because he got in trouble” (110). Glancy acknowledges that this physical distance from Indian Territory has led to “a sense of distance, disconnection, disenfranchisement, separation” and she views her “writing [as] an attempt at restoration” (110), a movement ever toward Cherokee culture. But this sense of disenfranchisement is in and of itself a shared experience among Native Americans because of their removal from tribal lands. Glancy notes that “separation is felt more intensely because interconnectedness is part of the Cherokee culture, and when it is severed, there is a need to reconstruct” (110). In fact, the Cherokee often feel distance more intensely, Glancy asserts, because the tribe is frequently viewed as a “traitor” to traditional Native American ways. Glancy explains:

early on, the Cherokee took the ways of the Europeans they saw. The Cherokee raised corn. The men dressed in tunics and turbans. The women in cotton print dresses like the settler women. They became ‘small farmers.’ It’s why the Cherokee were called the “civilized tribe.” (110)

Glancy’s own personal sense of disenfranchisement is compounded by the fact that she does not have an enrollment number “because my great-grandfather was not in Indian territory at the time the Dawes Commission took role” (111). Even James Mackay questions Glancy’s own connection to Cherokee culture, calling it “tenuous” (2). Still, Mackay acknowledges that Glancy does not shy away from identity controversy; instead of shrinking away from criticism Glancy “takes it upon herself to question and self question, to represent the marginal of the marginal,

standards. However, Glancy and the other three authors featured in this dissertation all write from a multiethnic perspective. The notion of what it means to belong to the American Indian community has shifted over the years and has become increasingly fraught as fewer and fewer full-blood Native Americans survive.

those whose uncertain trace of Native heritage . . . marks their understanding of the world” (2).

Glancy’s experience with people questioning her identity is shared by other Native Americans who do not have enrollment numbers or who belong to unrecognized tribes. This was experienced perhaps most publicly by leading theorist on Native American literature Andrea Smith.⁶⁰ After countless public accusations of faking her Cherokee identity and using that assumed identity to gain position and prestige as a scholar,⁶¹ Smith responded with a July 9, 2015 blog post titled “my statement on the current media controversy.” Smith writes, “I have always been, and will always be Cherokee. I have consistently identified myself based on what I knew to be true. My enrollment status does not impact my Cherokee identity or my continued commitment to organizing for justice for Native communities” (para. 2). She goes on to assert that questioning the identity of “Native peoples who are not enrolled, or who are otherwise marginalized,” “send[s] a chilling message” that such people “should not publicly work for justice for Native peoples out of fear that they too may one day be attacked” (para. 3). She refers to the public attack on her heritage as “violent identity-policing” (para. 3). Scholars like Glancy

⁶⁰ In this contemporary climate of questions surrounding identity politics and with the burden of defense resting on the shoulders of already marginalized ethnic and racial groups, Glancy practices courage and conviction with her open assertions of conservative Christian faith along with her candid descriptions of learning her Cherokee heritage from which she felt separated because of family history and geographic location. Public self-disclosure is only one of many ways an individual can choose to respond to an often hostile contemporary socio-political climate. In a blog post titled “In Search of an Authentic Indian: Notes on the Self,” Joseph Pierce of Stony Brook University responds to both the Rachel Dolezal and Andrea Smith identity controversies. He references “the comfort of that silence” that individuals sometimes adopt about their ethnic or racial associations (para 7). Pierce speaks specifically of his father whose adoptive parents did not offer any documentation or suggestion about the man’s racial orientation though it was clear he was “not entirely white” (para. 6). Silence about racial identity can operate, claims Pierce, as “a defense mechanism” which “means not having to subject yourself to the violence of being something other than White” (para. 7). Both Smith and Glancy, without the support of a tribal enrollment number, have shunned the protection of silence and publicly defended their ethnic identities in a society that demands such proclamations from populations that have been historically oppressed and continue to be marginalized while being pressed into the limelight, forced to provide the burden of proof for both the confused and curious majority culture and a suspicious, protective, though hopeful minority community.

⁶¹ The controversy surrounding Andrea Smith became increasingly public after Rachel Dolezal, Africana studies lecturer and NAACP leader, was outed by her parents as not having African-American ancestry. Dolezal’s claim to Native American ancestry was given less media attention but was met with ire in the Native American community because of Dolezal’s flippant stereotyping of the Native American experience.

and Smith expend much intellectual and emotional energy toward defending the truth of their claims to Native identity, claims that are ironically considered invalid because they are not backed by the government-generated measure of Native belonging. Before the American government colonized the indigenous people of the continent, the concept of enrollment did not exist and yet contemporary Americans, both academic and nonacademic, both Native and non-Native, use enrollment as a measure of authentic Native American identity.

Glancy's outspoken identification as Christian further complicates her already complex cultural identity. Her authenticity is often doubly questioned. James Mackay asserts that Glancy reveals her "Christian faith, in its most evangelical form" (3), making Glancy's perspective "both difficult and unfashionable" (1). While she engages deeply with Native American history she also risks alienation by critiquing Native American rejections of God (3) perhaps most directly in *Claiming Breath* where she writes, "the sacred hoop of the Indian nation was broken because it wasn't the sacred hoop of God" (97). In response to this same passage, Jerry Harp notes that people need cultural and social institutions, and yet "our profoundest spiritual stirrings and insights challenge the very institutions that nurture our spiritual growth" (48-49). In other words, Glancy's spiritual beliefs challenge her cultural systems. Harp takes Glancy's critique of Native American traditionalists in stride:

I believe that what Glancy says of this sacred hoop remains true of any religious tradition whatsoever – including the tradition of Christianity. If what we believers in Jesus as the Christ profess is the case, what sacred hoop or circle or institution does the gospel, taken seriously, leave intact? None at all, it seems to me, for this divine energy exceeds and disrupts all things human. (48)

Harp provocatively underscores Glancy's critique of Native American traditionalists instead of

focusing, as Mackay does, on its polarizing effects. Glancy's approach to faith is indeed evangelical, but it is not one-dimensional. While critiquing Native rejections of God, she boldly indicts Christianity for its role in both colonization and patriarchal oppression. Likewise, as Harp notes, Glancy rejects any Cherokee traditions that are "fundamentally at odds with her life in Christ" while "she remains fundamentally alive to what it means to be Cherokee" (49).⁶² She "walk[s]-in-2-worlds," resisting those who see Christian and Native as mutually exclusive identities.

Glancy does much work to bring these two often opposing traditions into conversation with one another. When asked in an interview if literature could create dialogues that lead to reconciliation, Glancy replied, "dialogue has two faces . . . The part that denies what needs to be talked about, and the other" ("Walk-in-2-Worlds" 120). But she does see a purpose in dialogue through writing when it accomplishes a necessary *step* toward reconciliation, one piece of the process. She identifies her writing as "uncovering the problems" (120). She acknowledges this, what Echo-Hawk calls indictment, is a step in the healing process.

I contend that she does more than simply uncover the problems. The act of giving voice to those who have had no chance to speak is restorative and leads to community building. Glancy identifies it as her central mission as an author to give voice to those who have been previously unheard when she describes her "voice as a writer broken down into many different voices . . . especially those that did not have a chance to speak" ("Walk-in-2-Wolrds" 111). Her desire to give voice is intensely personal, coming in part from "hunger for the lost voices from my father's

⁶² Harp identifies Glancy as participating in what Peter Phan calls "multiple religious belonging or hyphenated religious identity" (qtd. in Harp 50). Phan discusses multiple religious belonging in the context of Christians who "believe that it is possible and even necessary not only to accept in theory certain doctrines or practices of other religions and to incorporate them, perhaps in modified form, into Christianity, but also to adopt and live in their personal lives beliefs, moral rules, rituals, and monastic practices of religious traditions other than Christianity" (qtd. in Harp 50). Diane Glancy's practice of multiple religious belonging, claims Harp, is what allows her to situate herself firmly within both Christian and Cherokee ways of life (50).

side of the family” (112). Glancy explains, "In all the other genres, its other voices that come in and claim ownership, you know, and I'm sort of their servant" (112). In fact, she identifies only creative nonfiction as a genre that represents her own voice (112). She takes it upon herself to piece together fragments in order to re-create the culturally and spiritually inflected voices of the past while she constructs her own perspective deeply rooted in both the Cherokee and Christian traditions. This is how her literature performs atonement and healing which Echo-Hawk links strongly to community building: she draws these voices into contemporary society giving them a community in which to be heard.

Glancy introduces both Native and Christian female voices into contemporary dialogue, bringing together two identities many consider mutually exclusive. She identifies the silencing of these voices as a common link between them. In *Stone Heart*, *Pushing the Bear*, and *The Reason for Crows*, Glancy gives voice to Native Americans of the past. Glancy notes that while she “started out with historical Native women” she has more recently given voice to “biblical women” because “they didn’t have a chance to speak either” (112). She draws a comparison between Native American tribes and churches, seeing them both as having undergone a process of fracturing or splintering (121). This likeness extends into representation. She sees the need to re-create voices from both populations because they are still marginalized today. While she focuses many of her works on what it means to be both Native American and German-American, she sees women of the Bible and Christians also as underrepresented populations.

Glancy does more than simply honor individuals who have been previously unheard. She is filling in gaps in the historical record: “I found in school that history contained a lot of blankness. It was told from the point of view of the people in power, and those who were not were sort of ignored” (“Walk-in-2-Worlds” 111-112). This is a cultured and gendered gap from

which the voices of women, both Native and Christian, have been excluded. Glancy describes the practice of giving voice to formerly silenced women as a “calling” and as a way of honoring the communal nature of tribal culture (118). She brings these voices and stories into community with the existing bodies of stories so central to Native American cultures.

The Only Piece of Furniture in the House

Both *The Only Piece of Furniture in the House* and *The Reason for Crows* demonstrate the ambiguity and depth with which Glancy writes about intersections between Christian faith and Native American experience. Significantly, Glancy does not commit to representing only Native American life. In *The Only Piece*, she does not identify the characters as American Indian, though she does not preclude them from being so. Near the end of the text, Rachel, the protagonist, comments, “We’re not Cajuns” and her husband Jim replies, “Close to it” (157). This single racial or ethnic marker signals to the reader that the characters are not “white” but Glancy’s refusal to identify them as Native American allows the text to suggest that hardship and oppression follow all people of color. In fact, oppression and Christianity’s relation to it take center stage in this novel. *The Only Piece* demonstrates how Glancy develops Christian themes and imagery in order to address oppression of women perpetuated in and by the church. Critiquing oppression within the church aligns with the theme of “escaping from some form of oppressive atmosphere” which, James Mackay notes, is “near the core of the author’s faith” (3). In *The Only Piece of Furniture*, Glancy imagines the life of a young Christian woman caught in an oppressively patriarchal marriage and living in the confines of an army barracks shadowed by warnings of coming judgment. Rachel seeks strength and solace in her mother who is alarmingly complicit in enforcing patriarchal values. While still clinging to an idealistic image of her mother at the close of the novel, Rachel finds a sense of freedom in the natural environment of the

Bayou, routing release from oppression in the land.

Glancy does not dismiss Christianity though she soundly indicts it for its participation in patriarchy. As an outspokenly Christian author, in *The Only Piece* Glancy critiques Christianity from within, using scriptural allusions to bring judgment on strongholds of oppression within the church. The protagonist, Rachel, is a committed Christian and experiences oppressive patriarchy in the context of both marriage and church. Glancy extends her critique to include the military, using the novel's setting and imagery to indict the American government's use of force and disregard for Christian values. Recalling the didactic tone of Linda Hogan's memoir and her nonfiction treatise *Dwellings*, Glancy preaches to her readers, celebrating commitment to Christian practice while using Old Testament imagery and references to conservative Christian culture to underscore how the church participates in oppression of women not just in the Native American community but more broadly among minorities.

The novel foregrounds gender through Rachel's strong attachment to her mother, Bethanna. The mother represents stability and connection even though the family is nomadic. Though the novel closely follows the female protagonist, the narrative opens with information about Rachel's father, Wood. In the first few sentences, readers learn that Wood and his family travel from job to job, and that Rachel has "learned to read on highway signs" (9). The link between Rachel's literacy and her family's frequent travel persists throughout the narrative. As though punctuating her journeys with moments of connection and stability, she watches road signs "rush . . . toward us for their instant of recognition, then pass . . . into dark" (9). The names of towns represent anchors, moments of "recognition" and location in Rachel's life. They repeat throughout the narrative, often when Rachel experiences trials and longs for the comfort of home. Perhaps surprisingly, instead of associating these names with her father whose profession

makes the family nomadic, Rachel links the names of the towns with her mother who “could cook and make beds for us anywhere” (10). Rachel describes the idyllic home life her mother created: “The winter afternoons were damp and cold in the Bayou, but Bethanna had a fire in her kitchen and neighbors and railroad wives with their children came by to talk when Wood was gone. There were always people with Bethanna. When one meal was finished, she began another” (63). Even as her husband’s job carries them continually from one town to the next, Bethanna manifests the stability that the town names represent.

While Rachel’s father represents constant movement, Rachel’s husband Jim creates an oppressive immobility. Rachel’s mother is a stalwart Christian and the first sign of trouble in the narrative arises from Bethanna’s aversion to Jim, a local military man with whom Rachel falls in love. Bethanna’s objections to the match are religious; Jim is not a Christian. She counsels Rachel, “You can’t marry an unbeliever” (43). From the start of Rachel and Jim’s flirtation, Glancy pairs Bethanna’s admonitions against the marriage with ominous foreshadowing of problems between the two. For example, when Jim takes Rachel for a drive and attempts to be physically intimate, he responds to her hesitation with physically and emotionally aggressive behavior, detaining Rachel in the Jeep and claiming that her refusal will drive him to another woman. He punctuates his words by “hit[ting] the steering wheel with his hands, start[ing] the Jeep, and back[ing] up from the pasture with a jerk” (51). When Rachel tries to exit the Jeep, Jim “held [her] arm” (51). Under pressure from both Rachel and her mother, Jim converts to Christianity but his frequent and aggressive attempts to persuade her to be physically intimate signal the confining oppressiveness of the marriage to come. Throughout the novel, Glancy explores the consequences of pairing Christianity with oppression through Jim’s abusive treatment of Rachel.

Until she marries, the presence of Christianity in Rachel's life is idyllic, almost whimsical, fostered by the hospitality and warmth of the home Bethanna creates and signaled by the flurry of gnat-like angels that frequent Rachel's vicinity. When she realizes she longs for Jim, "the angels hovered around, fanning us with their wings" (31). She has difficulty expressing her desire and knows that the angels, "plowed my words, hoping my thoughts would come up like a crop of cotton in the field" (32). These same angels respond with unrest on the morning of Rachel and Jim's wedding: "the angels were arguing in the corner of the room" foreshadowing the discord to come (68). After she and Jim wed, the angels become a barometer for Rachel's emotional and spiritual health. Upon returning to their home at the army barracks after Rachel recovers from a difficult childbirth and Jim's affair, she opens her suitcase and "the angels spilled out, confused for a moment as to where they were. Soon they flew around the room and then I didn't see them" (114-115). The whimsy fades away as Rachel leaves home and faces difficulties in life with Jim.

In the midst of these difficulties, Rachel searches for an anchor, a sense of grounding, and instead of looking to her husband, she seeks her mother's comforting presence. Rachel's experiences as a married woman become fraught with suffering and increased longing for her mother. Not long after marriage, Rachel gives birth to a baby boy. She immediately falls into ill health, fading in and out of a confused consciousness for three months (72). During this lengthy semi-consciousness⁶³ she longs for her mother and the places her family frequently lived. She hallucinates the sensation of traveling, seeing "the road signs passing the truck" (74), ironic

⁶³ Glancy's prose here are reminiscent of Gertrude Stein's disorienting juxtapositions. She pairs together images from a variety of times and locations in Rachel's life – they all appear simultaneously to her during that three-month limbo (70-79).

moments of recognition and anchoring surfacing in the midst of the disorienting illness.⁶⁴ The hallucinations also indicate Rachel's fixation on the other source of stability in her life, her mother. In the midst of her delirium, Rachel comments that Bethanna "was the only piece of furniture in the house" (74). She is the only source of dependability Rachel knows. She looks to Bethanna for comfort and courage.

Rachel's fixation on Bethanna illuminates the patriarchal system in which she lives, creating increased tension between her and her husband who resents Rachel's refusal or inability to focus her affection and dependence on him. Throughout her three months of confusion, she hears Jim asking her to acknowledge his presence, "sobbing" (73), but in her mind she is back at home with Bethanna before her marriage (79). Jim confesses afterward, "I hated [Bethanna] for a while . . . because she was the one you called for" (80). When Rachel returns home from the hospital, the barracks becomes a place of loneliness: "when [Jim] couldn't see me, I cried over the plainness of the army barracks, and I cried at not having anyone to talk to. Bethanna left the room empty. Nothing could fill it" (82). She confesses to the Army chaplain, "I want to retreat into Bethanna and never come out. Nothing else makes any difference" (83). As it becomes clear that Rachel would rather live with Bethanna than her husband, Jim's anger boils over: "You aren't your mamma's anymore. You're my wife. It's been a long time without you" (89). Rachel continues to long for refuge in her mother who consistently represents stability and home.

Multiple times throughout the novel, her pastor, husband, and even mother invalidate Rachel's own perceptions and feelings about her marriage. Shortly after Rachel's return to her mother's home in Madill for recuperation, she finds out that during her illness Jim has been

⁶⁴ James Mackay writes about Glancy's use of travel: "it is neither the destination nor sightseeing that is mainly important, but rather the sensation of travel" (6). Perhaps this explains why Rachel recalls the town names they would pass on their journeys back home when she is in the midst of turmoil in the barracks.

seeing another woman (89). She seeks counsel from the family minister only to have him place the blame on her for Jim's indiscretion. Rev. Danner admonishes her, "Jim loves you, Rachel, but you left him and there is always someone to fill the place you vacate. You left Jim for your mother. He didn't leave you. I can't blame him. . . You called for Bethanna and not for him. That was hard for him. You haven't realized what you've done to him. You rejected his love" (102). Danner's advice is manipulative. He takes Rachel to task for calling out for her mother during three long months of feverish confusion and for seeking convalescence in her mother's home. Both Bethanna and the reverend see Jim as strong and even faithful during Rachel's illness (95), while Rachel only feels that he is distant from her (93). In an exercise of patriarchal dominance, when Rachel confronts Jim about his affair, he, like Danner, places the burden upon her, arguing that they have both committed wrong (110). At one point Jim "slap[s Rachel] across the face" and threatens to bring the other woman back if Rachel continues in anger (112). Not understanding the extent to which Jim's control of Rachel oppresses her, Bethanna reinforces the destructive relationship telling Rachel that making Jim's meals and cleaning his house are "what's in you. Love and care for your family" (100). Bethanna's and the minister's faith in patriarchy blinds them to the causes of Rachel's distress.

Both her minister and her mother critique Rachel's intense focus on the family matriarch, telling her she has been limited by her closeness to her mother (94, 96-97). Rev. Danner counsels her,

Bethanna has done everything for you. You were nothing on your own without her.

That's the terrible discovery you've made. She was your reason for living. You could attach yourself to her side and ride through life. You never had to look within yourself for anything. Now you have to find the strength to live. That's your terrible crisis, Rachel.

(93)

Rev. Danner, a character who both openly supports the patriarchal system and offers keen insights into Rachel's struggles, claims that Rachel has lost herself to the overpowering image of her mother. His assessment reveals the ambiguity at the heart of Rachel's conflict. Her longing for the maternal influence contrasts sharply with the oppressive and forceful masculine presence of Jim, Rev. Danner, the chaplain, and the army barracks. Yet Rachel does fail to find "the strength to live" within herself, remaining dependent upon Bethanna who is herself complicit in the system of male dominance. Rachel is surrounded by both male and female characters who reinforce the man as head of the house, above reproach. Glancy articulates the insidious nature of patriarchy. Rachel clings to her mother, longing for the sense of home and warmth Bethanna produces, but by doing so she reinforces her own entrapment and lack of independence in both social, military, and religious circumstances that privilege men.

The patriarchal dominance at work in the novel manifests strongly in Jim and Rachel's marriage once they return to the army base. Jim refuses to let Rachel make decisions and chides her for her frequent desire to visit home (138). During an earlier visit to Madhill, Rachel describes her dislike of life on the army base to Rev. Danner. He dismisses her by saying, "when you want to grow up I'll talk to you again" (96). Bethanna too comes under his influence, advising Rachel to "be patient with" Jim as they returned to life together (99). Not understanding the extent to which Jim's control of Rachel oppresses her and convinced by Rev. Danner's assessment of the family's dysfunctional dynamics as needing to be both more evangelical and more patriarchal (96), Bethanna reinforces the destructive relationship. The men are to be trusted and the woman is left to suffer as her own perceptions and reasoning are questioned.

Rachel determines that on the army base she will re-create the stability, warmth, and faith

of life with Bethanna. Rachel ponders, “Maybe I would be the piece of furniture in the barracks” (124). This means being a Christian presence in a place Rachel associates with darkness, describing the surroundings as “uglier than I thought” (138) and calling the people “dirty” (141). In Rachel’s experience, the base is a godless place where people disregard morals and where the air is thick with a sense of impending doom. Hoping to bring light to her life on the base, she begins to play the role of missionary with a rowdy group of children, attempting to preach to them while they play in her front yard. But Rachel’s attempts to proselytize are ambiguous. She wrestles with her own sense of doubt and her impatience toward the children. She marvels over the ease with which her mother used to tell children about Jesus and contrasts this with her own sense of how “painful and heavy” her life at the barracks is. She feels like “Jesus up and went off to heaven and left me holding the bag here on this army base” (127). On a different day, she tells the children about Jesus calming the storm on the Sea of Galilee, but her audience grows so large and restless that she demands silence, screaming at the children and admonishing, “If you want to stay on my steps you have to *shut up!*” (130) Almost immediately, she follows admonishment with this contrastingly gentle invitation, “Now, would you like to accept Jesus Christ as your Savior?” (130) When one child finally answers her invitation in the affirmative, Rachel rejoices that he now has a buffer between him and the darkness of the barracks: “let the army base fling its hardness at him, its coarse language, its poverty and abuse. The hopelessness. He would pass into the arms of the Lord who washed the deepest cesspool clean” (132). She views Christianity as salvation from the darkness she witnesses in army life. Rachel’s efforts to bring testimony of God’s salvation to the youth of the army barracks represent both her attempt to emulate Bethanna’s presence and her own struggle to fulfill the role of Christian housewife in the midst of so much pain and suffering. Her evangelization of the children also becomes the source of

controversy and more unrest in her marriage as parents express dislike for her “Bible school on the steps” (134).

Coinciding with her negative impressions of life in the barracks, Rachel begins experiencing visions rooted in the Old Testament book of Ezekiel. For example, Rachel has a vision of the base “flar[ing] with red . . . the brilliant fire . . . encircle[ing] us with a terrible charred land” (138-9). Indications of a fire consuming the army base and the surrounding area allude to the prophecies in the book of Ezekiel which foretell coming judgment on Israel, often in the form of consuming fire, for its disobedience and idolatry. In Ezekiel 5:4-12 the prophet forebodingly announces the destruction of Israel with fire, plague, famine, sword, and exile. In chapter 5 verse 4 God tells the prophet to announce that “a fire will spread to all the house of Israel.” The prophet is later told to announce about the inhabitants of Jerusalem, “though they have come out of the fire, yet the fire will consume them” (Ezekiel 15:7). Rachel multiple times sees visions of the barracks either already having burned or about to catch fire, a condemnation of the military’s idolization of masculinity. Rachel lives in the midst of the fire, longing to escape to Pole Cat Creek or Madill, both locations where her mother has created a haven.⁶⁵

Rachel also has visions from the book of Ezekiel that recall Ezekiel’s experience of “the glory of the Lord” (Ezekiel 1:28). When she returns to the barracks after Jim’s adultery Rachel comments, “The back of the chair somehow made the shadow of a wheel on the wall – a chariot wheel. The night would be all red” (117). In the Old Testament book, just before God reveals the prophecy of judgment on Israel to Ezekiel, the prophet sees an elaborate vision of God’s glory. Included in this vision are four creatures accompanied by wheels that move about within the

⁶⁵ The security she creates, however, is ambiguous, continually drawing Rachel to it, in a way stunting her ability to branch out on her own and interact well with the rest of the world. Perhaps the impending judgment is for Rachel herself for having idolized her mother and made Bethanna her entire world.

vision: “Wherever the spirit wanted to go, they went, because there the spirit went; and the wheels were lifted together with them, for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels” (Ezekiel 1:20). The appearance of wheel imagery in *The Only Piece* coincides with Rachel’s determination, after her illness and Jim’s affair, that she is going to share the good news of Jesus with the residents of the army base. While fire imagery indicates judgment of the military base, images from the vision God gives Ezekiel of “the glory of the Lord” suggest that the presence of God is near to Rachel, the oppressed woman. Through wheel imagery, Glancy connects Rachel to Ezekiel, positioning her as a prophet.

While the images of impending judgment on the barracks align with Rachel’s assessment of life there as unholy and “ugly,” as a whole the novel judges patriarchal Christianity’s blindness to its victimization of women. A climactic episode at the end of the novel manifests and intensifies the darkness of Rachel’s life at the barracks while firmly connecting the Ezekiel imagery with judgment of masculine dominance. In a bizarre manifestation of patriarchy’s oppressive control in Rachel’s life, she is attacked by an elderly man after agreeing to sit with him while his daughter runs errands. When she first arrives at Clyde’s home, Rachel feels as though “something seemed to have a grip on the barracks” (144). “Hostility,” she comments, “or hopelessness. It was the opposite of what Bethanna’s house was like” (144). As the man’s presence concentrates and intensifies the negativity she has experienced on the base, Rachel begins to feel fear (144). The man himself, contemplating his own loneliness, speaks out of utter despair asking Rachel to help him commit suicide. Recalling the force with which Jim interacts with her, Clyde holds her “arm in a tight grip” and she notes “an evil [she] hasn’t seen in anyone before” emanating from his eyes (145). As Rachel suddenly backs away from him, he falls to the floor and angrily knocks Rachel down beside him, pinning her by the neck and “spatter[ing] his

hatred at” her (146). As he holds her to the floor, cutting off her airflow, she sees red again and hallucinates as she had in the hospital (146-147). In this attack, Rachel is confronted by the man’s despair, his utter hatred and desire to die. He embodies for her the darkness of life on the military base and in her marriage, quite literally suffocating her with it.

While pinned to the floor, Rachel experiences a vivid and chaotic hallucination that further underscores Glancy’s indictment of patriarchy. During her hallucination, Rachel travels in her mind to distant parts of the world. She imagines that each part of her body rests in a different geographic location – her foot in Sudan, her ankle in Cape Town, her fingers in Germany (147). These visions link her to the places where inequality and oppression have at one time or another caused tragic losses. She sees red again, “all red, every bit of [the world]” (147). As if imagining a scene of judgment, Rachel walks in a “long line of people moving toward the edge . . . and we marched one by one to be gnarled by the pit . . . and my turn was there so quickly” (147). As she falls over the edge, she finds herself in the grip of a man who is “a horror to look at” holding her fast with his “red hands” (148). In a bewildering moment of recognition, Rachel realizes the man holding her is Jesus accompanied by his angels: “Jesus was the Savior and the angels were like his sweat when he worked” (148). Adding to this apocalyptic vision, the elderly man becomes representative of the struggling Earth. Rachel sees both herself and the Earth “held” by the angels “and the whirling Earth . . . hit them again and again and splattered them with its slobbers” (148). In these hallucinations, the presence of Jesus anchors her in the midst of such chaotic and violent images. But his presence is initially alarming, a “horror” as she experiences judgment. Rachel’s experience of Christianity is ambiguous throughout the novel. She locates comfort and hope in the religion taught to her by her mother Bethanna, while also grappling with the presence of great suffering in her own life and the male-centric agenda of her

pastor, husband, and mother. In this final climactic episode, Christ appears as a rescuer whose presence is alarming perhaps because it is male. The presence of Christ manifests as a man's hands gripping her arm, hands that are red like the color of fire burning the land around the army base. Rachel's experience of Christianity is so bound up in a patriarchal worldview that she cannot separate it from the oppressive force exerted on her by the male-dominated circumstances of her life.

Consistently throughout *The Only Piece*, Glancy's text implicates the patriarchal expectations of society in creating the darkness Rachel experiences. Husband, minister, the old man who attacks her – they each represent the oppressiveness of systems, military, domestic, and religious, built on the premise of masculine dominance. Perhaps most heartbreakingly, Rachel's mother perpetuates the system by pushing Rachel deeper into a life marked by adultery and blame. The faith Rachel learns from her mother is simultaneously Rachel's lifeline and a perpetuation of male control in her life. As Jesus reaches out his "red hands," the grip he has on her arm recalls Jim holding tightly to her, refusing to let her go when she tried to escape his forceful attempts to be physically intimate before marriage. But Rachel never gives up on her faith, trying to show grace and forgiveness to Clyde's daughter even after Jim tells Rachel, "How can you be so stupid? You're going to take your Christian feelings out in the world and get trampled" (154). While Glancy indicts Christianity for its replication of patriarchal patterns, she does not dismiss it entirely. In fact, she celebrates it, ambiguity and all. Jesus' grip on Rachel saves her from Clyde's suffocating embrace. The color red washing over the base simultaneously foreshadows a coming judgment and recalls the blood of Christ that atones for the sins of the world.

The close of the novel mirrors its opening where Rachel finds moments of connection

and grounding in the road signs that punctuate her family's nomadic lifestyle. After recovering from her near suffocation, she finds a peaceful acquiescence, a strength that comes from knowing there is life outside the army base. She and Jim go on a fishing trip to the Bayou. As they drive, she notes the names of towns on road signs, reading the familiar words, anchoring herself in these moments of recognition accompanied by "the slow rhythm of Bethanna's humming" (157). She wonders if any other residents of the base ever wanted freedom: "With all its stifling corners, did they never long for this?" (156) Rachel finds a sense of comfort on the Bayou. She determines that "as long as there were places like Pole Cat Creek . . . I could get past the clunk I always felt when I returned to the base . . . that place that was washed of what I called life" (159).

The life she chooses, however, is never entirely free of oppression. Claiming that Glancy typically ends her novels with subtle or "transitory" moments of "illumination" rather than clear triumph for the protagonists, James Mackay argues that by the close of the novel "Rachel . . . gains the difficult understanding needed to stay with her husband" (6). Her perhaps reluctant willingness to remain on the base as long as she can occasionally escape to the Bayou indicates that Rachel stays within the patriarchal system. The novel does not depict her gaining power over her husband or breaking free to start her own life. Rachel appears not to change the system in any way: she is unable to reinterpret Christianity outside of the patriarchal paradigm. Rachel does, however, find a sense of freedom and release in place and nature. The Bayou reminds her of all those towns where Bethanna turned houses into homes. Reminders of Bethanna's presence, however, are insufficient because that presence is inextricably bound up with masculine dominance, dominance that Glancy soundly critiques throughout the novel.

Recalling Linda Hogan's emphasis on humans living in harmony with the land, Glancy

closes her novel with Rachel's recognition that she finds freedom in her connectedness to the natural world. Rachel's experiences are continually anchored throughout the novel in place names, words on road signs as her family frequently travels from one home to another. At the end of the text, her sense of place becomes anchored in the natural world of the Bayou and here Rachel finally finds relief from the oppressiveness that restricted her in those very homes she misses and on the military base. Glancy acknowledges the messiness of identity formation. While Rachel remains connected to Bethanna and continues to dwell within the patriarchal system, her sense of place, that connection to the land outside the army base gives her hope and anticipates the possibility of freedom from such a restrictive male-dominated life.

The Reason for Crows

Glancy also indicts the male-centric practices of Christianity, this time specifically Catholicism, in *The Reason for Crows*. This particular novel operates both as a critique and celebration of Christianity from a Native American perspective. *The Reason for Crows* is perhaps Glancy's most well-known attempt at re-creating a past voice, that of Kateri Tekakwitha, a young Mohawk woman converted by the Jesuits in the 17th century and recently canonized by the Catholic Church in 2012. In this fictional memoir, Glancy labels each section, alternatively identifying Kateri and each of the priests as the primary narrators. She gives Kateri's voice more than equal weight with the voices of the priests, affording readers the opportunity to consider Kateri, the only female narrator, alongside the male priests who were in positions of power. As Kateri recounts her bout with smallpox and the loss of her closest relatives to the same disease, the novel indicts the wrongdoing of the settlers and even the priests who brought smallpox, devastating fire, and violent attack to the Mohawk villages. The novel re-inserts Kateri's distinctly Native and Christian voice into the fabric of history.

In *The Reason for Crows* Glancy re-creates the past. James Mackay notes that in doing so, she “enters territory on which few other Native American writers have chosen (or dared?) to tread, in writing novels that animate not only the present day experience but also the historical experiences of Native American peoples” (2). While she researches the background of each of her novels extensively, Glancy takes a chance each time she writes historical fiction. In reinterpreting historical Native American experience she risks creating fictional histories that alter the past, disappointing contemporary desires for accurate historical representations of Native America. Simultaneously, though, Glancy courageously re-creates the voices that have been lost in the wake of a history full of the silencing of both Native Americans and Christians, especially women in both groups. Mackay writes, “Glancy’s peculiar gift is to take her reader into the heads of silent women and to animate without patronizing their glancing, painful encounters with the world” (8). Jennifer Andrews praises Glancy for refusing “to impose a unified reading of America’s past, present, and future” (86). Instead, Glancy “sees writing as a way to create alternative histories that recognize the shifts that have taken place in Native Americans’ lives, including her own” (86). She frequently creates alternative histories of women “who are located at the borders and frontiers” (86). Especially in *The Reason for Crows*, she centralizes gender, giving voice to a female saint who experienced the arrival of the missionaries when the eastern coast of North America was the frontier. Glancy parallels (and equalizes) the women’s words with those of the male authority figures, the priests.

Christianity figures more prominently but just as ambiguously in *The Reason for Crows* as it does in *The Only Piece*. The narrative opens with Kateri giving her soul to God in prayer, “unto the Lord I commendeth my soule” (3), and closes with a scene from the book of Ezekiel (and featured also in Revelation). Kateri, as though standing alongside Ezekiel, looks on as the

cherubim support God's throne and chant, "Holy. Holy. Holy" (83). The text in between functions as Kateri's testimony of God's presence among the Mohawk while the text also witnesses the arrogance of the priests and destructiveness of the settlers. Glancy peppers *The Reason for Crows* with Old Testament quotations from Psalms, Hosea, and Isaiah, but Ezekiel figures most prominently in the novel. As in *The Only Piece*, Glancy uses imagery from Ezekiel to indict the church for its participation in patriarchal dominance and also for its role in the violence of colonization. Simultaneously, she uses Old Testament Scriptures to show the integration of Kateri's Mohawk culture with her faith. Finally, imagery from Ezekiel points to Kateri's holiness, positioning this female saint in close proximity to the presence of God.

Just as Glancy describes language as a "spiritual spine," words are central to Kateri's conversion. Kateri hears and understands the message of Christianity in spite of language barriers. She can hear the Bible but not read it: "there was no writing in Mohawk. I could not read English. I did not know French. But Father de Lamberville knew enough Algonquin that I could understand what he said, maybe some of what he said" (20). In the midst of de Lamberville's words Kateri recognizes "a voice I had known anyway" (20). She describes this voice as "more than language sometimes. It was light. In God's light I saw light. Some of the priest's words I also came to know" (20). The use of language by the priests is powerful even when the language is written. Kateri writes, "I follow his path of writing" (21) even though she cannot read the words. When she hears the priests pray in the church, the sound of their voices draws her closer. "I fly with them," she narrates, "it is the rhythm of their words. It connects with something I know" (24). Father de Lamberville notes that, "the light of language captivates" the women who come to hear him read Scripture (26). He hopes God will send "them visions to authenticate what I say" (26). Kateri has such visions throughout the remainder of the narratives,

but instead of merely authenticating the priest's words, they foster in Kateri a strong vibrant Mohawk Christianity.

The spiritual imagery in *The Reason for Crows* has more force than in *The Only Piece*. Whereas Rachel is accompanied throughout life by a cloud of wistful but helpful gnat-like angels, Kateri has visions of lions. She narrates, "I see lions when I sleep. I did not know what a lion was until I saw one in a book in the mission" (4).⁶⁶ The lions are ferocious and ambiguous, sometimes forewarning of spiritual dangers and other times signifying Christ's regality. Kateri's assertion that lions "have eaten Christians" (4) is troublingly reminiscent of 1 Peter 5:8 where Christians are warned that "the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." And yet the lions Kateri sees do not just eat Christians; they are also "magnificent in their roaring" (4). In fact, Kateri writes, "Jesus is a lion. I often see him with a mane of light" (4). The lions in Kateri's visions represent the totality of her devotion to Christ: she is consumed by Jesus.

This devotion begins when she is a child. She recollects her mother telling her about the love of Christ, how God "sent his son, Jesus, to become a crow on the cross," to become "darkness for us" (4). Early on, Kateri tries on faith, playing the part of missionary with the "rabbits and muskrats," telling them "about Jesus" and how through suffering "we come to the knowledge of You, O Lord" (5-6). Her mother's stories about baptism are Kateri's earliest memory: "When she bathed me – I remember she said there was a holy bath – I felt her hands on my head. They felt like water. I think it was my first memory" (20). This sacrament shapes Kateri's earliest exposure to Christianity. As she matures, she identifies her belief in Christ as

⁶⁶ Significantly, whether the lions appeared to her in visions before she reads about them in the book, Kateri's knowledge of them originates with mission teachings. Though the text demonstrates, as I will later discuss, in many ways that Kateri is in no way a puppet of the priests, her life bears the mark of missionary influence.

changing her fundamentally: “I am different than I was” (30). She defines this difference in terms of being chosen or made sacred, reaffirming “I am set apart for God” (30). She questions continually why God would choose her: “did he see me more pitiful than others? Did he show me his mercy because I was battered with disease?” (31) In spite of these doubts, her faith is robust. She both longs for death so that her suffering on earth can end and she longs to persevere “to see faith become substance as it is promised in the word” (30). By the time Kateri is a young woman, her words are interlaced with scriptural references and her dedication to Christ persists through suffering and loss.

Early in life, Kateri experiences significant trials that cause her both to question God and to see herself as uniquely prepared by him. In much the same way that Rachel questions why God would leave her on the army base (*The Only Piece* 127), after Kateri describes the horror of suffering from smallpox and losing immediate family to it, she calls God “toxic” (4). Recalling Rachel’s repeated visions of red and charred land around the army base and continuing the theme of consumption, for Kateri God is “this Fire who burns away everything” (4). While fire in *The Only Piece* consumes the land around the barracks, indicating judgment, fire in *The Reason for Crows* refines Kateri, indicating her status as set apart and chosen. Kateri identifies the limitations smallpox has created for her as a sign of that refinement, a marker of having heard from God. Her eyesight is severely limited and she “trip[s her] way through the village” (4). Recalling Isaiah 6:6-7 when God touched a hot coal to Isaiah’s mouth, Kateri wonders, “Is it the same for all who hear the Lord’s voice?” (4); she interprets smallpox as the coal God holds to her mouth. Kateri’s suffering does not lead to a loss of faith. She has already survived tragedy asserting that she “was hauled into death, but pulled back out” (13). Having seen the worst, she is confident of God’s protection and ponders, “maybe I was set apart for the Lord” (13). Kateri at

times sees the smallpox as protecting her from sights she would rather not see. This is the case when a neighboring enemy tribe attacks her village. She cannot see them die or go “crazy with pain” because she “did not have clear sight” (15). She narrates, “I had seen smallpox. I had seen the Torturer. That was enough” (15). Smallpox acts as a sort of shield – it was a terrible enough experience that it now blocks out other horrors to come and gives her confidence that God will protect her and has chosen her. Kateri, the female convert, though (or because) she is scarred by smallpox is “set apart” (13), sacred. This sacredness manifests in part through smallpox preparing her to both endure suffering and maintain her faith throughout it.

Like Erdrich in *The Last Report*, Glancy here calls attention to devout women. In *The Reason for Crows*, the strong Christian figures among the Mohawk are female. While the missionaries are male, female converts perpetuate the message through the generations. Kateri notes that while her mother had been a Christian, “my father, who was dead, and my uncle, who was now chief, were not” (16). When she begins praying in the church of St. Peter, she feels the need to hide “my visits from my uncle” but not from her aunts who “made no objection” because they “had been baptized” (16). The priests who appear to Kateri as “blurred images” and “dark spots,” “preached their religion to my mother and aunts” seeing in the female members of Kateri’s family the potential for Christian faith to grow (14). And it does grow, spreading through maternal influence.

Kateri’s relationship with God is deeper and more complex than what she sees among her relatives who are Christians. She puzzles, “they did not hear Christ the way I did” (28). It is not just her ability to hear Christ that sets her apart. Kateri also notes that she is the only one who questions her beliefs: “they did not question. Who was this man who asked for everything and gave nothing in return but promise for eternal life?” (28) She confesses, “I feel a pull. A

certainty. I feel doubt. Anger. I feel a questioning of what I felt. I have nothing certain, but a belief that God is” (28). Her faith is nuanced and deep, not a blind acceptance but a belief tested by doubt. Hers is not the case of a Native American being forced to assimilate through religion. Kateri approaches, wrestles with, and accepts the Christian God with her whole being.

Kateri identifies her faith as her own, not merely a set of beliefs imparted by forceful missionaries. She knows that God “speaks to me” though “HE is a mystery” (18). She feels “drawn to HIM more all the time” and “HE is the only thing I want” (18). When she sees Christ on the cross, a sculpture brought by the Jesuits, she finds a special sympathy with him because he is “pocked with holes from thorns in his forehead, pocked with holes from nails in his hands and feet” (20). Like herself, “he had known smallpox” (20). Both Kateri and Jesus have endured great suffering; late in the narrative she has a vision of Christ “wrapped in animal skins” with his “four faces revealed in suffering” (71). Her connection to Jesus is strengthened by the shared experience of suffering and she manifests her faith as action by caring for others who are suffering. When a woman is scalped by the Machicans, Kateri sits with her head in her lap while Father Bruyas “sprinkled her forehead with his holy water” (18-19). Like Mary Kashpaw in Erdrich’s *The Last Report*, Kateri ministers to the sick and wounded alongside the priests.

Kateri’s spiritual life is marked by defining moments that anchor her faith experience and by movement through Kateri’s attraction to travel or journeying. Only a few short years before her death at the age of 24, Father de Lamberville says that Kateri is “ready for baptism” (31). When he does baptize her, she experiences it as though she is “one with the water” and as though the baptism had already occurred. Kateri remembers in her baptism the touch of her mother’s hands as she bathed her small head when she was younger (31). Her baptism is accompanied by a vision of her being placed Moses-like in a basket on the water and also by a vision of “the Lord

on his wheels” (32), recalling “the glory of God” brought in the book of Ezekiel by cherubim and wheels (11:22). This is perhaps an early sign that she was chosen of God just as Ezekiel was chosen as a prophet. The vision of wheels continues as Kateri begins to use a rosary given to her by the priest after her baptism: “the little beads were wheels. My fingers rolled over them, the way the soldiers’ cannons rolled over the land, full of awe and fear” (32). Praying the rosary gives her a sense of movement, “I had the feeling I was going somewhere. Something was happening when I prayed” (32). The beads, or wheels, carry “everything” (32) as if rosary prayers allow her to go on a spiritual journey carrying all her experience with her.

While she receives guidance from the priests, Kateri’s faith journey is one she ultimately undertakes without human companionship, instead situating herself entirely in relation to Christ. She sees the scars from smallpox as an obstacle to any experience of human affection and companionship: “no warrior would want me. He would grow tired of the crow marks on my face. I would be mistreated because of my ugliness” (29). So Kateri spurns marriage and instead wants to “study with the priest” (29). She comes to see human marriage as a barrier to the spiritual insight after which she strives: “how could I marry when I heard the prophets’ visions? How can I marry when I wanted the visions myself?” (29) And Kateri does have the visions she longs for: “there were times Christ flew down to me. I saw the trail as flames” (30). This contrasts strongly with Agnes’s very sensual connection to Christ in *The Last Report*. Agnes frames her experience on the Ojibwe reservation in the context of marriage to Christ when she receives a vision of Christ as her caretaker after the flood. Kateri’s concept of marriage to Christ is marked by longing and devotion but not by physical passion. She wonders, “Is this marriage to Christ? The going away with him – the longing to stay with him – the belonging nowhere else. It is his border I desire” (76). Even without the physicality, Kateri still experiences intimate and meaningful

closeness to Christ. She finds acceptance and empathy with her suffering Savior and with her dying breath she professes her devotion to him, “Jesus, I love you” (77).

In the midst of her devotion to Christ, Kateri is faced with the priests’ insistence that practicing Christianity means giving up Native American cultural ways. In response, she asserts that blended or culturally contextualized Christian practice is possible. Late in the narrative, when Kateri considers fleeing from her village to seek refuge among Christian Native Americans elsewhere, she comes face-to-face with the question, “how could I choose between the French Jesuits or the traditional Mohawk ways I had always known?” (33) Kateri experiences the tension that comes with the missionaries telling her that her own American Indian traditions must be left behind. She feels drawn to Onnonhouarori, “dreamfests” that help alleviate the hardships the tribe faces, but she feels the need to “run to the priests” to end this desire to participate in traditional rituals (33). Father de Lamberville contrasts the dreamfest with the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace. Theirs was “a holy fire” but de Lamberville sees the dreamfest as “a dance with the devil” (35). Writing about the history of Christian missionary activity among Native Americans, Richard Twiss of the Lakota/Sioux and Oglala tribes, explains that “the majority of these missionaries denounced and demonized Native cultural ways, part and parcel, as pagan, idolatrous, evil and sinful” (23). Kateri comments on how difficult it is to separate herself from “ceremonies for seed planting, bean harvest, new corn, and corn harvest” (40). Kateri resists the forsaking of cultural ways called for by the priests, describing how Mohawk prayers and rituals around planting and harvest align with Christianity in spite of the priests’ objections: “we scrape together small amounts of soil and plant seeds of corn, beans, squash. We wrap them in prayer. The trail of smoke from burning tobacco takes our words to God. I do not see how he could be displeased with the smoke. I do not agree with the priests. Is it

not the same as their censer?” (68) This combination of Christian and Mohawk practice resembles what Twiss calls “‘transitional’ syncretism” (31). Resisting the contemporary Christian aversion to syncretism as a heretical mixing of pagan beliefs with Christian doctrine, Twiss endeavors to redefine the term in a positive light. He explains that a Western concept of Christianity relies on “dualistic categories” so that anything outside of Western Christian tradition is pagan (35). However, Twiss identifies the value of “Indigenous ambiguity [in] embracing Creator ‘all around’” (35). In other words, Twiss encourages the contemporary Christian church to view Native American cultural practices as ways of “embracing Creator” (35). He asserts that he is “able to hold the ‘exclusive’ claims of Christ in tension with the religious claims of other Indigenous ways that [he] embrace[s], and lose nothing of [his] faith in Jesus in the process” (35). Glancy imagines Kateri engaging in this same type of “transitional syncretism.” In spite of the dualistic approach of the priests, she determines to practice Mohawk Christianity, borrowing faith practices from the priests while holding fast to many of her cultural traditions.

Kateri integrates her Mohawk culture into her Christian faith in large part through an emphasis on nature. She seeks God apart from the priests’ guidance, finding him in nature: “the sky is pocked with stars. I am not alone. The Lord walks with the sky and the earth” (28). She finds harmony between Christian and Native beliefs through the presence of animals and trees in the biblical text (16-17). She confesses, “I listened to the Book Father de Lamberville read because of the animals” (16). She likens the Scriptures to “falling stars,” continuing, “They come in sheets of light. Red wings of flames fling inward to the dark. His bread is thrown to us, crumbling in the Milky Way” (19). For Kateri, nature affirms the truth of Christ’s existence: “I felt the daily death and resurrection of the sun. The changing shape of the moon. The visitation

of the fish in the river. They say, *he is, he is, he is. He has made us*” (37). She finds evidence of God’s presence all around her.⁶⁷

In that evidence afforded by the natural world, Kateri articulates her own sense of Christianity with a Native American perspective. Nature adds to her faith a sense of comfort and companionship. Though the “forest holds us in its teeth” (9), instead of fearing the forest, Kateri finds sympathy with it and empathy for it. When she picks up leaves and touches them, “they feel pocked” and she realizes, “maybe the forest suffers what we suffer. Maybe it becomes like us. It is marked like we are marked. It feels what we feel” (8). In suffering, “we are one with it” (8). The suffering forest also recalls the suffering Christ: “I often think how the forest is like our Christ. It is stronger than the evil that passes” (8). This evil lurks in the forest, masquerading as a lion: Kateri guards herself against the “evil one:” “I hear his roar that lifts through the trees. He is not a lion, but he thinks he is” (8). As she reads more Scripture passages about nature she also finds increased harmony with trees: “they wrapped their branches around me. I became a bough of leaves on their trunk. I sang like the trees sang” (18). And she experiences God’s presence in the forest: “I think sometimes God is a tree. He is many trees. He hides the animals. He speaks to me. I think it is God. HE is a mystery. HE is the only thing I want” (18). Kateri’s closeness with the natural world leads her into these deep meditations on the presence of God and her desire for him increases. At the same time, her discussion of the trees recalls Linda Hogan’s assertions about the connectedness of land, humans, and the spiritual world. When Kateri writes, “I sang like the trees sang,” she appears to mirror the role of artist or interpreter for nature that Hogan identifies. When she writes that, “God is a tree,” she collapses the traditional Western distinction

⁶⁷ Into these meditations on nature a priest’s voice intrudes, “abruptly” manifesting as the “cawing” of a crow (37) as though he is an interruption in the natural progress of Kateri’s faith.

between nature and the divine, preferring an indigenous reading of the world that locates God in nature. Kateri's interactions with the natural world both draw her closer to the Christian God and anchor her Christian practice within a Native American context.

Another connection Kateri finds between her American Indian culture and Christianity is the reliance of both on stories. The priests that visit the village remind Kateri of her mother because of the stories they tell: "they sounded like her – they told stories I had heard from her. There was the same feeling – the same spirit" (11). Stories are central to Native Christianity. Kim Mammedaty, the pastor at First American Baptist Church in Hobart, Oklahoma where the congregation is 98% Native American, notes that in her personal spiritual journey stories "shaped my understanding of the world, of God's activity in the world" (161). She continues, "the stories of Indian people have a prominent place in the preaching of the Word" (161). Stories reinforce a sense of community across generations as narratives of American Indians who converted in the 19th and 20th centuries are repeated in the church and participate in a culture of honoring elders. Even when these stories record evidence of "governmental and religious paternalism" still, the church hears and honors these "early converts" for the "sacrifices they made in order to embrace the Christian faith," giving "up all Indian ways to follow the Jesus way" (158). Glancy acknowledges early converts in much the same way, noting that the Cherokee who converted to Christianity in the 19th century were responding to narratives that resonated with their own cultural stories rather than forsaking all of their culture to take up Christianity in its place. For example, in the story (quoted earlier) that Glancy tells about Selu, the corn goddess, connected the narrative of Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection to a central Cherokee story. In much the same way, the fact that the priests share the "same spirit" of storytelling with Kateri's mother encourages her to welcome them. Kateri notes that the Jesuits

tell stories “about God, the Maker, the Old One, who is in my spirit opening the way for his words” (24). For Kateri, stories beckon her to relationship with God.

In contrast to the sincerity of Kateri’s devotion, Glancy captures the ambiguity and complexity of early missionary activity. She paints a picture of the darker side of the European presence in the Mohawk villages, the impending doom of settlement. As Kateri describes a rising dread among the villagers, she says, “these settlers” show up in “our nightmares” “with their need to conform us to them” (12). While the missionaries attempted to engender a way of life that meant forsaking Native American ways of living, they simultaneously showed mercy and care for their American Indian contacts. For example, Glancy portrays the priests as allies for those in pain. After the attack of the Machicans, Father Pierron narrates for the first time, recording the torture of Machican captives and his own role in sitting with the wounded by night and caring for them with bandages, song, and prayer (15). Glancy’s portrayal of the priests is not one-dimensional though it does hold them accountable for their complicity in colonization. Though Kateri does not identify the priests as a source of evil or destruction, she describes their arrival as “clattering” and though they may have done so unknowingly, they “brought disease” (17). Glancy indicts the priests for the role they historically played in altering and often erasing Native American cultures.

In contrast to the humble suffering of the female protagonist, Glancy records the arrogance of the male priests who brought Christianity to the Mohawk. Kateri herself chides their overconfidence, “they think theirs is the only way. They do not know the trees do not like them” (28). The arrogance of the priests is marked by their association of Native Americans with evil. Father de Lamberville comments that the Mohawk village is “so near the gates of hell – I could feel the breath of the evil one. I could hear the flames. My flesh crawled” (26-27). He is

repulsed by the presence of the “evil one who was used to holding the Indians between his teeth” (27). Recalling the fear and judgment that often drove assimilation, he even sees the art the Mohawk created as “creeping things and abominations” (27). In contrast, the priests believe they bring only light and goodness. At the St. Francis Xavier mission in Sault St. Louis Father Chauchetiere writes, “the Indians have their own beliefs. . . But it has to be our way, advanced as we are. We bring God’s mercy and truth. We bring the way, the light. We have brought it all to them” (46). The priests have no sense of humility, of having learned anything from the Mohawk. In contrast to Father Damien, from Erdrich’s *The Last Report*, who sees himself as serving the Ojibwe in atonement for the harm brought by the church, Father Cholenec writes of the “enormous frustration” of trying to teach the Mohawk about Christ when the missionaries and the American Indians do not share the same language. Betraying his Eurocentric bias, he bemoans, “look at the opportunity lost to turn them into a likeness of us” (57). Punctuating the destructiveness of their arrogance, the priests associate conversion with possession. Father Claude writes, “I see them turn back to their old ways just when I thought the Indians were mine” (59). He even confesses the political motivation behind proselytization when he writes, “I was to smooth the way for colonization when the Indians would be rid of their savagery” (59). Even after Kateri’s death, Father Cholenec tries to assert his stamp of ownership, calling her “*My pious savage*” (italics original 79). Glancy exposes early Christian missionaries for their belief in their own superiority and their willing participation in imperialism.

Behind that sense of superiority, the priests worry about their own relevance and worth, and in expressing these anxieties they reveal some of the ulterior motives that drive them to convert the Mohawk. Father Chauchetiere feels as though Native American dependence on the priests gives the priests their significance. He asserts the following in his journal:

We have to keep [knowledge of the Bible] from them. We have to nurture. Direct. It should come from us. We are the go-between between parishioners and Christ. What if they knew they could approach God on their own? With only the blood of Christ between them. What would they do for us? How fragile. How insignificant. (63)

Here Father Chauchetiere contemplates his own fragility, his own insignificance and that of his fellow priests. His sense of need drives him to withhold the Bible from the Mohawk so that they rely on the priests for knowledge of God. Father de Lamberville harbors similar insecurities. In his own journal entries, he reveals the need he feels to save himself by obeying the scriptural injunction of “warning” “the wicked” in order “to save his life” so that the “blood” of the wicked will not be “on [his] hands” (22). These revelations of the self-interest behind the drive to convert Native Americans function as both indictments of such non-altruistic uses of Christianity and as complex explorations of the priests as humans who themselves are vulnerable. This is yet another demonstration of how Glancy avoids one-dimensional representations of Christianity without turning a blind eye to its complicity in colonization.

Even with all of his arrogance and self-interest, Father de Lamberville recognizes his own culpability in the difficulties the Native Americans face. He confesses in a journal entry, “They are tormented by the diseases we brought. Forgive us, Lord” (34). Still, de Lamberville has the perspective of one in control. He writes, “I am shaping Katherine Tekakwitha in spite of the noise in the village” (35). His missionary fervor turns to sensual passion when he feels the desire to protect Kateri, not wanting her to leave the church at night and be “tempted with the dreamfest” (35). As he writes of the temptation he fears Kateri will experience, he confesses his own, “so this is what sends them to one another – Man and woman . . . I long for the drunkenness of passion” (35). As he faces temptation, de Lamberville sounds more interested in

preserving his own holiness than Kateri's. He writes, "If I gave in once – even once, I would be lost. I had to send Katherine away" (36). Though Kateri eventually decides that she does want to leave her village because of persecution, the priest prompted her to do so out of his own desire for self-preservation.

Her departure from the village is prompted by persecution against Christians but ultimately strengthens Kateri's faith. Kateri even experiences resistance from her own family toward her Christianity, telling how "they took my rosary. Others threw stones," and one man threatens her with his tomahawk (32). At first, Kateri stays in her village suffering from taunts and even attacks. Finally, when a convert from the Oneida comes with a canoe to take her to Sault St. Louis in Québec to live with other Native American Christians, she agrees (40-41). The journey to Québec is dark and difficult and she longs for the safety of her own village, fearing "the evil one" who "scouted his territory" and breathed "on my neck" (42). Kateri experiences the trip as a test of her commitment to Christ. Her journey through the wilderness recalls Father Damien's dream before he enters the sweat lodge with Nanapush. The contrast is helpful because it highlights Kateri's commitment to Christianity. Whereas Damien experiences the wilderness in his dream as a place of interfaith exploration, Kateri's journey to Sault St. Louis tests but ultimately affirms her commitment to Christ. She decides resolutely, "I had chosen this trip. I would go. I had committed myself to Christ. Nothing else had power over me. I pushed the evil one away, and he departed" (42).

In the midst of this test, Kateri experiences a series of visions. In contrast to her physical eyesight which was permanently blurred by smallpox, she has heightened spiritual vision while traveling to Québec. For example, she has visions associated with memory, seeing "the faces of people in the woods who had died of smallpox" including her mother (50). When she hears

Scripture she has “moments of clear vision” when the stars and the moon are in focus (43). Experiencing a vision of God’s presence from the book of Ezekiel, she narrates, “I saw wisps and swirls of air. I watched them with my eyes that could not see. I was seeing beyond seeing – I think it was the passing of wheels – the passing of cherubim wheels” (45). This particular vision not only signals Kateri’s proximity to the presence of God but this is also the vision Ezekiel receives when God tells him to prophesy the coming of judgment of Israel. Her flashes of clarity are accompanied by spiritual sight rivaling that experienced by the priests themselves.

Kateri’s faith practice has high stakes associated with it; she sees her conversion and dedication to Christianity as “reparation for the sins of my people” who were reluctant to believe (46). As Kateri watches settlers arrive at the mission, she wonders if the “unspeakable grief and suffering” she and her people have experienced is their own fault and she asks, “is that what we bring upon ourselves by blinding our eyes to God? Is this the darkness the new people bring?” (56). She questions in her journal, “how can I help my village?” (31) She responds by attempting to atone for the disbelief among her people by scourging herself, “whipping a small branch against my back” turning her suffering into “an offering. A desired offering. I wanted to suffer. I felt God’s judgment on sin. I smelled the sharp smell of his shed blood” (46). She wants to come alongside of others in their suffering, resulting in the increase of her own discomfort.⁶⁸

When Marie Therese confesses that she has seen and done “things you have not,” Kateri tells

⁶⁸ The severity of Kateri's faith goes beyond self-sacrifice for the sake of others. Once Kateri arrives in Québec, her faith practices become increasingly severe and focused on her own sense of unworthiness. When Kateri takes communion at St. Francis Xavier mission for the first time it makes her intensely aware of her own shortcomings (47). Even before this, when confronted with her own “unworthiness” she “want[s] to beat [her]self” (18). Kateri believes that “God. . . burns away everything he is not” (47), and she sees herself in need of this fiery refinement, repeatedly depriving herself of things necessary for life. She fasts most of the time and refuses to use a blanket even in the cold so that she can stay awake to pray and meditate on Scripture (49). She is so overcome with her own sense of unworthiness that she alters her appearance, removing, “the red eel-skin ribbons I loved in my hair” and ceasing to wear the beads she “loved to roll . . . in my fingers” in spite of the fact that these things helped to mask the “ugliness” created by smallpox (49). She chides herself for any attachment to a physical object, even hitting herself because she likes thimbles (49). Kateri strips herself of all things beautiful in order to live the life of the penitent.

her, “we will do penance together . . . That way you can forgive yourself” (58). Father Claude notes that Kateri cannot “watch anyone being tortured” unless she inflicts pain on herself (59). This infliction of pain is not mere masochism but rather a spiritual discipline. In strong contrast to the self-serving faith practices of the priests, Kateri’s faith is a severe one, requiring her to sacrifice her own well-being for that of others.

Her devotion to her fellow American Indians is mirrored by her continuing connection to Native American cultural traditions. She even becomes a teacher of American Indian cultural ways for the young girls: “This is how to pound corn . . . This is how to tell a story . . . This is how to make a wampum belt for conducting the affairs of the Iroquois nation” (67). Kateri also becomes a seamstress for the other residents at St. Francis Xavier Mission. She “bead[s] moccasins and deerskin shirts” and “make[s] headpieces for the men” (68). This mission is where Kateri finds the confidence to assert that “ceremonial planting[s],” songs, and prayers could not be “displease[ing]” to God even though the priests disapprove (68). Significantly, as Kateri offers instruction on Native American culture, she reaffirms the blendedness of her spiritual practice. Kateri’s Mohawk Christianity recalls Twiss’s desire to embrace “transitional syncretism” that weds together indigenous culture with Christian belief rather than replacing the former with a westernized Christianity.

Alongside her portrayal of Kateri’s cross-cultural faith, Glancy’s treatment of Kateri represents the author’s opposition to the male dominance perpetuated in the church, positioning Kateri as a chosen woman closer to God than the male priests. Illness spreads at the mission and Kateri succumbs. While her health declines, she experiences increasing visions from the book of Ezekiel, these visions marking her as chosen by God. She hears the voice of God telling her, “Go between the wheels under the cherub, Fill your hands with coals of fire and scatter them over the

land, Over your people” (73). Kateri interprets the spreading of the coals as the spreading of the gospel among her people. She reacts against the vision crying out, “I was not through spreading the coals – wait – wait! I am not finished – I want penance for my father, my uncle Lowerano, and the Indians who do not believe” (74). But the vision continues and, in contrast to Rachel from *The Only Piece* experiencing a vision of herself falling over the edge of the earth into judgment and being pulled back up by Christ, Kateri is carried up with the cherubim to “the throne of the Glory of God” (74). Rachel remains bound by patriarchal ideologies while Kateri rises above them, becoming both the cultural and religious leader in her community.

Consistently throughout the novel, Glancy aligns Kateri with the prophet Ezekiel in spite of the priests believing that they themselves fulfill the role of prophet. Father de Lamberville writes, “I have been sent to the Indians – impudent, rebellious, stiff hearted. Those are the prophet Ezekiel’s words in the Old Testament” (22). But it is Kateri who acts the part of priest without arrogance and self-importance. Kateri is humble, prayerful, selflessly serving her people. Beth Brant, editor of *A Gathering of Spirit: A Collection of North American Indian Women*, blesses Kateri not because she was a Christian, having converted because of the “racist and misogynist vision of the Blackrobes” or priests, but because Kateri was an American Indian woman (10). Glancy contrasts this female saint with the male authority figures who dishonor their calling by speaking the message of Christ with arrogance and prejudice. The priests even looked to Kateri to learn about Christ. During the illness that takes her life, Father Chauchetiere witnesses Kateri’s suffering and then prays to Christ, “In this suffering, I think of your suffering on the cross” (60). Kateri’s journal entries continue postmortem. The novel closes as Kateri kneels by the throne of God, listening to the cherubim chant, “Holy. Holy. Holy” (83) Kateri, both female and Native, disrupts notions of masculine superiority and Eurocentric bias. Both in

Glancy's fiction where Kateri, as a chosen and favored one, enters the presence of God and in reality where Kateri was the first Native American canonized by the Catholic Church, she represents a model of Christianity alternative to the patriarchal one that was brought to the American Indians by the missionaries of the last several hundred years.

Through the acknowledgment of wrong in *The Only Piece*, the indictment of masculine superiority in both texts, the condemnation of colonization in *The Reason for Crows*, and the increase of community through giving voice to silenced women, Glancy's imagination comes together with Echo-Hawk's paradigm to create pathways to reconciliation voiced from a distinctively Christian perspective. Central to this voicing is Glancy's emphasis on the injustice of patriarchal dominance and the value of the female voice. Glancy condemns oppression whether perpetuated through Christianity or in spite of it. In much the same way that many contemporary Christians read the ancient church fathers for insight about faith practice, Glancy deepens the Christian tradition by making the voice of an American Indian church mother accessible to a contemporary audience. Through storytelling, Glancy introduces both Rachel's and Kateri's voices into contemporary American literature. As a result, Glancy's writing participates in reconciliation and healing in the wake of both the racism and sexism fueled by colonization by building community among all the voices she records. She *stories* a life force that is inclusive, making room for often unheard Christian minority female perspectives. At the same time, that life force judges, drawing boundaries to demarcate what is and is not just and good, condemning the church's racist and sexist actions while celebrating the Christian faith.

The next chapter examines Joy Harjo's allusions to Christianity throughout her poetry. Like Glancy, Harjo was introduced to the Christian church early on in life and even briefly identified as a Christian. Unlike Glancy, Harjo publicly distanced herself from the

institutionalized church when she experienced racism and sexism and now chooses to represent distinctly Native American voices that do not identify as Christian. She does, however, demonstrate a reconciliatory dialogue that borrows from both Native American and Christian tradition, imagining the two working in concert together in such a way that distinguishes between Christian teachings and institutionalized religion while celebrating the powerful healing potential of the female artist.

Chapter 4

“Probably starting I’d say around 10 or 12 years ago . . . I began to really yearn inside and . . . want to be Indian whether it be Apache or Comanche or Kiowa, whatever tribe. I really want to just learn more of my Native American people.”

“I began to realize my dad was Oteo . . . I remember my mom and dad used to have lots of terrible fights. A lot of it was because he was drinking, but . . . the Lord showed me and opened my mind that a lot of it was because my dad was Native American Church and I didn’t even know it. My dad used to go to powwows a lot and sing at the drum and he would want me to go, but my mom would resist . . . It’s because she had been taught so strictly by the missionaries who took over the Apaches and would teach them how to be civilized Christians. They were force[d] – made to be Christian – Christianized. They cut their hair. They took away all their clothes, shoes, moccasins . . . They gathered the children and took them way up to Carlisle, Pennsylvania. . . Bible, Christian, Bible, and it wasn’t a loving way they were taught. My mom’s parents were under that rule and my mom – . . . it was so strict it carried over, so my mom was the same way when she taught me. She was very strict, everything Christian. It had to be just that way.”

On attending her first Native American Church meeting: *“I went in and I listened and I heard those songs they sing and they all came back to remembrance. My dad used to sing all those songs. I remember my dad would sing them. I remember my grandpa would sing them. And I thought, ‘oh my gosh.’ I just started to cry. I was like, ‘I know these songs . . . I’ve heard them.’ My dad would sing them in the car when we were going places and sing them at home when we were sitting around the house.”*

“There are Native American people in the Native American Church that strictly forbid anything about the Bible. They say, ‘No, that’s the white man’s way’ . . . I used to get so tired of the Indian people telling me that. I said, ‘well, you know what? Electricity is the white man’s way too, and so is that car out there. So you still drive? You better just get you a horse.’”

– Mary, Chiricahua Apache

“I’ve had the best teachers. These women that are here, they are strong in the faith. And they understand that authority that Jesus has given us as healers.”

“When you hear those tribal hymns, those are really prayers.”

– Anna, Oteo-Missouria

Introduction

Both Joy Harjo and Diane Glancy cross boundaries to create community, though their attempts to do so are distinct from one another. While these two authors’ attitudes towards

Christianity differ strongly (Glancy embraces evangelical Christianity while Harjo distances herself from it), both writers do important cross-cultural work. At the heart of Eliza Gibson's article, "Love, Hunger, and Grace: Loss and Belonging in the Poetry of Lorna Dee Cervantes and Joy Harjo," is her assertion that "Harjo develops a poetics of grace that creates a rich sense of historical and spatial interconnection across tribal and cultural lines" (107). This cross-cultural connection creates what Gibson calls "full subjecthood" through embracing loss rather than attempting by displays of tribally specific nationalism to recuperate that which was destroyed (108). She features Harjo as an author who uses "grace" to create the fullness of "selfhood" in the midst of loss without relying on the celebration of any particular nationalism (107-108). Just as grace allows Harjo to reach across boundaries, eluding the seeming necessity of creating "authentic" cultural identities and instead allowing grace to bring healing without insisting on cultural specificity (107), Glancy both celebrates and blurs the lines between multiple nationalisms or distinctive identities. Certainly she features Cherokee heritage, especially in her creative nonfiction and poetry, but she also explores other tribal communities like the Mohawk and represents both Protestant and Catholic identities as well. She also explores identities with no authenticity markers like the ambiguously raced characters in *The Only Piece of Furniture in the House*. While Glancy frustrates identifiers and introduces voices representing previously underrepresented populations into the contemporary Native American community, Harjo reaches across boundaries by creating space for the perpetrator and victim, regardless of their cultural orientation, to become members of one community. The difference is subtle but the relatedness, the boundary crossing and bringing together, is significant.

This chapter will first consider Harjo's critiques of Christianity and then her poetry's intersections with it, paying particular attention to the role of imagination, expressed in the

poems as story and song, in facilitating reconciliation. Harjo's work is both influenced by and actively revises the Christian tradition. Her poetry aligns with New Testament teachings of Jesus by embracing peaceful responses to aggression. She critiques the church's participation in an economy of greed that values money over an ethical treatment of the land, while asserting the importance of human harmony with the land. She offers an indigenous perspective on healing, emphasizing the value of ceremonies and the centrality of language to an individual's and community's well-being. She critiques the participation of the church in patriarchalism. And finally her poetry once again finds resonance with Christianity's emphasis on grace and love. The poems showcase the imaginative acts of story and song as they privilege a community of grace through extreme expressions of love and inclusion. All of this results in a cross-cultural and inter-religious articulation of healing in the wake of colonization.

Muscogee Creek writer Joy Harjo is best-known for her bold, honest, and culturally-rich poetry that explores what it means to be Native American, female, and connected to the land. Much of her work foregrounds her own multiethnic experiences. Her mother was French and Cherokee, her father Creek, and, with her grandfather having been a Creek Baptist minister, she experienced exposure to multiple religious traditions much as Louise Erdrich did. In "Ordinary Spirit," Harjo calls her family "the root from which I write" (265), and much of her poetry is anchored in personal history. Her often ambiguous relationship to Christianity is an integral part of her explorations of multiethnic heritage. She addresses the tension-fraught relationship between the church (Catholic and Protestant) and American indigenous cultures from both national and personal perspectives. Like Hogan, Erdrich, and Glancy, Harjo identifies and indicts Christianity's role in colonization and assimilation of Native Americans. Her poetry does not absolve Christians of their participation in imperialism, but it does identify the possibility of

emotional and social healing based on the formation of community that reaches across cultural and religious borders. While Hogan dismisses Christianity in favor of an American Indian worldview, Erdrich soundly critiques Catholicism's patriarchal dogma while seeing potential if Christianity is shaped by women, and Glancy both holds the church accountable from within for participating in colonization and celebrates Native American Christian voices, Harjo simultaneously takes Christianity to task and maps a road toward healing that embraces values shared by both Christian and Native American communities. Unlike Glancy, she does this from outside institutional Christianity.

Harjo's body of work is abundant so this chapter will focus primarily on poems that first appeared in *The Woman Who Fell from the Sky* (1994) and *A Map to the Next World: Poems and Tales* (2000), later reprinted in *How We Became Human, New and Selected Poems: 1975 – 2001* (2002) and on her newest collection, *Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings* (2015). In her study of the poems and tales in *A Map to the Next World*, Angelique Nixon characterizes Harjo's work this way: Harjo "empowers women . . . crosses cultural boundaries, celebrates nature, and defies Western ideologies" (2).⁶⁹ Harjo's defiance works in tandem with the belief that all things are connected. Laura Coltelli calls Harjo's poetry "multilayered and increasingly suffused with profound interconnections among the various elements of which her poems are composed" (Introduction 2). Harjo, in an interview, confirms Coltelli's assertion: "the world is not disconnected or separate but whole. All persons are still their own entity but not separate from everything else" ("The Story of All Our Survival" 22). For Harjo herself, her belief in the persistence of memory and the connectedness of all things suggest that the presence of biblical allusions or agreement with some Christian values in her poetry is not surprising.

⁶⁹ Nixon also notes that according to Paula Gunn Allen, an "achronological" method of storytelling is indicative of how tribal women write (qtd. in Nixon 16).

Harjo writes in the wake of colonization, exploring loss, longing, and what it means to continue living in the midst of these things. In a 2010 blog post she mourns, “It is difficult to proceed with dignity and grace when you have lost yourself and your children to a prevailing story that doesn’t include you. We are almost never visible in the story” (“MNN Column for January 2010”). While colonization muted and mutated the Native American story, contemporary culture continues the silencing, passing along stereotypes that do not reflect the reality of American Indian culture and life. Harjo responds to this stereotyping and silencing by creating poetry without teepees and tomahawks but with an honest expression of her American Indian heritage and her emotional, spiritual, and artistic engagement with the world around her. She writes herself and other indigenous people into the story.

Harjo takes risks through her poetry. She describes “each poem [as] a jumping-off edge and I am not safe” (“Ordinary Spirit” 265). Creating community across cultural and religious boundaries is indeed a significant risk. Harjo’s own nationalism, her commitment to Creek culture and more broadly to Native American activism and art gives her a platform from which to risk such border crossings that could otherwise bring, and probably still do, harsh critique. Her firm positioning within Creek culture paired with an ability to write and live across boundaries was born of much struggle with her “mixed-blood/mixed-vision” which she considered “a curse” early in her life, a “confusing and destructive” orientation that prevented her from feeling like she belonged to any particular community (266). As she matured, she began to see “being familiar with more than one world, more than one vision, [as] a blessing” (266). For Harjo, written words create a “structure” through which she can “enter . . . the world” (266). Like Glancy, writing brings Harjo’s culture, her sense of self into focus. She enters the risky territory of multicultural identity, both discovering and crafting what it means to live across and in

between cultures.

In a September 2015 write up about Harjo's receipt of the prestigious Wallace Stevens Award from the Academy of American Poets, the poet was praised specifically "for her 'visionary justice-seeking art' and for transforming 'bitterness to beauty' and 'trauma to healing'" ("Joy Harjo Receives \$100,000 Poetry Prize"). It is precisely qualities like these to which I turn my attention in this final chapter. I focus on a number of Harjo's poems that together outline a reconciliation process between individuals in conflict which bears striking resemblance to the one articulated in Walter Echo-Hawk's *In the Light of Justice*. Borrowing ideas from Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela, Echo-Hawk identifies the need, following centuries of colonization, for acknowledgment of wrongdoing, sincere apology, forgiveness, atonement, and healing based on building community (265-270).⁷⁰ Harjo's poetry explores both the first and final steps in this process, indicting the church for its role in colonization and forced assimilation and building communities of grace through radical expressions of love across cultural boundaries. As a result, her poetry creates space for negotiation, alternatively aligning with traditional tribal and Christian values.

Though any number of religious traditions could influence Harjo's work, I focus exclusively on Christianity in keeping with the dissertation's attention to cultures in conflict but also in keeping with Joy Harjo's own close connection to the Christian church. Her grandfather a Creek Baptist minister, Harjo was intimately acquainted with Protestant Christianity. As a teenager she attended church regularly and spent much time with the Judeo-Christian scriptures

⁷⁰ What sets Harjo apart from the other authors featured in this study is her articulation of a six-part reconciliation process recorded in the title poem of her recent collection *Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings*. Harjo is a culture shaper, articulating a process whereby communities and cultures and religions in conflict can move forward together. *Conflict Resolution* was published in September 2015 when I was already in the process of completing my dissertation. Had I encountered the text earlier, I would likely have reframed the study by incorporating Harjo's reconciliation paradigm alongside Echo-Hawk's throughout.

at a young age. In her memoir *Crazy Brave*, Harjo writes that she “grew to love Bible stories, and . . . hungered for God knowledge” (77). She found laws in the Old Testament “reminiscent of tribal law . . . along with wisdom, poetry, and a great respect for dreams and visions” (78). She identified Jesus as an inspiration, a producer of miracles and healer of people with words and deeds (78). And she made the Bible stories a part of her consciousness by reading them over and over. Harjo notes that some of her family members “found ways to incorporate Christianity, for ultimately, without the fundamentalism and agenda of the colonizers, the Bible allowed another way to speak of the sacred” (“Song of Solomon” 421). Reading the same source, Sheila Hughes articulates Harjo’s “recogni[tion of] the productivity and possibility of the biblical word as distinct from the limitations put on speech by Christian institutions and practices” (52). Hughes goes on to note that Harjo sees the Bible as “a marginal site from which to expose the porous boundaries of Christianity and prompt its transformation” (52). In other words, Harjo both influences and is influenced by the Bible. The stories and ideas of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures are lodged in Harjo’s memory and surface quietly throughout her poetry as a reminder that all things are connected.

Perhaps because of Harjo’s own outspokenness against the church, only a handful of scholars have addressed intersections between Harjo’s work and Christian teachings. In 1996 David Rosenberg edited *Communion: Contemporary Writers Reveal the Bible in Their Lives*. In this collection he includes a short piece by Joy Harjo reflecting on the influence of the Old Testament book *Song of Solomon* in her life and work. She addresses her own experience with Christianity, commenting on both her early attraction to it and then resistance against it. Sheila Hughes references Rosenberg’s anthology and identifies “desire” as a thematic connection between Harjo’s early collections of poetry and Christianity. While Hughes illuminates instances

of syncretism in Harjo's texts, she fails to give any attention to Harjo's open resistance to institutional Christianity. Jacqueline Kolosov also draws Harjo's poetry into conversation with the Christian tradition but she does so obliquely by comparing Harjo with Chinese-American poet Li-Young Lee who openly identifies himself as a poet whose work converses with God and Christianity. Kolosov argues that both Lee and Harjo produce "a poetry of transformation [which] involves finding the love within hatred, the eternal within the temporal" (39). Harjo's comments in *Communion* help to clarify her relationship to Christianity, Hughes's treatment of desire identifies dialogue between Harjo's poetry and Christianity, and Kolosov's reflections on love dovetail nicely with my attention to the theme of loving one's enemy. Unlike Hughes and Kolosov, however, I acknowledge Harjo's indictment of Christianity for participating in oppression of Native Americans. According to American Indian writer Phil Cousineau, if "the harm and grief of the victim" is not "dealt with," this failure to acknowledge "often leads to a wider cycle of revenge in communities" (qtd. in Echo-Hawk 261). This indictment is a necessary step in the process of reconciliation that both Harjo and Echo-Hawk outline.

Harjo's own words about the purpose of poetry offer a framework for understanding the cultural work her literature performs. On September 10, 2015, the day on which she was given the Wallace Stevens Award, Harjo published an extended Facebook post remembering the people who influenced her pursuit of poetry. After honoring her mother, her teachers, and her favorite poets, she says this about the purpose of poetry:

I've learned that poetry could heal the broken heart of a woman who found herself in battle with the man she loved beyond love itself. It can assist in healing humans, creatures, plants, and countries. It speaks unspeakable truths. Poetry is almost always present at those major transitions in our lives: birth, marriage, death, and . . . love. It

assists in healing my tribal nation. It's poetry being sung at the ceremonial grounds or in Creek churches and because of it we feel ourselves living together into a greater understanding despite the struggles, the battles. It is one of the toughest teachers. It teaches us how to listen, to even the most difficult truths.

Her identification of poetry's role in reconciliation as a healer both of the individual and the nation resonates throughout her body of work. She affirms the cross-cultural nature of contemporary Native American writing, seeing poetry active in both a traditional tribal and Christian tribal context, at the "ceremonial grounds" and in "Creek churches." And she articulates the relatedness of poetry, speaking, and song, writing earlier in the same post, "the roots of poetry are the same roots as [those of] song." As poetry "speaks unspeakable truths" and is sung at sacred gatherings, it creates "greater understanding despite the struggles, the battles," performing a vital service in a broken world. Much of that vitality, a close reading of her poetry demonstrates, rests on Harjo's emphasis on love in the midst of conflict.

Poetry acts as a language of the sacred for Harjo in part by creating a space in which an individual has the freedom to think her own thoughts. In an essay called "Writing With the Sun," Harjo describes poetry as an outlet, a way to escape that suppression of individual thought:

Poetry was revealed as a sacred language, something I didn't find in the church and Sunday school I attended alone and then with my sister. It was a gift from a woman [Emily Dickinson] who searched out her own truth in the judgmental Puritan enclave of this country. The images called sacred were constructed for her by the fathers and the church. She was no place to be found in those unrelenting places, but there in her room where the sun came in to speak those rare mornings she met herself and the poetry that became her. (72)

Like Dickinson, Harjo crafts her poetry and her spirituality at a place where “the sun [can come] in to speak.” Her poetry creates space for conversation with the religious tradition that has so often been misused to marginalize and colonize Native American people, making a distinction between the institutional church and the teachings of Jesus by showing how those teachings align with Harjo’s own values.

When Harjo confides in an interviewer, “There’s no sense engaging evangelical Christianity. You can’t engage something like that because they don’t encourage interaction and thinking for yourself” (“Weaving Stories for Food” 125), she is noticing a lack of space for conversation. At the same time, Harjo identifies her poetry as a site for making the “spiritual realm more manifest” in the earthly world (“Landscape and the Place inside” 79). I contend that Harjo’s poetry opens up dialogue between Native Americans and Christians, making way for both the acknowledgment of wrongdoing on the part of Christians and the identification of common values like loving the enemy.

While Harjo acknowledges the separation and grief that results from conflict, her poetry posits that the response to conflict can be unifying rather than divisive. Eliza Gibson explains that “one response to the loss of people and land has been to re-create, recover, and rewrite the history of that loss” (106). She claims, however, that reimagining this past “is not entirely without problems” leading sometimes to “historiographic blind spots” that occur when particular nationalist groups (in this case tribal communities) advocate so strongly for themselves that they “obscure each other . . . in effect ignoring each other’s presence” (106). Gibson reads Harjo as a “cultural nationalist” and focuses her article on the relationship that Harjo posits between herself, her tribe, and “genocidal and cultural loss” (106). Gibson argues that instead of compensating for loss by reasserting her tribe’s history and identity, Harjo “embraces loss and the grief that comes

from identifying with the survivors of genocide and the dispossessed” (107). Harjo does this through story and song which both function throughout her poetry as actions and even characters, together facilitating a radical reconciliation process anchored in love. Gibson suggests that “loss” allows Harjo to “imagine a community that does not demand an authentic origin” (107). The empathy and compassion initiated by story and song build community across cultural borders, allowing space for both Creek and Christian perspectives.

While grace is not the primary focus of this chapter, the attention Eliza Gibson gives to it deserves notice and helps frame a reading of reconciliation in Harjo’s poetry. Gibson uses grace as “a shaping poetics,” the lens through which she interprets Harjo’s poetry in much the same way that I use reconciliation. Gibson acknowledges that “grace is a concept most associated with Christianity” and in spite of this religion’s involvement in colonization, grace “provides possibilities of negotiating the conflicted histories and relationships that result from 500 years of colonization and genocide” (111). According to Gibson, grace, in Harjo’s poetry, “does not concern reconciliation with a Judeo-Christian God but rather the ability to continue living in the face of historical and cultural genocide and, more important, to flourish creatively and culturally” (111). Taking grace out of the Judeo-Christian context entirely, however, would contrast Harjo’s own exposure to and engagement with both the Bible and Christian tradition. While I agree with Gibson that Harjo’s use of grace does not directly reference relationship with the God of the Bible, I do consider Harjo’s own interaction with Christian scriptures and traditions important. The practice of reading her use of grace without acknowledging its proximity and Harjo’s own proximity to Christianity, though her perspective on the church is often critical, would deny the spiritual complexity of Harjo’s work.

“A Postcolonial Tale”⁷¹ demonstrates how imagination is a key ingredient in reconciliation, the catalyst that makes story and song active. This particular poem illustrates the relationship between the imagination and poetry’s agents, story⁷² and song:

Our children put down their guns when we did to imagine with us.

We imagined the shining link between the heart and the sun.

We imagined tables of food for everyone. (105)

In the poem, imagination inspires the children to turn away from violence and instead envision or story a community life where people embrace connection rather than division, breaking bread and making music together. The poem also records the activation of songs as expressions of love where violence was previously imminent:

We imagined the songs:

the imagination conversely illumines us, speaks with us, sings with

us, drums with us, loves us. (105)

Imagination activates story and song throughout Harjo’s poetry, contributing significantly to communal and individual reconciliation. In addition, recalling the function of dreaming in Erdrich’s *The Last Report*, imaginative writing, like poetry and fiction, has the capacity to create space for dialogue that can lead to reconciliation in circumstances where the world outside of literature, the waking world, is bogged down with tension and misunderstanding.

While many of Harjo’s poems foreground the forced removal of Native Americans from their homelands and others address specific localized crimes like theft and murder, I argue that

⁷¹ "A Postcolonial Tale" was originally published in *The Woman Who Fell from the Sky* but is quoted here from *How We Became Human*.

⁷² The word "story" does not appear in "A Postcolonial Tale," though the children in the poem engage in the act of storying, or imagining new circumstances. While other imaginative forms activate throughout Harjo's work, such as dancing and drumming, I highlight story and song because both of them are named and active throughout much of the poetry explored in this chapter and because of their close relationship to both oral and literary Native American culture..

ultimately her poetry offers a creative response to Christianity's involvement in colonial takeover. I agree with Eliza Gibson when she states, "Genocidal loss in the Americas [in which the church sometimes participated] cannot be compensated – discursively or otherwise" (108). Reconciliation does not equal compensation or reconstruction. It signals emotional and social healing, new beginning based on the formation of community that reaches across cultural and religious borders. This reaching across suggests the possibility for radical peace, the kind that grows up in the midst of confirmed enemies. Of concern to this particular study is how Harjo's writing creates the potential for the formation of community by demonstrating a shared value between Muscogee culture and Christianity when she emphasizes the transformative power of loving one's enemies. This radical principle, around which peacemakers like Jesus, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Nelson Mandela built their campaigns for change, is repeated multiple times throughout the New Testament⁷³ and is also enacted in Harjo's writing. Both song and story facilitate this transformative love. The ability to produce songs in the face of tragedy measures the capacity of people to regenerate, to experience new life not by shutting out the harm of the past but by working through the pain and allowing it to produce songs of survival, beauty, and resilience. Story brings about the final and most radical step in the process, loving the enemy. Harjo envisions the role love can play in transforming both the perpetrator and victim, sometimes even imagining them becoming members of the same family. Her words restore balance by creating community between the victim and the perpetrator, aligning herself with Echo-Hawk and Tutu, altering the course of the story so that all parties are included, none exiled.

⁷³ Luke 6:27, Matthew 5:44, Romans 12:14, Romans 12:19 – 21.

Indictment

Harjo's indictment of wrongdoing is essential for the extent of reconciliation her poetry makes possible. Harjo's poetic interaction with Christianity is punctuated with indictment of the church's role in colonization, aligning with the first step in Echo-Hawk's process and serving as a foundation for the more advanced work of reconciliation in many of her poems. In spite of her early attraction to Scripture, Harjo's contemporary engagement with Christianity is marked by strong critique. The misuse of the Bible to "prove the superiority of white people [and] to enforce the domination of women by men" (*Crazy Brave* 78) ultimately manifested in her separation from the church. Even though in the Bible itself Harjo saw a respect for dreams and visions, the teachings of the church contrasted with those of both the Bible and her culture: "in church I was taught that anything visionary on a personal level, especially in girls or women, was evil and most likely of the devil. I became fearful of those abilities. I closed the door" (46). She experienced an emphasis on rules and restrictions, "the Christian law of forthright tied-tight shoes" (47).

In many ways, Harjo's poetry positions the institutionalized church as aligned with greed and destruction, the enemy in an ongoing conflict. Her poetry repeatedly associates the church (Harjo makes no distinction here between Protestantism and Catholicism and so I use "church" to refer to the entire body of believers) with violence and with the decimation of Native American cultures. In a tale titled "there are as many ways to poetry as there are to God," Harjo writes, "In most world conflicts in the news both church and business interests have been and continue to be major instigators of war. The church is fueled by a righteous zeal and the need to acquire and control souls" (*Map* 61). Harjo continues:

Missionaries and Bible translators work to convert, then attempt to destroy

cultures and languages to supplant a system and the language as a superior alternative construct.

I don't agree with the need to proselytize and force conversion. . . What is the source of this need to devour peoples, cultures, and resources throughout the so-called third world? This is the same force that drove our people out of our lands in what is now known as Georgia and Alabama, followed us to Indian Territory and took our lands there.

(62)

Here Harjo directly links Christians with colonization and assimilation. She also identifies and corrects a willful misunderstanding, that indigenous people inhabit a "third world," implying the connotations of less advanced, primitive, in need of civilization. In "Song of Solomon," she identifies Christianity with a warlike pursuit of people, one that privileges violence over peace: "I imagine the Bible being carried as a sword through the various nations and tribes . . . It was a tool of righteousness weighted with the blood of many nations who fell to those who brandished it" (421). Her criticisms pinpoint the institutional church's hypocrisy, its betrayal of Jesus's emphasis on peace and care for the marginalized.

Harjo holds Christians responsible alongside government officials for suicidal tendencies felt generations after the initial takeover. In the poem titled "Suicide Watch,"⁷⁴ the speaker describes being given drugs to mediate her moods. Late in the poem she says, "This is not mine. It belongs to the soldiers who raped the young on the trail of tears. It belongs to Andrew Jackson. It belongs to the missionaries" (72). The list continues and by the end of it the act of assigning blame where it belongs frees the speaker so that she is able release the weight of mental illness and assert that it "no longer belongs to me" (72). The speaker finally experiences a healing self-

⁷⁴ "Suicide Watch" appears in *Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings*.

recognition once she is surrounded by nature. She sits by the river and is “fascinated by the dance of dragonflies” (72). “Suicide Watch” contrasts the ineffectual campaign of the missionaries with the quiet effectiveness of nature to bring about restoration and healing.

Community: Story, Song, and Healing

Moving past indictment to community-building, “Equinox,”⁷⁵ offers an opportunity to see the potential for cross-cultural exchange facilitated by story and song. In it Harjo explores a value which resonates with the teachings of Jesus, that of turning away from the desire for revenge and instead embracing new life. The beginning of the poem introduces the conflict. “Equinox” opens as the speaker attempts to refrain from “breaking into the story by force” (184), knowing that if she does she

will find myself with a war club in my hand
and the smoke of grief staggering toward the sun
your nation dead beside you. (184)

Whatever wrong has been committed is large-scale, indicated by the fact that the speaker wants revenge against an entire nation.

The speaker’s desire for retaliation has historical context. According to Robbie Ethridge, author of *Creek Country: The Creek Indians and Their World*, the Creeks were known for waging wars. Ethridge writes, “Many Europeans believed that the Creeks viewed war as a sport or social necessity, waged merely for honor and status” (231). He quickly responds to this misunderstanding, asserting, “It certainly was one of a Creek man’s main occupations, but the primary motive was retaliation” (231). Retaliation is one aspect of blood revenge, a principle

⁷⁵ “Equinox” was originally published in the section titled “New Poems, 1999-2001” at the close of *How We Became Human*. It now appears as the penultimate poem in Harjo’s newest collection, *Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings*. I use pagination from the earlier collection.

that was part of the Creek legal code in the 18th and early 19th centuries (228, 231). The legal code was based on the emphasis Creeks placed on cosmic balance and the principle of reciprocity. Ethridge explains, “the historic southeastern Indians cognitively ordered their world into a series of opposite categories, such as man/woman, plant/animal, war/peace, life/death, farming/hunting, and sacred/profane” (229). If any of these categories was tipped out of balance, it was a tribe member’s duty to restore order, to engage in a reciprocal action. For example, if a member of one clan caused the death of someone from another clan, the victim’s people would be duty-bound to kill a member of the offender’s group. Ethridge explains the seriousness of blood revenge: “The Creeks, as well as all other southeastern Indians, held so rigidly to this principle that any kinsperson who did not avenge crying blood was infamous throughout the nation and considered utterly sunk in cowardice” (230). When blood revenge was enacted on a national scale it was called retaliation and most often resulted in war between nations (231). Eventually the Creek leaders revoked blood revenge and translated the principle into reciprocal law that was enforced by Indian warriors (232).

“Equinox” demonstrates the power of imagination as the “story” resists the speaker’s hunger for violent revenge by putting up a barrier the speaker would have to break in order to exact revenge (184). Instead, the speaker chooses to continually “walk away” from the tragedy “though it has been an eternity” (184). In response to this rejection of retaliation, the attention of the poem turns from grief to regeneration. Just as “geese are returning to mate and crocuses have // broken through the frozen earth” in the beginning of spring, new life emerges as the speaker distances herself from a desire for revenge:

from each drop of blood
springs up sons and daughters, trees,

a mountain of sorrows, of songs. (184)

She acknowledges that during the eternity-long interval after tragedy struck, a whole community has arisen. A “mountain of sorrows” accompanies the new sons and daughters, but its presence does not produce bitterness; it produces songs. The poem, “It’s Raining in Honolulu”⁷⁶ indicates that songs function like blessings: “we will plant songs where there were curses” (194). Songs, in “Equinox,” are created as a result of story’s work in preventing violent revenge. Together they are an expression of recuperation from conflict and confirmation of a shared value between the Creek and Christianity, that choosing peace is more productive than revenge.

The poem showcases an individual’s choice to avoid retaliation for a national crime and foregrounds the resulting regeneration or resurrection of life after destruction, another feature that tends toward Christianity’s central tenets of new life and resurrection. The speaker imagines judgment day when an ambiguous “they” “will come for me;” she asserts that she “will make [her] stand / before the jury of destiny,” confident that resisting revenge was good (184). The speaker’s tone is assertive, emphasizing the first person: “*I will* make my stand,” “*I will* answer,” “*I have broken* my addiction to war and desire,” and finally “*I will* reply, *I have buried* the dead” (emphasis added; 184). Set apart from the rest is the final line indicating that the speaker has “made songs of the blood, the marrow” (184). She has found a way to create beauty out of the sorrow and tragedy. She follows the pattern of nature where songs spring up as each drop of blood falls, creating an immediate regenerative response to tragic loss. Individuals rise up from the blood, resulting ultimately in the regeneration of a community.

In multiple ways “Equinox” is a poem about powerful transformation. Harjo asserts, “I’m aware of being involved with transformation in my work . . . I hope that on some level they

⁷⁶ “It’s Raining in Honolulu” was originally published in *How We Became Human* and was recently reprinted in *Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings*. The passage quoted here reflects pagination from *How We Became Human*.

[my poems] can transform hatred into love . . . I know that language is alive and living” (“Ancestral Voices” 43-44). The language of “Equinox” performs just such transformation. First, the poem recalls Harjo’s words to Joseph Bruchac in an interview: “I like to think that bitter experience can be used to move the world” (“The Story of All” 27). Instead, as Harjo declares in an unnamed prose poem, “*songs . . . turn hatred into love*” (italics original; *Conflict Resolution* 16). Harjo’s poems function as songs figuratively and literally. “Equinox” is one of the poems Harjo has translated into song and included on one of her music albums, *Winding Through the Milky Way*. The poem suggests movement out of one understanding into a new one, encouraging the changing of bitterness into something else entirely, something life-giving and beautiful. Second, the speaker’s testimony to the “jury of destiny” is an affirmative declaration that a pattern, an addiction, has been broken and is now replaced actively. Third, that active replacement takes the form of songs that are “made . . . of the blood, the marrow” (184). In all of these ways, she invokes the power of language in an effort to take a bitter experience and transform it into one that gives life. Her placement of “Equinox” as the penultimate poem in her newest collection, *Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings*, reinforces the poem’s significant role in Harjo’s paradigm of reconciliation. It helps to conclude the entire collection, the global focus of which is on creating resolution in the wake of colonization by embracing peace and new life.

Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings highlights story’s role in establishing peace in place of violent conflict. Recalling Linda Hogan’s assertion that people can “transform” history (*The Woman Who Watches* 111), Harjo writes about how altering stories can bring about peaceful resolution. In “You Can Change the Story, My Spirit Said to Me as I Sat Near the Sea,” the speaker’s stay in an Alaskan village coincides with the murder of a woman. Recalling the early practice of retaliation killings among some tribal communities, the villagers decide that the

speaker and her friend must be killed “to satisfy the murder, to / ensure the village will continue in a harmonious manner” (102). While the retaliation killing takes place, the speaker’s spirit “leaps out above the scene” (102) so that she can watch. Her “soul’s helper” tells her that she can “go / back and change the story” (102). Throughout the rest of the poem, the speaker’s spirit guides her as she travels back in time and discovers what it means to change the story.

Ultimately, she learns that telling a new story is the only way to alter the old one. She addresses the community after discovering by whom the murder was committed, “I have a story I want to tell you” (103). As she sings and dances, she speaks the tale of a walrus hunter who killed “a walrus who is like / a woman” (104). The story begins to take on a life of its own. The speaker describes it as having

its own

spirit that wants to live. It dances and sings and breathes. It

surprises me with what it knows. (104)

Story itself is active. It reveals truth and restores balance and harmony to the village. As the story reaches its climax, the murderer “stands / up, as if to flee the gathering” and the community holds him accountable for his violence (104). As the speaker “return[s] to present earth time” the story lingers: “It is still in my tongue, my body, as if it has lived there all / along” (104). The dwelling place of the story is inside the body of the storyteller. The poem closes with a single line that simultaneously mourns the loss of unity among all people and affirms the existence of stories inside everyone. Harjo writes, “We make a jumble of stories. We do not dream together” (104). The existence of the stories offers hope, but the jumble indicates that humans are not accessing the stories in unity with one another. Stories have the power to bring restoration in the wake of violence and even prevent the violence itself if the storyteller can learn how to access

and articulate the tale that dwells inside of her.

A transformative response to violence occurs also in “When the World as We Knew It Ended.”⁷⁷ Another large-scale tragedy takes place, the September 11 terrorist attacks, but this time the Native American community witnesses it rather than being the victim of it. The poem brings American Indian culture into sharp relief against the money- and power-driven systems of the white world, in which Harjo often includes the church. The poem also highlights the Native American land ethic celebrated in Linda Hogan’s writing, contrasting this ethic sharply with the church’s participation in the conquest of American Indian lands. This particular poem speaks a message of hope, depicting resilience and harmony among Native American people as they take their cue from nature and press forward in the midst of tragedy. While the poem critiques Christianity, it simultaneously recalls Jesus’s emphasis on peace and combines it with an American Indian call to harmony with the land.

The work of reconciliation performed in “When the World” by story and song is closely linked to the land, and so a discussion of land ethics offers context for this poem and much of Harjo’s work. N. Scott Momaday explains what it means to have an ethical understanding of the land: “We Americans need now more than ever before – and indeed more than we know – to imagine who and what we are with respect to the earth and sky” (“An American Land Ethic” 47). Recalling both Momaday’s and Hogan’s land ethics, Harjo writes in “Talking with the Sun”⁷⁸ about the relatedness of people and nature, describing “the sun [as] a relative” (31) and writing, “Humans are vulnerable and rely on the kindnesses of the / earth and the sun; we exist together” (31). Decades before Momaday’s appeal, non-Native environmentalist Aldo Leopold offered a

⁷⁷ “When the World As We Knew It Ended” made its debut in the section titled “New Poems, 1999-2001” at the end of *How We Became Human*.

⁷⁸ “Talking with the Sun” is published in *Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings*.

similar call, noting that Americans fail to be transformed by land ethics. An ethical concept of place and people implies “that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent [sic] parts” (98). Rather than honoring this community, Americans cling to a position of power even though “a land ethic [should] change . . . the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it” (99). Early Americans who were so often also Christians demonstrated a lack of respect for the plant, animal, and mineral members of the community as they cleared the land for settlement. They harmed not only the natural world but also the psychological world of the Native American communities that are so closely linked, both spiritually and culturally, to the earth and its non-human inhabitants.

Momaday suggests that humans save something more than nature when they preserve the land. Each culture, he explains, has a “racial memory,” and this collective information is linked to the land the culture inhabits (“An American Land Ethic” 48). In an untitled prose poem,⁷⁹ Harjo writes, “*Each human is a complex, contradictory story*” and these stories exist also within each human and within the earth: all of these narratives are connected (italics original; *Conflict Resolution* 20). This interconnectedness recalls Linda Hogan’s articulation of the symbiotic relationship between humans and nature in *The Woman Who Watches Over the World* and *Dwellings*. She identifies nature as a source of healing (*The Woman Who Watches* 149) and notes that the “voices of the world” need to be interpreted by artists who convey messages from nature to humankind (*Dwellings* 50). This same interconnectedness also suggests that listening to the land is essential for people to learn how to access and learn from the stories that dwell inside their bodies. Threats to nature, then, are threats to culture, especially to tribal cultures that are so thoroughly connected to land. Glancy’s voice contributes to this discussion as well. She sees land

⁷⁹ Each poem in *Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings* is followed by an untitled prose poem.

as the source of stories; it holds voices of the past (“Walk-in-2-Worlds” 15). In jeopardizing its well-being, people risk the loss of the narratives and distinctive voices the land offers to artists like Glancy who have learned to listen to it and interpret what it has to say. Harjo’s land ethic is equally strong, expressing not only her value of the natural world but her expectation for how people should interact with it in order to sustain spiritual, physical, and communal health.

In “When the World as We Knew It Ended,” Harjo identifies the need to control, to conquer both people and land, at the heart of conflict. As the poem opens, Harjo imagines a community of people, represented by a communal speaker “we,” living “on an occupied island at the furthest edge / of a trembling nation” witnessing a horrible tragedy on the other side of the country (198). The events recall the September 11, 2001 destruction of the World Trade Center:

Two Towers rose up from the east island of commerce . . .

. . . Then it went down. Swallowed

by a fire dragon, by oil and fear. (198)

The speakers associate the destruction of the towers with greed for oil and power, recalling Harjo’s indictment in “there are as many ways to poetry as there are to God” of church and business interests that hunger after people’s souls for financial gain. The speakers anchor the narrative about the tragedy in the context of Christianity’s arrival by saying, “we have been watching since the eve of the missionaries in their / long and solemn clothes, to see what would happen” (198). When the “racket” of destruction rises “in every corner of the world” (199) “the hunger for war [rises] up in those” who are greedy for power and ownership,

who would steal to be president

to be king or emperor, to own the trees, stones, and everything

else that moved about the earth, inside the Earth. (199)

Harjo traces all tragedies to these vices, these consuming obsessions with power and money, for ownership over people and land. In a January 2, 2010 blog entry published by Muskogee Nation News, Harjo asserts, “There is no separation between economics, social, political, or spiritual systems. Each is interconnected . . . Each system within the whole either supports life, or it degenerates” (“MNN Column for December 2009”). In other words, the propensity of governments, of individuals, to position themselves as “conquerors,” recalling Leopold’s language, of the land indicates an entirely “degenerate” structure, a globally broken system.

Instead of reacting in kind, the people on the “occupied island” respond with surprising calm to the tragic events in the East, recognizing that “there were the seeds to plant and the babies / who needed milk and comforting” (199). They understand their role in helping the natural and human world persist. They continue to work and survive as they witness the horror:

We saw it all, as we changed diapers and fed
the babies. We saw it, . . .
as we bathed and washed
the floors. (198)

The witnesses respond with calm in part because they live in harmony with the land. In their ethical understanding of nature, they engage in an open channel of communication. They see the tragedy,

through the branches
of the knowledgeable tree
through the snags of stars, through
the sun and storms from our knees. (198)

Nature forewarns them about the impending disaster:

We knew it was coming, tasted the winds who gathered intelligence
from each leaf and flower, from every mountain, sea
and desert. (198)

The birds, too, sound notes of danger:

The conference of the birds warned us . . .
It was by their song and talk we knew when to rise
went to look out the window
to the commotion going on--
the magnetic field thrown off by grief. (199)

Humans and nature prepare together to witness destruction, bracing themselves against the impact. In contrast to America's imperial involvement outside its borders, the speakers in "When the World" do not intervene. They witness from their windows, grieve the loss, and then continue their ordinary life-sustaining tasks.

"When the World" participates in a poetics of witness. First described by Carolyn Forché, poetry of witness is "a mode of reading rather than writing"⁸⁰ that positions the reader to bear witness to what Ann Keniston and Jeffrey Gray describe as "extreme or even hitherto unspeakable events" (5). Keniston and Gray note that contemporary poetry of witness, what they call "engaged poetry," often uses "figuration, paradox, and equivocation" to create distance between the speaker of the poem and the events the poem records (8), thereby allowing both the speaker and reader to document and "transform or transcend" what happened (2). Harjo's poem bears double witness. It documents the destruction of the Twin Towers and imagines a group of people witnessing the event. The poem also creates a twofold buffer between the witnesses and

⁸⁰ Ann Keniston and Jeffrey Gray quote Carolyn Forché on page 5 of their introduction to *The New American Poetry of Engagement: A 21st-Century Anthology*.

the terror attack. The speakers of “When the World” are both physically distant from the tragedy, watching it from the shores of Hawaii, and their witness is mediated by nature. Rather than relying on figuration, paradox, and equivocation, Harjo mediates the witness experience with the birds and trees. The speakers see the destruction “through the branches / of the knowledgeable tree” and are prepared for it by the “conference of the birds” (198). Nature acts as a sort of transparent shield, inviting the speakers to watch the tragedy unfold but protecting them from the force of impact. This harmonious relationship with nature allows speakers to not only continue living in the face of great loss but to embrace the earth’s ability to birth new life out of the “rubble.”

In the poem, while the speakers witness destruction in the present, Harjo indicates that the human ability to dream, the imaginative activity that makes it possible to see new ways forward, is also connected to what happens to and on the land. Those who witness the destruction of the towers see a connection between the physical world and dreaming, and they mourn the disruption of that potential. Harjo expresses their sense of loss:

And then it was over, this world we had grown to love
for its sweet grasses, for the many-colored horses
and fishes, for the shimmering possibilities
while dreaming. (199)

Here Harjo directly identifies the dream world as a place of possibility and mourns the loss of access to it as tragedy threatens the natural world that sustains dreaming. The activity of dreaming is firmly located in the physical world, surrounded by “sweet grasses,” “horses / and fishes.” This is yet more reason to value the land, for it fosters dreams that hold such potential to create new realities like the ones authors create through imaginative writing.

In the midst of the community's grief and the rhythm of daily routines, the relationship between humans and nature initiates healing. In the final two stanzas, Harjo writes,

. . . someone picked up a guitar or ukulele from the rubble
and began to sing about the light flutter
the kick beneath the skin of the Earth. (199-200)

While musician plays, the earth gives birth to

a warm animal
a song being born between the legs of her,
a poem. (200)

The two creative acts, the person singing and the earth giving birth, happen simultaneously, signaling the synergy between humans and land. This synergy most clearly resembles Linda Hogan's assertion that artists translate messages from the earth for humans. The ukulele player acts as one of these artists in "When the World." The musician uses song to draw attention to nature's regenerative act, new life being born even from beneath the wreckage. In line with the land ethic Leopold identifies, humans and the earth are interdependent parts of the whole. Years after completing the poem, Harjo writes, "To heal means addressing the source of the problem, to bring what is broken back into balance. It means changing the story" ("MNN Column for December 2009"). The singer, the musician does just this in the poem. She changes the story by counteracting destruction with new life. Instead of continuing in unalleviated sorrow, she alters the direction of the story, sounding a note of hope, offering balance – a return to goodness after much grief and a sign of continuing on with the pattern of life in the midst of the utter disregard for it.

Significantly, Harjo pictures an individual, the artist, translating the hope of new life from

land to the rest of the community. He or she sings about the birth, transferring the action of earth into music so that the rest of the community can hear and comprehend the renewal. Relatedly, Harjo introduces the final section of poetry in *Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings* with these two lines, “*The poetry ancestors scattered to all parts of the world. / Each family of trees, animals, winds, stones needed a poet*” (italics original; 99). In the same section, in an untitled prose poem, Harjo articulates the need for the natural world to have poets who can serve as interpreters. Harjo writes that “Everyone comes into the world with a job to do – I don’t mean working for a company, a corporation – we were all given gifts to share” (126). The artist’s gift is the ability to hear and articulate the land’s stories and the community’s collective cultural narratives that reside in the land. As spokesperson for nature, the singer in “When the World” both initiates healing, the promise of new life out of tragic loss, and articulates and affirms her community’s land ethic and culture, the “racial memory” stewarded by the land. Her ability to sing after such destruction and to do so in harmony with nature’s regeneration confirms the intimacy between indigenous people and nature. This intimacy results in a hopeful resolution to an otherwise dark and foreboding chapter of American experience.

Harjo highlights the healing power of story and song in the context of the Native American practice of ceremony.⁸¹ At the close of “In Mystic,” written in response to the

⁸¹ Essential for healing through both story and ceremony is mindfulness. In the tale “ceremony” in *A Map to the Next World*, Harjo posits that, “we can walk or run blindly through the ceremony of our life . . . or incorporate knowledge that will give this journey a heightened sense of meaning, of beauty, despite the terrible complexities and apparent injustices” (58). Whether a day brings peace or turmoil, “any conscious preparation will allow us to act with steady grace, no matter the fluid destiny” (58). Preparation is necessary because the conditions all people, but especially Native Americans, face on a daily basis are difficult. In the poem titled “The War Zone,” Harjo describes the tension that marks existence in the midst of conflict:

skins pulled tight in the vertigo of fear
under unbearable
pressure. //
We go on. (*Map* 60)

An examination of Harjo’s poetry reveals that mindfulness prepares the way for reconciliation based on love and depends largely on the grace with which Harjo responds to the tragic history of her people.

injustices of the Pequot War, Harjo asserts, “Every poem is an effort at ceremony” (*Conflict Resolution* 63). Here she identifies poetry as a vehicle for healing. According to Vine Deloria in *Spirit and Reason*, ceremony is meant to “to make whole again what has now become disassociated and chaotic” (55). Kimberly Roppolo Wieser draws a connection between this same passage and Paula Gunn Allen’s description of “Right relationship, or right kinship, [as] fundamental to American Indian aesthetics . . . [it] is dictated by custom within a given tribe or cultural grouping, but everywhere it is characterized by considerations of proportion, harmony, balance, and community.”⁸² Wieser notes how in much the same “way [that] ceremony evokes change in the participants and in reality” reading literature “evoke[s] change in the reader and in reality” as well (*Back to the Blanket*). In other words, story and ceremony perform parallel functions.

In “Returning from the Enemy”⁸³ Harjo showcases how story and song are active within ceremony, working in tandem with indictment and community building to bring about healing as a much-needed change in reality. The poem, which is interlaced with a series of tales, records stages of preparation for a ceremony of healing. Harjo identifies the earliest stage as one of facing “the knot of memory” and the danger that persists long after a hostile takeover occurs (69). Rehearsing the darkest memories performs indictment, naming wrongdoing so that victims can move forward after suffering without being weighed down by traumatic histories. Harjo writes, “And the enemy who pressed guns to our heads to force us to Oklahoma still / walks in the mind of the people” (69). She calls the “journey” toward healing “perilous” because of the

⁸² Allen is quoted in Kimberly Roppolo Wieser’s *Back to the Blanket: Recovered Rhetorics and American Indian Studies* which is under contract with University of Oklahoma Press with expected publication in Spring 2017. The quotation originally appeared in *Spider Woman’s Granddaughters*.

⁸³ “Returning from the Enemy” was first published with a series of embedded tales in *A Map to the Next World*. It later appeared in *How We Became Human* but without the tales. I use pagination from the earlier collection.

historical register in people's memories, what Harjo calls the "slick of knowledge" (69).

Contained in this slick are murders, forced assimilations, the separation of children from parents, and the loss of homeland. In the third section of the poem, Harjo identifies the presence of fear, "the funnel of terror" (73), and a deep longing for the life of the past,

the homelands beloved by my people
who were marched to the west
by the authority of a piece of paper. (73)

The poem helps the speaker prepare for the ceremony by acknowledging the tragedies that have placed her community in need of healing.

The ceremony participant encounters these dark memories in the context of community.⁸⁴ While the poem certainly references large-scale tragedy inflicted on entire indigenous nations, Harjo anchors the poem firmly in the personal. In other words, she contextualizes individual experience within communal experience. She does this through the series of tales that are embedded in the poem.⁸⁵ "Returning from the Enemy" is the only poem in the collection that has a tale following each of the 14 sections and these tales help contextualize personal hardship within the community. The poem itself is dedicated "for my father" (*Map* 69) and the inclusion of the tales allows Harjo to articulate connections between the poem and her own life. She

⁸⁴ Writing in a Christian Native American context, Kateri Mitchell describes how ceremony and ritual create community in the life of American Indian Christians. She explains that each stage of life is celebrated with some sort of ritual whether it be a vigil, dance, feast, etc. These rituals, celebrated communally, are "all events of our cyclic life" and through these events "we breathe the fullness of God's revelation to us Native people" (174). Whereas missionaries in the 19th century approached Native American rituals as remnants of pagan religion, Mitchell and many contemporary Native American Christians understand dances, symbolism, and ceremony as elements that "bring us in closer union with our Creator" (173).

⁸⁵ Angeliq Nixon argues that each poem and tale which appears in *A Map to the Next World* work together, speaking into each other, forming what Nixon calls a "double helix," meaning that the tales comment on the poems which precede and follow them, making all portions of the text interdependent. This structure promotes a circular reading of Harjo's collection of poetry and reproduces oral storytelling techniques, firmly rooting both the poems and tales in Native American cultural practices (2-3). This circular reading technique influences my reading of "Returning from the Enemy" because it emphasizes the relationship between the personal and the communal.

establishes connections between the speaker in the present and the relatives who have come before her. Harjo writes, “I am linked to my father, my son, / my daughter” (69). Later in the same section she writes about the presence of a community of voices in the midst of the suffering, all of them convening for the ceremony: “I hear relatives’ voices in the wind as we gather for the reckoning” (69). She both experiences the ceremony with relatives and records interactions with family members as the subject of ceremony, the cause of her need for healing. The tales echo and expound upon these familial ties. In the tale that immediately follows this first section of the poem, Harjo captures the ambiguity of intensely personal suffering, writing about how she was both hurt by and close to her father: “When my father remembered he was descended from leaders he was ashamed he had hit his wife, his baby. When I was the baby I did not know my father as a warrior. I knew him as an intimate in whose face I recognized myself” (70). In the tale that follows section four, Harjo writes about the deeply personal struggles of her father with alcohol and anger alongside the very public problem of “white men” “getting rich on Indian oil money” (76). What happens in the family is connected to what happens in the community. She identifies the reassignment of American Indian lands as a root cause of self-hatred in her father’s life (76). Throughout much of her poetry, much as Linda Hogan does in her memoir, Harjo demonstrates how loss and trauma at the national level bleed into the personal lives of the individuals who make up indigenous nations. Through her writing she indicts the enemy on behalf of and explores healing for both the individual and the community.⁸⁶

Even the structure of the first section of the poem suggests that individuals who

⁸⁶ Significantly, Harjo simultaneously anchors her own identity firmly within the Native American community by rooting her poetry in autobiographical detail, and makes her poetry representative, writing about tragic experiences shared by several distinct nations of indigenous people. Gibson argues that in Harjo’s work loss becomes an organizing factor, the thread that connects people across cultural communities (106 – 107). I see both happening – Harjo’s work creates both pan-Native and cross-cultural connections while it is firmly anchored in the Native American community.

experience the forced relocation are not alone; they have their relatedness to one another through family ties, culture, and common experience. Section 1 is composed of seven two-line stanzas, suggesting companionship and sometimes even the perilous presence of the enemy as in lines 10 and 11 where the “enemy . . . / walks in the minds of the people” (69). The only line that appears alone describes the dependable presence of nature, “Behind me the river is steady and laps the jetty. Winds purr through the grass” (69). This single line establishes the presence of nature as tragedy occurs and as people gather for the ceremony of returning from it.

Another poem reinforces the importance of community for ceremonial healing. “For Calling the Spirit Back from Wandering the Earth in Its Human Feet,”⁸⁷ like “Returning from the Enemy,” offers instructions for attending a ceremony. The speaker tells the listener to be grounded in the natural world: “Let the earth stabilize your postcolonial insecure jitters” (5) and “Let go the pain you are holding in your mind, your shoulders, / your heart, all the way to your feet” (5). While “ask[ing] for forgiveness,” the ceremony participant is meant to “call upon the help of those who love you,” both human, animal, and earth (6). Surrounded by these helpers, the participant welcomes back her wounded spirit and becomes whole (6). As the process completes, the speaker and her helpers join together in a “party” welcoming “everyone you know who loves and supports you” along with “those who have no / place else to go” (6).

In “Returning from the Enemy” Harjo quickly establishes story as a method of surviving suffering inflicted on entire communities. As the second section of the poem opens, Harjo records the “raw story” of survival, of removal from homes and a treacherous journey with

. . . children

wrapped in smallpox blankets to keep

⁸⁷ “For Calling the Spirit Back” appears in *Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings*.

them warm. (71)

Here the “[raw]ness” of the story indicates the unbelievable suffering and lack of hope experienced during the imperialist advances of European Americans into Native American lands. A figure from American Indian mythology enters to provide rescue. “Spider” weaves a story that is capable of lifting people out of suffering: she spins “a sticky pattern from the muddy curses of our enemy / to get us safely to the Milky Way” (71). The speaker, a collective “we,” rejects “your version of progress” (71) that results in the loss of homes and family. In keeping with this rejection, Spider

does not consider making webs
to sell to the highest bidder
but keeps weaving and thinking
and including us in the story. (71)

In an endnote in *How We Became Human* offering contextual information about “Returning from the Enemy,” Harjo quotes Carolyn Dunn and Carol Comfort from *Through the Eye of the Deer*, describing the spider: “Grandmother Spider appears in many forms in tribal narratives. She is woman as Creatrix, giver of life, guide, nurturer, and protector” (230). In her introduction to *Spider Woman’s Granddaughters: Traditional Tales and Contemporary Writing by Native American Women*, Paula Gunn Allen notes that Grandmother Spider brings understanding, “the light of thought about the past and present, about the lives Native people live as hostages in our own land, and about the overreaching power and living presence of the Land over which, finally, no one can tyrannize” (1). In “Returning from the Enemy,” spider acts as a guide and rescuer, using story to provide escape for those forcibly removed from their homes. Spider places more value on human life than on monetary gain. The web she weaves not only leads the people out of

the enemy's reach, but it also leads them away from the enemy's socioeconomic agenda.

"Returning from the Enemy" emphasizes the importance of story by also articulating the relatedness of the spiritual, physical, and linguistic elements of humans. The fourth stanza of the poem articulates the relationship between language and intensely personal and embodied suffering. Angelique Nixon offers a helpful suggestion for reading Harjo poems that include italicized sentences, as section four does. She suggests reading the italicized portion as a separate poem intertwined with the standard style text (4). Adopting this reading strategy for "Returning from the Enemy," the italicized portions of section four become an intensely personal series of confessions and laments interspersed with comments on the relationship between the physical body and suffering. For example, the speaker's "I" statements each precede a description of how a particular body part is affected:

I have handed my power over to my enemies. My shoulders bear each act of forgetfulness. //

I have abandoned my children to the laws of dictators who called themselves priests, preachers, and the purveyors of law. My feet are scarred from the steps taken in the direction of freedom. (75)

In first person, the italicized voice confesses both the speaker's weakness and her victimization. The non-italicized portions of the text are anchored in the physical body. In the opening stanza, the speaker describes "[aking] language into the soft parts of my body" (75). The language then turns "into bones, other hard parts" (75). Language is so integral that it becomes a physical part of the speaker's being, recalling Diane Clancy's assertion that language is a "spiritual spine" ("Walk-in-2-Worlds" 111). In the next four stanzas her heart, neck, shoulders, and feet are all wounded or weighed down by the speaker's reluctant participation in the way of life forced on

her by the “*dictators who call themselves / priests, preachers, and the purveyors of the law*” (75). At the close of section four, the speaker confesses that through all of the tragedy, “I have forgotten my name in the lan- / guage I was born to, forgive me” (75). In keeping with the poem’s focus on the body, this final stanza references the speaker’s birth and underscores the distance created between her and her originating culture by the forces that have led her to forget her Native language. Not only has the speaker “lost [her] country” (75), but she has also lost access to that language which became part of her body before she was even able to “fully digest meaning” (75). In “Returning from the Enemy” Harjo suggests that an assault on language has a measurable effect; it is akin to an assault on the physical body.

“Returning from the Enemy” also demonstrates the powerful healing capacity of songs when people come together in ceremony to remember injustices and move forward from them. The speaker has the ability not only to weave her own stories but also to “make songs out of the debris of destruction” (95). Earlier in the poem, Harjo identifies the indestructible nature of song,

You cannot destroy a soul though you may destroy a planet.

You cannot destroy a song though you can make a people forgetful.

A soul can appear to be destroyed, and a song can disappear for a few generations only to reemerge from the heart of a child who turns and becomes a woman. (79)

Whether song or story is the vehicle she chooses to use, Harjo asserts that the imagination, the conveyor of the stories and songs, generates new life after tragedy, reconciliation in the midst of discord.

Significantly, when Harjo writes that songs can “reemerge from the heart of a child who turns and becomes a woman,” she specifically identifies songs as the purview of women. She suggests that women not only have access to but perhaps are naturally gifted with the ability to

produce healing songs. In sharp contrast, one consistent feature of Harjo's indictment of the enemy is that the enemy is masculine. She herself identifies sexism as a reason why she left the church and continually refers to the "enemy," who she aligns with colonizers, church leaders, and greedy politicians as male. For example, in section five of "Returning from the Enemy" Harjo writes, "the enemy immigrated to the land he claimed for his God. / He named himself the arbitrator of deity in any form" (77). The "he" in this poem once again draws together the national with the personal. The masculine enemy who claims indigenous lands "for his God" and "beat[s] his Indian children" (77) is simultaneously the paternalistic white man, the speaker's own violent and afflicted father, and the speaker's stepfather who she identifies in the tale following section six of the same poem as "a man who hated Indians" (80). Harjo's identification of the enemy as both Christian and masculine reaffirms her association of the church with sexism and more broadly American society's move to make women subject to men. Her response is to employ her own voice, the female voice, as she indicts these enemies and seeks healing. Paula Gunn Allen asserts that exploring what it means to be "in a state of war for 500 years" is the work of "Indian women" writers (Introduction 1). If the speaker's voice in "Returning from the Enemy" is female, which it appears to be because of the close relationship between the speaker and Harjo's autobiographical details, then section five offers a strong assertive female voice⁸⁸ in response to the masculine enemy claiming land, arbitrating, and

⁸⁸ In an early collection, *What Moon Drove Me to This?* (1979) and later reprinted in *How We Became Human*, Harjo makes a strong statement about the quiet unexpected strength of women in a poem titled "I Am a Dangerous Woman." The speaker moves through an airport security machine and comments that the weapon she carries is her own mind:

I am a dangerous woman,
but the weapon is not visible.
Security will never find it.
They can't hear the clicking
of the gun inside my head. (*How We Became Human* 17)

Harjo's work advocates not only for Native American populations but specifically also for women.

inflicting destructive laws. The speaker responds to these aggressive actions with this assertion: “I am asking you to leave the country of my body, my mind, if you have any- / thing other than honorable intentions” (77). Incidentally, when “Returning from the Enemy” was reprinted in *How We Became Human*, this statement ended with a comma rather than a period implying that this voice is silenced before it can complete its statement.⁸⁹ Harjo’s resistance to the silencing of women is consistent throughout her work.

While Harjo’s poetry celebrates American Indian elements of healing like living in harmony with the land, it also affirms that healing must be rooted in love, showcasing shared values between Native American or cultures and Christianity. In the poem “Reconciliation, A Prayer,”⁹⁰ story and song once again play a role in providing community for a group of suffering people – in this poem, love takes center stage. The poem begins with the speaker asserting the communal nature of the spiritual world: “We gather at the shore of all knowledge as peoples who were put / here by a God who wanted relatives” (*How We Became Human* p. 89, section 1, lines 1-2). The phrase “the shore of all knowledge” stands out as positive, signaling the hopeful tone of the poem in contrast to the “slick of knowledge” Harjo references in “Returning from the Enemy.” In “Reconciliation, A Prayer” God becomes mother, father, sister, brother and sits down to dinner with “everyone in this whole world” emphasizing the relatedness of all people (89). The darkness of human history enters the picture in the second section of the poem where people inhabit the earth, which is both a “land of nightmares [and] the land of miracles” (89).

⁸⁹ Other changes occur between the two printings of poems in *A Map to the Next World* and *How We Became Human*. For example, in the first collection, “Morning Song” appears as a 10 line poem (128). In *How We Became Human*, “Morning Song” has 14 lines. The second and third lines of the original poem are repeated three times throughout as though forming a musical refrain, “Thought by thought / Beauty by beauty” (171) as though continually reminding the reader how the “red dawn” goes about “rearranging the earth” (171). I have not tracked all of the changes between the first and second appearances of the poems that are collected in *How We Became Human*.
⁹⁰ “Reconciliation, A Prayer” originally appeared in Harjo’s 1994 collection *The Woman Who Fell from the Sky*. I quote from the later version printed in *How We Became Human*.

“The stories we have of each other” offer sustenance, clothing the people and “keep[ing] us from giving up;” as a sign of perseverance and togetherness the whole community “sing[s] our song” as they “climb into the next century” (89). In the final section of the poem, the people “gather up these strands broken from the web of life” and “carry them to our home made of the four directions and sing” of all they encountered including abundance, kindness, conflict, loss, and finally love (90). Love persists after conflict, reflecting the communal nature of the deity to whom the speaker prays. This persistence of love is made possible because story and song help the people survive.

Harjo posits that story, especially, has the power not just to help people survive, but also to help people love one another across seemingly impossible boundaries. Two of her poems in particular, “Holdup” and “Letter from the End of the Twentieth Century,” demonstrate the process of reconciliation and the role story can play in it. They draw attention to a link between Harjo’s work and the teachings of Jesus, the concept of loving one’s enemy and the centrality of grace to the formation of community.

In “Holdup,”⁹¹ the “spirit of the story” (49) becomes the source of transformation. First, Harjo describes a crime. As the speaker and a close companion walk through “the whirlpool of the city the monster found us . . . it was two young boys who could have been our brothers, // they held us up, so they would kill us, as if we were no longer human” (48). She cites the hunger for power and money as the reason for the attack (48), recalling her indictment of the church and the American government for its power-hungry method of oppressing Native Americans in “there are as many ways to poetry as there are to God.”

The victims in “Holdup,” once again a speaker represented by the communal “we,” desire

⁹¹ “Holdup” was first printed in *A Map to the Next World* and later in *How We Became Human*. I use pagination here from the former collection.

retaliation as does the speaker in “Equinox.” They want to

. . . kill

the monster so it would not destroy the earth and take it with them,

Or erase the dreams of humans in the ordinary world. (48-49)

However, once their money is gone and the perpetrators have left the scene, another impulse takes over when the “spirit of the story” intervenes. It descends from the sky “because things had gone too far” (49). The spirit “breathed in life / from all directions” (49). Echoing Desmond Tutu’s insistence that healing occurs when “both the victim and the perpetrator” are “integrated into the community” (qtd. in *In the Light* 262), instead of reviving the hearts of the victims alone, the spirit of story “included the running boys in the beautiful pattern” (49). The reference to this “beautiful pattern” signals the presence of a larger community in which people and their stories combine to form an artistically woven whole. The spirit’s inclusion of, love of the enemy is catalytic: the poem closes with a brief two-word declarative sentence that stands on the line by itself. The speaker confesses, “We followed” (49). No longer victims, the speaker and her companion become disciples of the “spirit of the story,” learning how to weave patterns of reconciliation, not retaliation. Significantly, healing is initiated in the poem not by humans but by the “spirit of the story.” Storytelling, imagination, takes center stage and initiates a process of reconciliation that relies on the formation of community.

The “story’s” inclusion of the enemy in the “beautiful pattern” in “Holdup” can be read as an example also of the grace Eliza Gibson identifies at work in Harjo’s poetry. The boys and the individuals who are robbed, regardless of whether they are part of the same cultural community and in spite of the fact that they are in opposition to one another, are incorporated into the same community. This radical inclusion resonates with the Christian belief system in

which a confirmed enemy of the church, Saul the persecutor of Christians, could become Paul, a beloved member of the same community. Story creates a community of grace where forgiveness and acceptance result in relationship instead of division.

Employing the circular reading strategies suggested by Angelique Nixon, the tale that follows “Holdup” provides insight into the poem that precedes it in *A Map to the Next World*. The tale, titled “twins meet up with monsters in the glittering city,” shares the story of the poet and her friend Greg, who is also a writer, walking through the city to visit another friend. It records the same robbery as occurs in “Holdup,” but this time the reader learns much more detail about the writers who are robbed and about the robbery itself; in addition, the tale adds layers of ambiguity to the poem making it more difficult to separate criminal from victim.⁹² For example, in the poem the speaker identifies with the twins: “we were the twins, given birth to by a mother who loved to talk of gods” (48). Simultaneously, she identifies the robbers as “two young boys who could have been our brothers” (48), allowing the reader to see the potential for familial connection between those who are robbed and the thieves. In the tale, the title identifies the presence once again of “twins” taking a walk in the city. These “twins” have different fathers suggesting that family extends beyond biology (*Map* 50). The first half of the tale foregrounds both family and its absence, offering back story about each father’s heritage, personality, and departure from the lives of the tale’s protagonists, Greg and the speaker. Greg never knew his father, having been given up for adoption and having “finally tracked down his father [only to] discover . . . [he] had died just a few months before” (50-51). The speaker’s father “was with us

⁹² The word "victim" is troublesome. It implies weakness or powerlessness whereas the individuals who are robbed in this poem do not appear to be weak or powerless at all. In fact, they are both writers who have the power of words at their disposal and neither one of them demonstrates weakness. The emphasis on family connection in the poem also makes it difficult to use the word "victim" because it builds such a gulf between the boys who robbed the writers and the writers themselves while the poem attempts to draw them together. I chose to use the word victim here anyway for lack of a better term to represent the circumstance of two people robbed at gunpoint.

until I was eight,” at that time succumbing to his own familial wounds and “the confusion of being Indian in a society in which his existence was shameful” (51). Both Greg and the speaker “mused we must have had the same stepfather, a man who could love no one, not even our mothers, whom they professed to love, without destroying everything they touched” (51). Connecting the personal to the communal, the speaker comments, “Our fathers and many of the men of our indigenous nations destroyed themselves with a whirling bright power that was meant to bring new visions to the people” (51). Later in the text the tale records the theft which is once again committed by two “boys” (52). The poet writes, “I hear Greg greet the boys with familiar words, as one would speak to young relatives on the road” (52). The boys who could be “brothers” or “young relatives” are not so clearly and distinctly enemies of the writers. The allusion to family is subtle but still present.

The speaker gives story mythical proportions when she references “the twin monster slayer stories I have heard from my Navajo friends” (53). In the Navajo tale, the twins go on their monster slaying mission precisely because they wanted to find their father, the sun, whom they have never met (“Navajo Mythology”). This plays into the emphasis on family, connection, and absence of fathers in “Holdup.” The speaker of the tale speculates, “perhaps the monsters are disguised as these two thieves” (*Map* 53). The poem adds an additional layer of ambiguity when the speaker suggests, “Or maybe in their [the thieves’] eyes we are the monsters, the ones who appear to have money because of the neighborhood they found us in, our light-skin” (53). Both of the descriptors, “twin” and “monster,” can then apply to the monsters/thieves and the victims/writers. The poem blends categories, resisting blame and easy labeling. Together the poem and the tale conflate the identities of the victims with those of the ones committing the crime, making it all the more possible for community, inclusion in the “beautiful pattern,” to take

precedence over punishment or ostracism.

The close of the tale foregrounds familial associations once again, resulting in an emphasis not on retaliation for a crime but on reconciliation through grace-centered community building. As the speaker faces the boy who robs her at gunpoint, she thinks to herself, “Strange to find a child in the face of a monster and I want to ask him, ‘Where is your father?’” (53) The same absence of fathers haunts both the writers who have been robbed and the boys who have done the robbing. The two sets of “twins” share the same need.

The structure of the poem offers its own commentary on these pairings of the twin writers and robbers. It is comprised of 17 two-line stanzas, each one emphasizing the presence of two: two twins who walk in the city, two boys who commit the robbery, and two “monster slayers” who save the day in Navajo mythology. The emphasis on these pairings, both structurally and in content, underscores the importance of community in this poem. The final lines of the tale bring the focus to supportive relationships: the speaker notes, “Only then do I feel the tremble of Greg’s life as we *hold each other up*” (emphasis added; 53). Both the poem and the tale suggest that a holdup can be transformed from an act of violence and theft to one of support and family.

In “Letter from the End of the Twentieth Century”⁹³ story plays an equally important role, leading ultimately to an inclusive reconciliation, another demonstration of love resulting in a community of grace. The speaker narrates a story told to her by a taxi driver. He describes the tragic death of his friend, an Igbo man from Nigeria who was senselessly murdered at a gas station. The speaker imagines the depth of loss the man’s family will experience when his spirit arrives at his mother’s door in Nigeria, his “bag of // dreams in his hands dripping with blood”

⁹³ "Letter from the End of the Twentieth Century" was originally published in *The Woman Who Fell from the Sky* in 1994 but quoted here from *How We Became Human*.

(111). Like the victims in “Holdup,” the murdered man desires revenge. His spirit searches for the killer, seeking vengeance and contemplating how easy it would be to “hang him or knife / him and it would be called suicide” (111). But “his mother’s grief” and “the prayers of the young man’s mother” remind him that he does not have to choose revenge (112). In a transformative reversal, he locates the killer in prison and “gives the young man his favorite name and calls him his brother” (112) once again demonstrating Tutu and Echo-Hawk’s principle of integrating the perpetrator into a community and “rebuilding the relationship between the forgiver and the forgiven” (267). This also recalls the speaker’s insinuation in “Holdup” that the boys who robbed her and her friend “could have been our brothers” (48). Similarly, Eliza Gibson notes that Harjo makes unexpected “connections . . . possible” across boundaries “only through a quality of perception that emerges in moments of grace” (113) as when the ghost of the slain Igbo cab driver calls the imprisoned murderer his “brother.” The murdered man’s decision to show love and forgiveness to his enemy rather than taking vengeance leads to the murderer’s transformation: “the young killer is then no longer shamed but filled with // remorse and cries all the cries he has stored for a thousand years” (112). The man makes the decision postmortem. He inhabits an otherworldly space akin to the dream world where negotiations that are so difficult in waking life become miraculously possible.

The killer is transformed by the radical love of the murdered man. Overwhelmed by the victim’s forgiveness, the killer is released to grieve and recuperate. He “learns to love himself as he never could, because his enemy, who / has every reason to destroy him, loves him” (112). The poem builds up empathy for the murderer who himself is “a young Jamaican immigrant” (111). This inclusion of the Jamaican immigrant in an Igbo family recalls Gibson’s assertion that Harjo uses grace in order to construct selfhoods that do not rely on “authenticity;” in other words, her

poems create characters who can bond over loss in spite of hailing from what could be described as distinct “cultural nationalisms” (107-108). The resulting communities of grace manifest the “healing” step of Echo-Hawk’s reconciliation because they allow the victim and the aggressor to be part of the same community. Gibson identifies grace as making it possible to “imagin[e] . . . living with the grief of history, and not only surviving, but also living with beauty and sometimes joy” (111). Harjo’s poetry suggests that loving across enemy lines and seeing the commonalities between victim and aggressor create a particular kind of beauty, unexpected and seemingly impossible to achieve.

Not only does the victim’s decision to love his enemy recuperate the wrong-doer, but the story of his decision is itself active, ensuring that his choice has far-reaching consequences. The story both “sustains” and “follows” the speaker wherever she goes (112). Harjo writes,

That’s the story that follows me everywhere and won’t let me sleep:
from Tallahassee Grounds to Chicago, to my home near the Rio
Grande. (112)

Craig Womack notes that the story even follows the speaker both into tribal territory and non-Native cities (255). Recalling the connections between the personal and the national/communal in “Returning from the Enemy,” the message of the poem reaches beyond reconciliation on an individual level to emphasize the need for reconciliation between cultural groups. In solidarity with other indigenous peoples, the speaker identifies with the Igbo man’s grief and desire for revenge, witnesses an offer of brotherhood and forgiveness for the Jamaican immigrant, and follows the speaker across cultural boundaries, reminding her of the man’s decision to love instead of retaliating.

Recalling Harjo’s frequent identification of the enemy as masculine, the antagonists in

“Holdup” and “Letter from the End of the Twentieth Century” are also identified as male: the two boys who commit the robbery and the young immigrant who kills the taxi driver’s friend. These individuals, however, are distinct from the “enemy” identified in “Returning from the Enemy.” The empathy Harjo’s poems offer to these individuals suggests that “enemy” is perhaps too harsh a label to assign to them. Instead, they are wayward, lost, family even, in need of forgiveness and community.

In each of these two poems, the story or the spirit of story averts violence, and the practice of loving one’s enemy transforms the individuals who would otherwise be negatively affected by the crime. Womack notes that in Harjo’s poetry love is “not simply an emotion but an action, a deed done for justice” (258). In a poem titled “This Morning I Pray for My Enemies,”⁹⁴ Harjo asserts again that relationship like the brotherhood extended from the murderer to the criminal in “Letter from the End” has transformative potential. As though in the midst of a conversation between mind and heart, the poem begins as the speaker’s heart questions, “And whom do I call my enemy?” (75) As the mind rationalizes how to determine who qualifies as an enemy, the heart begins the work of transformation. The end of the poem articulates the relationship between heart and mind as one that brings the speaker into community with her enemies: “The door to the mind should only open from the heart. / An enemy who gets in, risks the danger of becoming a friend” (75). Community leads to this radical possibility of extending friendship to and even loving the enemy. In the case of “Holdup” and “Letter from the End,” loving the enemy means that the victim initiates healing where the perpetrator has not. Recalling the unconditional love of Christ in the New Testament, this initiation results in expansive inclusion in a community governed by grace.

⁹⁴ “This Morning I Pray for My Enemies” appears in *Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings*.

Harjo's poetry acts as an entry point, a spark that has the potential to ignite dialogues of reconciliation between Christians and reconciliatory negotiation between Christians and the indigenous peoples still burdened by the religion's role in oppression. In Erdrich's *The Last Report*, readers witness the institutional Catholic system both causing harm and undergoing revision on the reservation. Harjo's negotiation leaves behind the institutional church and involves instead engagement with principles and teachings present in both Christianity and Native American culture. Harjo employs a model of reconciliation that has potential to resonate with both American Indians and Christians. The ability to tell stories and produce songs in the face of tragedy measures the capacity of people to regenerate, to experience new life not by shutting out the harm of the past but by working through the pain and allowing it to produce songs of survival, beauty, and resilience. Echo-Hawk notes at the close of *In the Light of Justice* that "reconciliation between the conqueror and conquered is one of the most difficult to achieve," but "human compassion" can triumph and lead to a community bound together across seemingly insurmountable borders (279). Harjo imagines the possibility of this in her poetry. In "Returning from the Enemy," she writes, "We influence the shape of the path with our thinking, our speaking and our songs" (*Map* 72). Through her poetry, Harjo influences the "shape of the path" by advocating for reconciliation based on truth-telling, love, and communities of grace. Imaginative writing has the potential to plant seeds that can grow up into a radical peace.

Even radical peace and reconciliation can be marked by persistent struggle and suffering. Gibson notes that the recuperation about which Harjo writes is not complete; grace in Harjo's poetry does not represent "a final salvation" (112). In her commentary on Harjo's poem "Grace" in which "the next season was worse" after "the spring thaw" (qtd. in Gibson 112), Gibson explains, "once grace is found, it can be lost again" (112). Similarly, reconciliation based on love

and community does not erase pain. When a community experiences the depth of pain that comes with colonization, assimilation, poverty, and prejudice, healing and reconciliation do not mean an absence of pain. But the inclusion of harmer and harmed in the “beautiful pattern” suggests that the pain, when it returns, is experienced in a new context, one in which the community has been altered, increased. At the end of “When the World,” new birth happens in the midst of rubble, not after the rubble has been removed. In “Letter from the End,” reconciliation happens after the victim’s death; the pain of mourning is still a reality for the cab driver’s loved ones. While these radical reconciliations take place in imaginative writing, the persistent presence of pain in Harjo’s poetry locates her narratives firmly in the waking world.

Pain is not the only thing that anchors Harjo’s imaginative writing in the waking world; in the Native American context, story and song both operate as powerful agents of change. A Western concept of story as belonging to the imagination and not to the physical world suggests that the healing and community articulated by Harjo and other Native American authors might not be absolute but instead just possible. Language and story from an American Indian perspective, though, are invested with activity, reality, power. Not only are they intimately connected to and stewarded by the land, but words in and of themselves are active just as story is in so many of Harjo’s poems. In “Charlie and the Baby,”⁹⁵ Harjo writes about the persistence of words: “Every word that’s ever said tries to find a way to live” (43). The words in Harjo’s stories literally come to life, orchestrating action that leads to healing: the rescue of a persecuted people from the enemy, the welcoming of an aggressor into a victim’s family, the inclusion of thieves into a “beautiful pattern.”

Harjo acts as a change maker through her use of words, perhaps most fully embodying

⁹⁵ “Charlie and the Baby” was published in *Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings*.

this role in her newest collection *Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings* where the poet takes up the role of the ukulele player in “When the World As We Knew It Ended.” She creates beauty in the midst of the rubble, “*singing a song that can only be born after losing a country*” (italics original; Untitled Prose Poem 7). Harjo is the type of artist Linda Hogan writes about, whose ears are attuned the voice of the earth. In “THE WANDERER,” the speaker sits and listens to a storyteller who she realizes is actually “the very Earth herself, / talking” (29). Like the speaker, Harjo listens to the land and records the pain and loss while privileging hope and healing through the production of story and song.

In “Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings,” the title poem of this newest collection, Harjo outlines her own reconciliation paradigm. The first half of the poem functions as a commentary on the way white settlers created conflict with Native Americans rather than resolving it. The second half of the poem shifts the tone of the entire collection, moving from indictment and recording tragic losses to healing, growth, and connectedness to the earth. The first section of six, “SET CONFLICT RESOLUTION GROUND RULES” anchors the process in respect for the land, “a being who remembers everything” and in “this holy realm of words” (77). In contrast to the words that can help the speaker and her community “understand who we are” and bring about “justice” (77), section two, “USE EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION SKILLS THAT DISPLAY AND ENHANCE MUTUAL TRUST AND RESPECT,” records the betrayal between white settlers and Native Americans in the form of promises made verbally and on paper but broken in reality. Here Harjo names the Bible along with “this blade, this pen, this oil derrick, this gun” as the white people’s “tools of coercion” and “false promises” (79). In section three, “GIVE CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK,” Harjo draws a comparison between American Indian ways and the ways of the white world. She describes “Mvskoke ceremonial circles . . . [where]

we keep the heartbeat of the earth in our stomp dance feet” (81). She immediately contrasts the sacred circle of Muscogee ceremonies with the economically driven practices of the colonizers:

You might
try wearing colonization like a heavy gold chain around a
pimp’s neck. (81)

The ceremonial circle is full of activity and represents harmony with the earth. The “heavy gold chain” of colonization underscores both the value placed on monetary gain and the prostitution of the earth and Native Americans by white colonial government.

The fourth, fifth, and sixth sections of the poem establish a positive path toward resolution. In section four, “REDUCE DEFENSIVENESS AND BREAK THE DEFENSIVENESS CHAIN,” Harjo writes about the power of the arts to transcend the sociopolitical roadblocks that keep Native and non-Native people from becoming allies. She writes,

You cannot legislate music to lockstep nor can you legislate
the spirit of the music to stop at political boundaries –
– Or poetry, or art, or anything that is of value . . .
This is about getting to know each other. (82)

In section five, “ELIMINATE NEGATIVE ATTITUDES DURING CONFLICT,” Harjo enigmatically presents an image of a panther about to attack its prey. The panther is so enchanted with the natural world around it that it

hears everything in the dark: the unspoken
tears of a few hundred human years, storms that will break
what has broken his world, a bluebird swaying on a branch a

few miles away. (83)

As the panther crouches, his prey sings a song, knowing that her end is near: “*I will always love you, sunrise. / I belong to the black cat with fire green eyes*” (italics original; 83). Harjo does not depict a bloody battle between predator and prey; she “eliminate[s] negative attitudes” in the midst of this particular conflict focusing instead on the synergy between the animals and the natural world. In the sixth and final section, “AND, USE WHAT YOU LEARN TO RESOLVE YOUR OWN CONFLICTS AND TO MEDIATE OTHERS’ CONFLICTS,” Harjo uses the first person plural “we” to establish a positive harmonious resolution. She writes,

We give thanks for the story, for all parts of the story
because it was by the light of those challenges we knew
ourselves –

We asked for forgiveness.

We laid down our burdens next to each other. (84)

These final lines of the poem represent a communal act of healing in which all participants demonstrate thankfulness, forgiveness, and mutual letting go of burdens. The poem proactively outlines a reconciliation process, and by the close of the final section the words produce action as a community of people practice resolution together.

Harjo’s writing represents a full, even if reluctant, integration of Christian and Native American perspectives. It does not necessarily represent acceptance of the former, but in Harjo’s poetry beliefs from both worldviews coexist and participate with one another in bringing about a more harmonious love-filled world. This is evident throughout her work but especially in *Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings*. The opening poem, “For Calling the Spirit Back” brings attention to the communal nature of healing while the title poem establishes both the need and

desire for resolution rooted ultimately in respect for the land and healing for broken human relationships. “This Morning I Pray for My Enemies” establishes the possibility that enemies can become friends and perhaps even loved ones. And in the collection’s fourth and final section, “You Can Change the Story” demonstrates the powerful potential of story to prevent violence and create community in its stead, while “Equinox” records story’s role in exchanging retaliation for regeneration and welcoming new life in place of loss. While Harjo’s direct references to Christianity occur in the context of indicting its involvement in colonization, her allusions to the emphasis on grace and love in the teachings of Jesus manifest the connectedness between Harjo and her own past spiritual experiences while paving the way for dialogues of reconciliation between Native American and Christian communities.

Read together, works by Linda Hogan, Louise Erdrich, Diane Glancy, and Joy Harjo demonstrate the complexity and richness of contemporary multiethnic Native American literature. Each of the four authors writes multilayered texts that draw attention to the tensions and frustrations of cross-cultural identity formation while exposing with vulnerability the authors’ distinct, assertive, and hopeful voices born out of much pain. This act of exposure comes with both great risk and great potential. In *The Man Made of Words* N. Scott Momaday writes about the Kiowa tale “The Arrowmaker” in which a man exposes himself to danger and proves his enemy is real through the use of spoken words. Momaday writes, “language involves the elements of risk and responsibility” (“The Arrowmaker” 11) and in speaking or writing words storytellers enter into “a world of definite reality and of infinite possibility” (12). Hogan, Erdrich, Glancy, and Harjo foreground the reality of conquest and assimilation while exploring the infinite possibility of relationships repaired and formed anew within Native America and even across cultural boundaries. Together, these writers perform an act of reconciliation that is

neither total nor insignificant. Individually acting out aspects of Echo-Hawk's paradigm for reconciliation, literature produced by Hogan, Erdrich, Glancy, and Harjo can be read in tandem as simultaneous expressions of anger, consternation, and indignation over the ravages of colonization and Christianity's participation in it. The same texts offer creative expressions of possibility and hope for a future marked by distinctive Native American cultural contributions and a revised and repentant Christianity stripped of its institutional sins and characterized instead by the peace and love that persists at the heart of its teachings.

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Duquesne University Institutional Review Board

Protocol Summary Form

The Protocol Summary is limited to three (3) to six (6) single spaced pages using no less than 11 Font. The Protocol Summary and all appendices must be submitted to Mentor in one WORD file with the exception of recruitment flyers and consent forms that must be uploaded to Mentor in separate files and named accordingly. The page limitation does not include appendices/attachments. Instruments for data collection may be submitted in WORD or PDF but should if possible be included as an appendix in the Protocol Summary file.

The following sections with headings **MUST** be addressed for review by Duquesne University Institutional Review Board. Protocols will be returned to the investigator if the specific headings are not used.

Use this form to submit your protocol to Mentor. Please complete each section below.

1. Statement of the research question

Explore the relationships between gender, Native American cultures, and the practice of Christianity.

2. Purpose and significance of the study

This study provides contextual perspectives for my dissertation which is titled, “Conflict and Reconciliation: Representations of Christianity in Contemporary Native American Literature by Women.” Excerpts from each interview will serve as prefaces to each chapter of the dissertation so that the words of Native American women frame my analysis of the literature. Depending on the content of the interviews, I might refer to them as illustrations of concepts at work in the literature (fiction and poetry) that are the primary subject of each chapter. The interviews are significant to the study because they supply non-academic voices which comment on the active practice of Christianity among Native Americans. Part of my dissertation looks at the discrepancy between perceptions in academia about the tension between Christianity and Native American cultures and the widely accepted practice of Christianity by a significant number of Native Americans. The interviews also supply individual focused stories that illustrate varied relationships between gender and faith practices.

3. Research design and procedures

After explaining in detail the purpose of the interviews and of the larger dissertation study, the researcher will ask the interviewee if she has any questions about the process. After receiving her written consent, the researcher will interview each participant individually by asking a series of four open ended questions over the course of approximately 20 to 60 minutes in a public location, or if the interviewee prefers in their home. The interviews will be audio recorded.

4. Instruments

Each interview will consist of four guiding questions:

What is your own personal experience with Christianity?

What conflict, if any, do you see between Christian practice and your tribal culture?

What role has gender played in your faith experience?

What do you wish more people knew about your culture and your faith?

5. Sample selection and size

The sample size is small, less than 40 individuals. Each participant will meet the following criteria: female, at least 18 years of age, affiliated with a Native American tribal community, either practices or has had exposure to Christianity.

6. Recruitment of subjects

Participants will be recruited via email and through a second party. Colleagues at universities facilitate the recruitment of students and faculty who are willing to be interviewed. Individuals not affiliated with a university are recruited via personal invitation from the primary researcher by email or face-to-face. The researcher will offer each participant no compensation for taking part in the study.

7. Informed consent procedures

The consent form indicates that participants will be identified only by tribal affiliation and each interview will be assigned a pseudonym so that the participant's real name is not disclosed. The form makes clear the researcher's intent to use the interviews in the dissertation and future publications and presentations. The form gives participants the option to consent to use of their interview in the dissertation only or to use of the interview in the dissertation and future presentations and publications.

By participating in the study, each interviewee assumes only minimal risk in addition to the risks of everyday life. The researcher will only disclose the individual's tribal affiliation but by sharing personal information in the interview an individual could risk sharing personal beliefs and experiences that could be identifiable to people familiar with their life. This could open them to criticism if a reader opposes their beliefs. However, the use of pseudonyms makes this type of exposure highly unlikely.

The benefit of participating in the study is the raised awareness in scholarly circles of female Native American perspectives on Christianity. Scholar James Treat notes in *Native and Christian* that Native American women who identify as Christian have a particularly difficult time making their voices heard in the contemporary publishing climate. Participants would help contribute to a broader conversation about Christianity in native communities.

8. Collection of data and method of data analysis

The researcher will make an audio recording of each interview using the “QuickVoice” app on an iPad. A third party will transcribe the interviews which will then be analyzed by the primary researcher for material relevant first to the dissertation and later for future publications and presentations for those interviewees that have consented to this additional use. All study materials will be stored on a password-protected computer and any hard copies will be stored in a file at the researcher’s locked residence. All material containing identifiers will be destroyed after five years have passed and all identifiers will be removed from interview transcripts. This allows the researcher time to invite each participant to proof and approve the transcript of her interview so she can have confidence that if it is published in full it does indeed represent her thoughts accurately.

9. Emphasize issues relating to interactions with subjects and subjects' rights

The researcher seeks interviewees from among the Native American population which has in the past been subjected to unethical research methods. The present study is self-reflective in that the researcher is continually seeking accountability from her dissertation committee which is made up of both native and non-native scholars. She is practicing cultural sensitivity by employing the practice identified by scholar Linda Alcoff as “speaking with” rather than “speaking for” a population that is underrepresented in contemporary scholarship. In other words, the researcher intends for the practice of interviewing to generate mutually respectful dialogue that engages her in conversation with the population about which she is writing rather than producing a dissertation which purports to speak only for or about that population without any firsthand interaction.



DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

600 FORBES AVENUE ♦ PITTSBURGH, PA 15282

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

- TITLE:** Female Native American Perspectives on Christianity
- INVESTIGATOR:** Rachel Luckenbill, English PhD candidate
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
- ADVISOR:** Dr. Laurel Willingham-McLain
Director of Faculty Development and Teaching Excellence
Center for Teaching Excellence
412-396-5177
- SOURCE OF SUPPORT:** This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree in English at Duquesne University, and this study is partially funded by a grant from the Conference on Christianity and Literature.
- PURPOSE:** You are being asked to participate in a research project that seeks to explore the varied relationships between gender, Native American cultures, and the practice of Christianity through interviews with Native American women. Your participation will last for the duration of the interview and you will be given the opportunity to proof the transcript of your interview should it at any point be published in full. The interviews will be audio taped and transcribed. The interviews will be quoted in the primary investigator's dissertation (which explores relationships between gender, Native American cultures, and Christianity in contemporary Native American literature by women), and if the participant consents could be quoted in part or in full

in future presentations and publications. These are the only requests that will be made of you.

RISKS AND BENEFITS:

By participating in the study, each interviewee assumes only minimal risk in addition to the risks of everyday life. The researcher will only disclose the individual's tribal affiliation, not any other personal identifiers, but by sharing personal information in the course of the interview an individual could risk personal beliefs and experiences being identified by people familiar with their life. This could open them to criticism if a reader opposes their beliefs. However, the use of pseudonyms by the researcher makes this type of exposure highly unlikely. The benefit of participating in the study is the raised awareness in scholarly circles of female Native American perspectives on Christianity. Scholar James Treat notes in *Native and Christian* that Native American women who identify as Christian have a particularly difficult time making their voices heard in the contemporary publishing climate. Participants would help contribute to a broader conversation about Christianity in native communities.

COMPENSATION:

I will offer no compensation for your participation in the project. Participation in the project will require no monetary cost to you.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

Each participant will be identified by tribal affiliation only. Pseudonyms will be assigned to each interview. All hard copies of materials and consent forms will be stored in a file in the researcher's locked residence and all digital files related to study will be stored on a password-protected computer. The materials that contain identifiers will be destroyed after five years and all identifiers will be removed from the transcripts of the interviews. This allows the researcher time to pursue future publications for which written consent is still vital and to invite participants to proof the transcripts in the case that they might appear in full in future publications.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You are free to withdraw from the study mid-interview if you choose.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS:

A full transcript of your interview and/or a copy of the audio recording will be supplied to you at no cost, upon request.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT:

I have read the above statements and understand what is being requested of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that should I have any further questions about my participation in this study, I may call Rachel Luckenbill at [REDACTED], Dr. Linda Kinnahan at 412-396-6440 or Dr. Linda Goodfellow, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board 412-396-6326.

Please initial next to the statement below that best describes your willingness to participate:

_____ I give the researcher permission to use interview content for the researcher’s dissertation only.

_____ I give the researcher permission to use interview content for the researcher’s dissertation and for future presentations and publications produced by the researcher.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date