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Linda Sue Shaffer

*University of Arkansas, Fayetteville*

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Cultural Reimagining and Literary Voice:  
Southeastern Tribal Women Negotiate Cultural, Social, and Political Identity through Literature

A dissertation in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in English

by

Linda Shaffer  
Concord College  
Bachelor of Science in Education, 1994  
Northeastern State University  
Master of Arts in English, 2008

May 2017  
University of Arkansas

This dissertation is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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Dr. Lisa Hinrichsen  
Dissertation Director

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Dr. Sean Teuton  
Committee Member

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Dr. Susan Marren  
Committee Member

## **Abstract**

This dissertation examines literature written by women who identify with Native tribes that originally inhabited, and in some cases continue to inhabit, the southeastern area of what is now known as the United States. The analysis presented in each chapter applies tribally specific methods used for creating knowledge within the particular discourse community being represented through literature. The project also employs the perspectives of Native literary scholars to consider the ways in which the roles and lives of Native women have been influenced by Euro-American values and to analyze the ways in which these female authors engage literature as a source for social and political voice, as well as a resource from which to empower cultural reimagining.

After an introduction which explains and validates the existence and function of indigenous discourse communities, the remaining chapters examine Chickasaw author Linda Hogan's *Power*, Cherokee author Diane Glancy's *Pushing the Bear*, Cherokee author Betty Louise Bell's *Faces in the Moon*, and Choctaw author LeAnne Howe's *Shell Shaker*. I argue that these fictional texts identify social and political issues faced by modern Native women from southeastern tribes and I note how each author suggests the potential for a cultural reimagining through which Native problems can be identified and addressed by Native peoples using Native-centric approaches.

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Special thanks to Dr. Lisa Hinrichsen who went above and beyond to ensure the success of this project. Thank you for your time and patience. Also a special thanks to Dr. Sean Teuton for his input on and knowledge of Native studies.

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated first to my husband who always believes in me, even when I fail to believe in myself, and to my children — Nick, Zach, David, Chris, and Makayla — who always have been and always will be the reason for everything I do.

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## Introduction

### Telling Their Own Stories: The Voices of Native Women from the American South

Entering into any discourse which explores communities of marginalized peoples who existed before and during the creation of the biracial southern myth and who continue to exist in the American South is undeniably problematic, as objections to such a study arise not only from poststructuralist deconstruction of identity but also from concerns within marginalized communities that such studies by those outside of the discourse communities amount to cultural appropriation. Later in this introduction, I will examine the poststructuralists' objections to culturally constructed identity perspectives; however, first, it is critical to explore what David Murray in his essay "Representation and Cultural Sovereignty" describes as "the crucial question of boundaries and the proper limits of cultural property and sovereignty" (82). Providing strategies for this negotiation of intellectual and cultural property and sovereignty, in his text *Tribal Secrets*, Native scholar Robert Allen Warrior maintains that indigenous peoples should "remove [themselves] from [a] "dichotomy" which requires either "abandoning themselves to the intellectual strategies of whites" or "declaring that [they] need nothing outside of [themselves] and [their] cultures in order to understand the world and [their] place in it" (123-124). Rejecting such a dichotomy, Warrior contends that "the struggle for sovereignty" for indigenous peoples "is not a struggle to be free from the influence of anything outside [themselves], but a process of asserting the power [they] possess as communities and individuals to make decisions that affect [their] lives" (123-124). Adhering to the parameters of Warrior's contention, the goal of this project is to present through literature the perspectives of women from particular marginalized southeastern discourse communities —Chickasaw, Cherokee and Choctaw women — avoiding appropriation of cultural voice yet broadening the understanding of



southern voice so as to make it inclusive to the social, cultural, and political concerns of these indigenous peoples. This inclusion does not necessarily demand an expansion of the southern literary canon as will be discussed later in this introduction; however, because colonial southerners and colonial peoples in general often act upon indigenous cultures in social and political ways — whether inadvertently or intentionally — it is imperative that they acknowledge and understand the social, cultural, and political perspectives of these indigenous peoples in order to avoid impeding indigenous social and political activism and cultural reimagining. Admittedly, even with the precautions which will be set forth in this introduction for such a study, this study may be perceived by some Native scholars as invasive to Native cultural sovereignty; however, again, I assert that in order to avoid colonial assumptions which lead to the appropriation of both indigenous resources and cultural identity, some basis for communication and understanding must be established.

Such a basis for understanding can be established through literary studies of indigenous texts, viewed from the perspective of the Native discourse community being represented. Affirming this Native-centric methodology, in her essay “The Indians America Loves to Love and Read: American Indian Identity and Cultural Appropriation,” Kathryn Shanley points out that “whether seen as ‘lack’ or as voices in need of recognition, a colonized people’s history and language must be heard in their own voices and terms” (27). Further, she encourages “academics engaged in literary criticism and cultural studies” to “offer to be an audience” to Native voice” and then to amplify those voices barely heard, or not heard at all without a committed audience” (27). Participating in Shanley’s request to hear and amplify these voices to other audiences is precisely what this project attempts to accomplish. Further, it endeavors to explore what Native scholar Jace Weaver refers to as the “essential component of . . .

communitism, a word of his own coinage from the words ‘community’ and ‘activism’” (15). Weaver’s term “[signifies] a proactive commitment to Native Community,” a commitment which perceives “Native American Literature as distinct from other national literatures,” which supports “distinct identity,” and which supports the concerns of Native nations as “separate” national and intellectual “sovereignities” (15). The Chickasaw, Cherokee, and Choctaw novels examined in this study will be considered from the perspective of this distinct identity and sovereignty.

As David Murray points out in an essay which appears in *Native American Representations: First Encounters, Distorted Images, and Literary Appropriations*, beyond discussions of discourse which proceeds from scholars outside of Native communities, even among Native scholars “one of the key issues has always been . . . who constitutes the representative body that has the authority to control representation” (81). Murray presents contradictory arguments by Elizabeth Cook-Lynn and Alex A. Jacobs regarding the control of representation, with Cook-Lynn arguing for indigenous art that is “socially engaged” (81) and Jacobs arguing against such representations as a “[cannibalizing]” of “culture” or as “[selling] what is not even ours to give away” (94). Still, Murray concludes that the “lines” are not as “clear” as Jacobs presents them to be and asserts that “Cook-Lynn may be right to say that in the present climate ‘the role of Indians, themselves, in the storytelling of Indian America is as much a matter of ‘jurisdiction’ as is anything else in Indian Country” (95). Based on Murray’s study, although Cook-Lynn and Jacobs disagree about the value of individual Native art for social, cultural, and political voice, one thing appears to be agreed upon by both: Native representations must proceed from within respective Native discourse communities. This project proceeds from the conclusions of Cook-Lynn that individual Native artist — in this case authors — can and

should represent the social, cultural, and political concerns of their respective discourse communities as a tool in promoting continued cultural and political sovereignty and for encouraging the reimagining of Native cultures, the re-establishment of the essence of Native values and practices in modern society.

Yet, primarily disregarding these contentions which advocate for Native voice by Native scholars and theorists, whether through popularized media creations used to rewrite historical realities of Native experience, through southern literary representations in which Native experience is rewritten to mirror an equally created and romanticized southern lost cause, or through postcolonial denials of continued sovereign intellectual and cultural practices, the ability of Native women from traditionally southeastern tribes to represent themselves using their own voices has been historically suppressed by appropriations of Native voice. Today, Native women forcibly removed from the U.S. South, along with those who stayed by hiding themselves physically or ethnically, continue to struggle to reclaim their removed and appropriated cultural voices and stories, most recently against traditional canonical theorists and scholars who would deny the possible existence of Native perspectives based on postmodern understandings of deconstructed identity.

In general, postmodernist thought is constructed to be a method through which one can “open up new possibilities for the construction of self and the assertion of agency,” allowing for the “reformulating” of “imposed” and “outmoded notions of identity” (hooks 2482). However, as African American theorist bell hooks points out, “considering that it is as subject one comes to voice, then the postmodernist focus on the critique of identity,” ironically, “threatens to close down the possibility that this discourse and practice will allow those who have suffered the crippling effects of colonization and domination to gain or regain a hearing” (2482). In this

above assertion, hooks establishes the premise that theoretical equality of voice has been reached by deconstructing identity; yet, she concludes that this theory does not negate the physical realities that continue to face those who have struggled and who continue to struggle against marginalization and subjugation. hooks contends that “yearning is the word that best describes a common psychological state shared by many” marginalized people, explaining that “specifically, in relation to the post-modernist deconstruction of ‘master narratives’ the yearning that wells in the hearts and minds of those whom such narratives have silenced is the longing for critical voice” (2481). Supporting her contended need for the power of a critical voice that has been ironically silenced for marginalized peoples through postmodernist deconstruction’s narrative of perpetually unstable identity, hooks quotes Robert Storr’s argument in which he asserts that while

much postmodernist critical inquiry has centered precisely on the issues of ‘difference’ and ‘Otherness’” [and while] “on a purely theoretical plane the exploration of these concepts has produced some important results, in the absence of any sustained research into what artists of color and others outside the mainstream might be up to, such discussions become rootless instead of radical. Endless second guessing about the latent imperialism of intruding upon other cultures only [compounds] matters, preventing or excusing these theorists from investigating what black, Hispanic, Asian and Native American artists [are] actually doing. (2480)

As Storr points out, theory alone is insufficient, particularly when those theoretical considerations facilitate a barrier against being heard, one faced by multiple marginalized groups, including indigenous peoples. Through her inclusion of Storr’s statement, hooks also makes clear that although she is primarily concerned with black representations in literature, she recognizes the parallel between the experiences of black authors as they attempt to gain voice and others such as the Native American women authors who will be discussed in this project.

Before presenting an examination of modern literature written by women from Native southeastern tribes, however, it is first necessary to fully comprehend the ways in which such a study can be complicated by privileging postmodernist theoretical practices, both in establishing identity and in analyzing texts. One example of the complexities of the interpretive and theoretical practices surrounding these Native texts can be seen in a consideration of the groundbreaking works of Melanie Benson Taylor. In Benson's 2008 *Disturbing Calculations: The Economics of Identity in Postcolonial Southern Literature*, she presents a critical consideration of southern cultural dynamics, examining issues involving the creation of both race and class identities from the perspective of power structures and capitalistic influences. Recognizing the erroneous creation and portrayal of a black and white southern dynamic, in concluding *Disturbing Calculations*, Benson suggests a shift in the national narrative, a shift in which the marginalized — a category which certainly would include Native Americans from southeastern tribes — would “[deny] and [erase] the coercive stories and justifications on which homogenous unity rests,” using this “subversive potential to ‘disturb the calculations of power and knowledge’” (205). Benson further proposes “literature” as a “weapon” whose “power is primary” to be employed in this subversive effort, asserting that “in this case its power is primary” and suggesting that “perhaps [through literature] we can transform the narratives that make [power structures and capitalistic influences] so vital to our perceptions of character, place, and fundamental human value” (205). Inclusive to this argument, she confirms the transformative power of Native literature to question established power structures and assumed colonial understandings of Native “character, place, and fundamental human value” in the southeast (205). Yet, in a seeming contradiction to this premise, in her highly critically acclaimed 2011 book *Reconstructing the Native South: American Indian Literature and the Lost*

*Cause* — a text through which she offers a history of Native Americans in the South and examines the appropriation of Native voices, recognizing that “Native southern experience has been both overlooked and transformed in the shadows of the region’s Lost Cause” (207) — Benson dismisses what she describes as “polarized narratives” that “perpetuate racial essentialisms and dichotomies” that are “aimed at sustaining sovereignty,” a stance which ironically denies her proposed power to independently create character, place, and fundamental human value through literature as proposed in her 2008 book (23). Benson’s apparent conflict of perspectives regarding the potential for transformative power and creating knowledge through Native literature occurs as she employs a strictly theoretical postmodernist individualist understanding of identity and equal voice in *Reconstructing the Native South*, a perspective which, as discussed earlier, generally undermines efforts for social and political justice presented through literature written by traditionally marginalized people. Moreover, Benson seems to suggest in her 2011 text that complete assimilation has taken place for all “previously” tribal southeastern indigenous peoples; yet, while many Native people have indeed become fully assimilated and no longer identify themselves with tribal issues or tribal cultural values, many have also maintained tribal affiliations and practices which inform their desire for voice, declaring themselves activists in a fight against continuing colonial practices.

In an essay for the book *Native American Representations: First Encounter, Distorted Images, and Literary Appropriations*, Native scholar Louis Owens asserts that “the most extraordinary denigration of Native American voices is found” in the words of the “celebrated father of postcolonial theory Edward Said” who encompasses all groups as postcolonial and, therefore, “dismisses Native American writing in a single phrase as “that sad panorama produced by genocide and cultural amnesia which is beginning to be known as native American

literature” (13). Yet, as Owens and others — including Cherokee author Diane Glancy who will be discussed in chapter 2 of this project — point out, indigenous peoples had their own oral literatures long before Europeans arrived, oralities that are evident in Native writings from today. Moreover, Said’s depiction of indigenous groups as generally postcolonial is also debatable. In his 2016 essay “‘A Structure, Not an Event’: Settler Colonialism and Enduring Indigeneity,” J. Kehaulani Kauanui asserts that indigeneity itself is enduring,” explaining that “the operative logic of settler colonialism may be to “eliminate the Native,” as the late scholar Patrick Wolfe brilliantly theorized, but that indigenous peoples exist, resist, and persist” and that settler colonialism is a structure that endures indigeneity, [even] as it holds out against it” (1). Kauanui adds that “the notion that colonialism is something that ends with the dissolving of the British colonies when the original thirteen [colonies] became the early [United States] has its counterproductive narrative in the myth that indigenous peoples ended when colonialism ended” (3). Through these statements, Kauanui contends that, far from being a historical event, colonial efforts to erase indigenous identification, and thereby social and political voice, are still ongoing. Kauanui sites the current “numerous attempts to remove indigenous peoples from their lands for corporate resource extraction ranging from oil to minerals and water” which have caused “environmental devastation with genocidal implications” (4). Further, he defends indigeneity in the face of those who argue that “Indians” are “mixed” and therefore no longer ‘truly Indian’” and who argue that “adaptation to modern life on the part of Indian peoples” is “evidence of their demise,” countering that Indians “did not — and have not — accepted this effacement” (3). While certainly there are those Native Americans who have completely culturally assimilated through colonization, as Kauanui points out, many who are presumed to be assimilated to the

point of dismissal of indigeneity indeed identify as Native American when considering cultural, social, and political concerns.

Through this project I will examine texts written by indigenous Chickasaw, Cherokee, and Choctaw women by explaining and employing particular, relevant Native experiential understandings and ways of creating knowledge which I will identify in each chapter and then explore. However, solutions are first needed to address the consequential voicelessness created by theoretical postmodernist individualist equality, solutions which incorporate methods that acknowledge the physical realities of continued marginalization. Because of the potential for the obstruction of voice created through a strictly theoretical perspective of postmodernist thought, the premise of this project's examination of Native women's literature from southeastern American tribes — Native literature which I will later confirm through the novels themselves is written for social and political purposes — rejects both strictly theoretical postmodernist and essentialist thought as inadequate in analyzing these novels. While most scholars can agree that essentialist ideas of an invariable fundamental nature are simply not feasible in an evolving modern society, conversely, many of these same scholars find the concept of a perpetually deconstructing identity without regard for physical realities as unquestionably tenable. From the privileged perspective of the Euro-American white, male dominated culture which created and perpetuates deconstructed identity, it is indeed a theory of equality; however, many marginalized, colonialized communities strongly object to the application of deconstruction as a complete and inclusive theory, as it denies them voice. For example, in *Postmodern Blackness*, African American feminist critic bell hooks deems most postmodernist discourses as “exclusionary,” claiming that “they call attention to and appropriate the experience of ‘difference’ and ‘otherness’ in order to provide themselves with oppositional political meaning,



legitimacy, and immediacy” (1). Further, she understands the frustration of those who claim theoretical postmodernism “denies the validity of identity politics” — empathizing with those who would say “‘it’s easy to give up identity, when you got one’” — and confirming that “we should be suspicious of postmodern critiques of the ‘subject’ when they surface at a historical moment when many subjugated people feel themselves coming to voice for the first time” (2482). hooks concludes that “the overall impact of postmodernism is that many other groups” — groups that would include Native Americans — “now share with black folks a sense of alienation, despair, uncertainty, [a] loss of a sense of grounding even if it is not informed by shared circumstances” (2481). Rejecting this practice by postmodernist “white male intellectuals and/or academic elites” of appropriating the experience of “otherness,” hooks proposes the concept of the “authority of experience,” contending that “the idea that there is no meaningful connection between black experience and critical thinking about aesthetics or culture must be continually interrogated” (1). Today, most academics accept hooks’ once controversial theoretical position as it is applied to African American literature. However, her theories, which emphasize the importance of “black experience” and the importance of the “writings of black people,” also reflect the importance of other subjugated people’s experiences and literary works, including those by Native Americans. This theory of the importance of experience is also expressed by Native scholar Craig Womack in his text *Red on Red*, where he quotes from a personal correspondence with Abenaki poet Cheryl Savageau in which she mirrors hooks’ skepticism of poststructuralist motives and dismissal of experience, stating

I never even encountered the word “essentialist” before coming to grad school, and then it was thrown at me like a dirty word, mostly because I wrote something about Native writers and the land in a paper.  
 . . . The same professor who labeled me “essentialist,” said there was no truth, No history, just lots of people’s viewpoints. I argued that some things actually did happen. That some versions of history are not just a point of view, but actual

distortions and lies.

It is just now when we are starting to tell out stories that suddenly there is no truth. It's a big cop out as far as I'm concerned, a real political move by the mainstream to protect itself from the stories that Native people, African American, gay and lesbian folks . . . are telling. (3).

Here, through the words of Savageau, Womack also establishes both a Native authority of experience and presents an accompanying questioning of poststructuralist motives. As evidenced through hooks and Womack, then, the opportunity for marginalized peoples to speak from the perspective of their respective discourse communities is essential in the creation of historical and contemporary understandings. Native women — who also continue to struggle against the formidable resistance of postmodern individualistic identity as described above — are attempting not only to regain a voice that describes their physical, social, and political experiences but to actually be heard by an academy which continues to deny the common concerns of Native women's voices and their cultural, social, and political needs for expression. Native scholar Louis Owens confirms that “the recovering or rearticulation of an identity, a process dependent upon a rediscovered sense of place as well as community” is the “attempt “at “the center of American Indian Fiction” (5). The basis for the idea of cultural reimagining for indigenous women as expressed throughout this project and the associated definition of the term derives from this perspective, as Native scholar Louis Owens in his text *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel* contends that there is a “consciousness shared” in “contemporary Indian literature,” one that enables the individual to “[attempt] to reimagine an identity” one which incorporates traditional Native knowledge and understandings and that assists in “[articulating] a self within a Native American context” (22). Discovering or renewing this Native consciousness through literature, Indigenous women are then able to incorporate this knowledge into their current modern understandings in order to create a vision of themselves as

Indigenous women in a modern world. For the Indigenous person who identifies with this Native discourse community, it is not a matter of returning to traditional forms, but one of embracing the essence and function of tribal values.

In addition to the “authority of experience,” there are other theoretical approaches which authenticate the literary analytical practices employed throughout this project. A relatively recent theoretical approach which also emphasizes the “authority of experience” is the Postpositivist Realist Approach developed by Stanford Associate Professor of English Paula M. L. Moya, whose current book is also a scholarly study of literature written by women of color. While this project incorporates aspects of Moya’s Postpositivist Realist Theory, it does not, however, embrace the theory as a whole and may therefore be seen by some scholars as essentialist in its approach. Moya’s approach proposes exploring “identity categories” and “examining significant correlations between lived experience and social location” (4), asserting that such identities “are evaluable theoretical claims that have epistemic consequences” (8) or that they affect ways of knowing and of creating knowledge. While contending that in establishing identity claims individuals will experience and participate in a variety of “[mutually intersecting] . . . relevant social categories that constitute [the] social, cultural, and historical matrix in which [the individual] exists (82), Moya also concedes that “some identities, because they can more adequately account for the social categories constituting an individual’s social location, have greater epistemic value than some others that the same individual might claim” (84). This study primarily considers these identities of social location. Yet, by embracing this particular aspect of Moya’s approach, this project in no way attempts to present an essentialist perspective, conceding, as does Moya, that “identities are subject to multiple determinations and to a continual process of verification that takes place over the course of an individual’s life

through [their] interaction with the society [they live] in;” however, this project does assert the right of individuals to willingly embrace certain identity ideologies based on social location and to incorporate these ideologies in negotiating the other various experiences which shape their identity (84). In other words, this project does not assert that genetic or historical affiliation with any certain Native group necessarily determines identity perspectives, nor does it assert that merely identifying Native affiliation necessitates any particular perspective. However, it does contend that there are individuals who identify with particular Native American groups who “willingly embrace certain identity ideologies” and “incorporate these ideologies in negotiating the other various experiences which shape their identity,” creating what will later be explained as rhetorical discourse communities (84).

Considering a distinctly Native view of Postpositivist Realist Theory, in *Red Land, Red Power* Cherokee scholar Dr. Sean Teuton establishes what he terms a “tribal realist” theoretical perspective, a perspective through which he validates Native experiences and the value of Native literature as they function as a source of activism regarding social and anticolonial concerns. Indeed, Teuton contends that “American Indian cultural and literary theory should be accountable to material social concerns and movements for anticolonial resistance” (39). Explaining the functioning of tribal realist interpretations in social and political endeavors, Teuton maintains that “realism acknowledges that identities are socially constructed, but also claims that we can nonetheless evaluate various identity constructions according to their comparative ability to interpret our experiences, thereby producing reliable knowledge of the world” that allows scholars to “value experience and identity as legitimate social and philosophical issues at home and in anticolonial studies of culture and literature” (31). Still, Teuton is clear in warning against “essentialist views” that “disallow” “cultural “improvement,”

as in “possessing an unchanging, self-evident tribal understanding,” he believes that “Native people become restricted in their capacity to know the world” (12). In diverting from particular aspects of Teuton’s theoretical lense of “tribal realism,” this project may at times be perceived as essentialist in nature. Still, similar to the inclusion of Moya’s Postpositive Realist Theory, this project encompasses some but not all aspects of Teuton’s theoretical position.

Returning to Moya’s original Postpositivist Realist Theory which provides a primary basis for consideration in this project, as members of similarly marginalized minority groups, Moya’s assertion that social and cultural experiences affect the creation of knowledge and ways of understanding as well as hooks’ theory of the “authority of experience” are relevant and applicable to the study of literature written by women from traditionally southeastern tribes who “[embrace] certain identity ideologies” (Moya 84). Aspects of postmodern rhetorical theory also validate a study of literature written by members of these marginalized minority groups from the perspective of identity discourse communities as presented in this project, as considering that the theoretical purpose of postmodernist deconstruction is to place identity dichotomies in motion in order to provide theoretical equality, the movement to authenticate lived experience as a form of creating theory and thus provide identity voice in opposing continuing subjugating practices and conditions seems in keeping with the overall equalizing intentions of postmodernist identity theory. However, again, in no way does this practical theory suggests static group identities or even the assumed membership of anyone other than those who would choose to identify with a particular group; instead, employing rhetoric and philosophy, one may consider the existence and formation of a Native identity group from the perspective of existing as part of a discourse or ideological community in which there is common intention, interpretation, social context and historical circumstances shared by members with significantly similar knowledge and ideologies,

members who choose certain identity constructions for cultural, social, and political purposes. This criterion for the establishment of what would later be called discourse communities is set forth by theorist Mikhail Bakhtin in *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*. Later, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, philosopher Michel Foucault establishes that the discursive practices of a community equates to what is considered truth within that community. Ironically, while Foucault's primary purpose in addressing discourses of "truth" is to challenge artificially constructed identity, his concept that discourse establishes what is considered to be truth within individually chosen communities again establishes the allowance that such discourse communities exist, a conclusion that confirms, then, that a close examination of the discursive practices of the Native communities to be studied is essential. Finally, in *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action*, as well as in many of his other works, rhetorician Kenneth Burke validates the application of these discursive principles to literature by concluding that as literature is a form of persuasive discourse it must be governed by rhetoric, thus validating the existence of literary discourse communities. Still, as Moya points out, defending identity is a difficult task which requires "deciding between different identity claims," a task that "is a deeply contextual and theoretical an empirically complex enterprise" and one that "requires an appreciation for the situatedness and embodiedness of knowledge, together with an ability to abstract from relevant cultural practices" (22).

Considering Moya's warning of the difficulty of establishing identity, along with her requirements for a successful analysis of cultural knowledge and practices, one can conclude that literature from particular Native American discourse communities can be best understood by employing scholarly practices that harmonize with the practices and understandings of the discourse community to be considered through literature. Native scholar Craig Womack asserts

that “there is such a thing as a Native perspective and that seeking it out is a worthwhile endeavor,” arguing that “literatures bear some kind of relationship to communities, both writing communities and the communities of the primary culture from which they originate” (4) and that “there is a link between thought and activism” (5). Womack further argues that Native literature is its own literary canon, predating the American literary canon, and therefore requiring no inclusion in, recognition from, or adherence to traditional Euro-American interpretive understandings. Even so, Womack’s assertion does not preclude scholars from outside the discourse community from engaging in and analyzing Native literatures; instead, he advocates for employing Native understandings and scholarly practices in attempts to explicate these literary works.

Detailing experiences which have informed perspectives such as the above by Womack, Native scholar Donald L. Fixico explains that “for American Indian intellectuals, it has been an uphill struggle in gaining recognition for their work and even for their ideas to be entertained” from a Native perspective (79). Like Womack, Fixico also contends that “point of view becomes the issue in Native studies” and cites “prejudiced books and articles” from academia which have been “written about [Native peoples] and their culture” because their authors failed to consider the understandings of tribal discourse communities (130). Addressing this dismissal of voices which proceed from Native discourse communities even as they are the subject of study, Fixico maintains that “it is only fair to consider that American Indians have something to say about the research and literature about them” (131). He further protests that while “Indians have not remained silent, their voices have been ignored,” and in ignoring these Native voices informed by the understandings and practices of Native discourse communities, many times scholars have

simply missed the point (131). Fixico confirms these misinterpretations and misconceptions, stating that

the basic truth about Indian people and their communities is much deeper than the scholars have written. The majority of literature about American Indian people only scratches the surface of the inherent depth of native cultures. By not delving deeply enough into the native cultures and learning the socioeconomic infrastructures and meeting the people of Indian communities, outside scholars writing about Indian people have redirected the importance of indigenous peoples and what they are truly about. (133)

Based on the above discussion, then, in order to avoid both appropriation and misinterpretation of Native texts which speak to the understandings of Native discourse communities, this project will employ methods which allow it to be informed by the particular Native discourse community being considered.

The concepts advanced by Native scholars such as Warrior, Shanley, Weaver, Murray, Owens, Kauanui, Womack, and Fixico and by hooks and Moya, as well as through rhetorical literary analysis, support employing Native experiential theoretical understandings in examinations of the Native texts included in this project, as for Native women from southeastern tribes, the social location of their tribal affiliation influences their identity and shapes their perception of and experiences in the world around them. The purpose of analyzing these Native texts using Native experiential understandings and ways of creating knowledge is both the reimagining of cultural identity and the applying of conclusions drawn from such literary analyzes for social, cultural and political purposes. Native scholar Donald Fixico explains that like traditional oral stories that convey a “sociocultural history about the community in general,” today’s Native American novels afford an opportunity for “teaching youth, conveying values, ideas, beliefs, and [for] providing much insight about the people,” thus “also providing a venue for reclamation of cultural identity and voice” (33). Further, like many other Native scholars



who consider Native peoples not to be fully postcolonial or in full control of the representations of their identities, in his essay “Conjuring Marks: Furthering Indigenous Empowerment through Literature,” Daniel Heath Justice explains that “Native writers of poetry, prose fiction, and nonfiction speak to the living realities of struggle and possibilities among Indigenous peoples, [challenging] both Natives and non-Natives to surrender stereotypes” and to “[commit themselves] to untangling colonialism from [their] minds, spirit, and bodies” (5). Similar to this idea expressed by Justice that Native people are indeed not fully postcolonial, in *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide*, Andrea Smith also contends that “challenging the violence of historic and contemporary colonialism” is necessary before there can be “a real movement for justice” (xviii). The reality of the claims by the above scholars maintaining that many Native groups are not truly postcolonial is readily substantiated through well-publicized ongoing struggles such as the ones taking place at Standing Rock for water rights and the Cherokee struggle against The Sequoyah Fuels Corporation to stop the dumping of radioactive waste near the Arkansas and Illinois rivers, adjacent to which many members of the Cherokee tribe live. Other Native groups continue to be environmentally and economically exploited as well, while being granted minimal political power to respond. Ironically, postmodernist theory — designed to promote equality — plays a role in limiting the political and social voices of these communities by facilitating the argument that indigenous peoples are or should be assimilated their tribal identities deconstructed and, therefore, have no right to a social, cultural, or political voice which would aid them in saving their lands and their chosen identity discourse communities.

Specifically addressing the contradictions between post-structuralist theories, postmodernism, and Native ways of creating knowledge — particularly as they relate to issues of

time, environmental kinship, balance, and cultural identity — in *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel*, native scholar Louis Owens explains that

ultimately, whereas postmodernism celebrates the fragmentation and chaos of experience, literature by Native American authors tends to seek transcendence of such ephemerality and the recovery of “eternal and immutable” elements represented by spiritual tradition that escapes historical fixation, that places humanity within a carefully, cyclically ordered cosmos and gives humankind irreducible responsibility for the maintenance of that delicate equilibrium. (20)

Here, Owens describes the Native understanding of a circular connection and ultimate relational equality between all living things: human, animal and environmental. Owens’ explanation also includes the Native concept of circular time: the Native belief that the past and present exist together in a circular rather than a linear fashion. As they embrace this understanding of circular time where the past touches and influences both the present and the future, Native American discourse communities in general believe that humans actually have a responsibility to avoid fragmentation — a by-product of theoretical postmodernist perspectives — which they believe ultimately lead to destruction. Owens also asserts that it is essential that those identifying as tribal peoples attempt to recover the essence of the traditional cultural beliefs of their tribes through their written texts. Speaking of the purpose of fiction written by Native authors, Owens explains that “repeatedly” through “Indian fiction ... we are shown the possibility [and essentiality] of recovering a centered sense of personal identity and significance” (19).

Still, seeking a sense of cultural identity can be problematic for Native Americans from Southeastern tribes, particularly if one is attempting to reestablish that cultural identity in part through fiction. Again, explaining the importance of employing Native literary theory and in examining texts by Native women in order to facilitate this cultural self-identity, in her book *Indigenous American Women: Decolonization, Empowerment, Activism*, Devon Abbott Mihesuah confirms that

while female scholars who study Indigenous women have made significant inroads into their histories, many interpretations remain incorrect and underdeveloped, providing only partial answers to complicated questions about Native women. The majority of writings are devoid of Native voices and are thereby only partial histories. (3)

Mihesuah's above observation verifies the misinterpretation of the historical roles and contemporary concerns of Native women created by employing analytical theories that do not approach Native women's texts from a literary perspective that recognizes the terminology and understandings associated with the Native discourse community described. Such misrepresentations of the historical and contemporary roles and concerns of Native women within their particular discourse communities may also occur by examining texts that are not written in Native voice but that presume to represent Native communities. The above examination of Mihesuah's observations leads to a discussion of the final barrier to examining fiction by Native female authors from southeastern tribes that will be considered before introducing the texts explored in this study.

This final significant complication in analyzing fiction by women authors from southeastern tribal discourse communities occurs, ironically, when traditionally Western feminist concerns are elevated in understanding such texts, without considering the authors' Indigenous feminist perspectives. Although modern Native women within the discourse communities identified for study in this project share in the general feminist struggle against issues such as gender inequality and violence against women, an analysis of fiction by these southeastern tribal women that solely reflects a Western feminist perspective disregards the fact that these texts were written for the purpose of cultural inquiry and cultural reimagining, and that they were also written in an effort to inspire a particularly focused social and political activism. In her essay "I Give You Back' — Indigenous Women Writing to Survive," espousing ideologies similar to

those of Native scholar Louis Owens, Elizabeth Archuleta explains that “although not always recognized as political, Indigenous feminist rhetorical practices engage in a kind of political activism because they provide a commentary on Indigenous people’s resurgence and recovery and because they instill in the younger generation pride, activism, and power to resist injustice” (108). Therefore, with cultural reimagining and the promotion of activism as their purpose, these texts — although sometimes also encompassing Western feminist perspectives — primarily approach issues including gender power structures from the perspective of colonization. In her 2007 essay “Yes, My Daughters, We Are Cherokee Women,” Cherokee scholar Denise Henning confirms this perspective, explaining that “many Indigenous women researchers and activists reject the idea of feminism,” since the patriarchal power structures Western feminists strive to overthrow were unknown to southeastern tribal people until after sustained colonial contact and are therefore connected with the overall process of colonization rather than with gender power constructions (195). Indeed, “most tribes were egalitarian, that is, Native women did have religious, political, and economic power — not more than the men, but at least equal to men’s. Women’s and men’s roles may have been different, but neither was less important than the other” (Mihesuah 42). Traditionally, these women’s roles were also generally communal roles, and, overall, historical aspects of Native southeastern women’s fiction portrays this communal feminine power, rejecting the postmodernist, Western feminist focus on individualism and deeming participation in the struggle for the destruction of hierarchical power structures between genders as necessary only as a consequence of colonization.

Traditionally Native women from southeastern tribes were known to be a part of oral cultures; however, today written literature also reflects many of the oral cultural values and understandings — both past and present — of these Native southeastern women. This

dissertation will examine four novels written by women who are members of and who identify with either Chickasaw, Cherokee, or Choctaw tribes: Linda Hogan's 1998 *Power*, Diane Glancy's 1996 *Pushing the Bear*, Betty Louise Bell's 1994 *Faces in the Moon*, and LeAnne Howe's 2001 *Shell Shaker*. I propose that these novels illuminate some of the specific social, cultural, and political concerns of their respective tribal discourse communities, as members of these communities seek to reimagine themselves and establish social and political voice as Native peoples in a modern world. Based on the Native scholarship and theoretical practices described throughout this project and in this introduction, given the establishment of Native relevant premises for discourse such as those described by hooks and Moya, and based on established rhetorical practices as well, I will employ Native theoretical practices in my analysis of the works listed above, practices which recognize experiential tribal cultural understandings and ways of creating knowledge. In my examination of these texts written by women from traditional southeastern tribes, I will also employ the term "tribalist," as used by Devon Mihesuah to more fully describe my literary approach — even though certain aspects may parallel Moya's Postpositivist Realist Approach — as "for the sake of scholarly discussion ... it appears that those Native women most concerned with tribal issues would prefer" this designation (Mihesuah 161). This concept of being tribalism is introduced by Mihesuah in describing Native women who are predominately concerned with tribal rather than traditional Western feminist issues, who are "strong, confident and active in their quests to assist their tribes," who believe themselves to be "primarily disempowered because of their race," and who therefore "believe that it is more important to eradicate racist oppression than sexist oppression" (Mihesuah 160-161).

A traditional American canonical theoretical analysis of novels written by Native women is presented in several instances within two of the chapters of this project. The analytical perspective given in these scholarly essays, however, is presented in contrast to an interpretation based on experiential Native understandings and practices. While the perspectives of multiple Native scholars who provide vital understanding are included throughout this project, three in particular most strongly influence this study by introducing an under-recognized perspective on Native literature, one which, ironically, is a Native perspective. Native scholar Louis Owens' *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel* — particularly his first chapter, "Other Destinies, Other Plots: An Introduction to Indian Novels," in which he discusses the role of the novel, written in Native voice, in cultural recovery and cultural reimagining for Native peoples — contributes significantly to the understandings presented in this project. Owens is quoted throughout the chapters of this project, referencing his scholarly and experiential understanding of Native novels. Another scholarly text that provides invaluable insight and understandings essential to this project is Donald L. Fixico's 2003 *The American Indian Mind in a Linear World: American Indian Studies and Traditional Knowledge*. Fixico's in-depth explanations of Native experiential tradition, knowledge, and philosophy are either included as a part of or illuminate the Native understandings presented throughout this project, and are quoted in multiple chapters and used as an aid in analyzing significant social and environmental concerns of identifying indigenous peoples. Moreover, as presented earlier in this chapter, in his scholarly text, Fixico exposes the extent to which Native authors and scholars have been marginalized, both in general culture and academia, thus indicating the need for the study presented in this project. Finally, Paula Gunn Allen contributes to this project through her scholarly text *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* not

only by reinforcing the differences between Native and Western literature and Native and Western Scholarly perspectives, but also by affirming the essential place of women in Native society, reminding her reader that “[women’s] traditions are the basis for much of tribal society in the Americas” (98).

In chapter one, I analyze Chickasaw author Linda Hogan’s novel *Power*, along with her memoir *The Woman Who Watches over the World* which reveals the connection between *Power* and Hogan’s tribal understandings and activist concerns. In my focused examination of *Power*, I explore the ways in which Hogan employs her characters to describe the various conditions of tribal women. Specifically, I consider Hogan’s character of Omishto’s mother as her representation of one who is fully assimilated to Western culture, who has relinquished her power and understandings as a Native woman to embrace materialism, Christianity, and patriarchal submission. Examining Hogan’s character Ama, I explain the ways in which Ama represents Hogan’s idea for the possibility of cultural reimagining, as Ama is one who lives between two worlds, maintaining Native practices and beliefs while acknowledging the Western practices of the society around her and their consequences. Finally, I examine Hogan’s Omishto as her symbol of hope for a reimagined cultural rebirth and renewal from within the younger generation of Native women.

In chapter two, I exam the essentiality of Native stories — both oral and written — told in Native voice as a conduit for cultural reimagining through Diane Glancy’s *Pushing the Bear* and Betty Louise Bell’s *Faces in the Moon*. Examining *Pushing the Bear*, I stress the importance of Glancy’s naming and describing the practices — and their effects on Cherokee culture — of the enemy colonizer, and her empowering use of the colonizers’ written language to reclaim her own voice, allowing her to present the possibility of cultural reimagining for

Cherokee women. I also exam Glancy's presentation of social issues faced by Cherokee women as, like Hogan, Glancy depicts the impact on her Native culture created through assimilation to a patriarchal hierarchy and materialist greed. Considering the impact of Christianity, I explore Glancy's focus on its connection to the concept of Manifest Destiny in Native cultural destruction.

I also explore how Betty Louise Bell's *Faces in the Moon* similarly conveys the crucial role of Native stories in reimagining Native culture. Recognizing the patriarchal abuse and internal colonization faced by Bell's character Lucie, I describe how Bell proposes Cherokee stories from the past and present as a source through which Lucie can understand her current circumstances and also as a source for her empowerment in reimagining a Cherokee future. Ending this section of chapter two, I elucidate how Bell encourages Cherokee women to use literature both to reclaim and reimagine culture and as a source of social and political activism.

In chapter three, I present a unique examination of LeAnne Howe's *Shell Shaker*, one that juxtaposes a Western literary interpretation of *Shell Shaker* against an interpretation based on Native scholarly practices and on Native cultural values and understandings. Through this chapter I convey that rather than a somewhat academically unremarkable novel — as it is assumed to be through the Western interpretation presented — Hogan's *Shell Shaker* presents the intricacies of Native beliefs and cultural values, Native beliefs such as an interconnectedness through time and space, the value of communal practices, the importance of tribal cultural reimagining and continuity, as well as the personal, social and political risks associated with assimilation to Western patriarchal understandings and capitalistic greed.

As a keynote speaker for the 2017, 45<sup>th</sup> Annual Symposium on the American Indian, Cherokee scholar and author Dr. Jeff Corntassel spoke of a "kinship with land, culture, and



[Native peoples]” that transcends time (Re-envisioning Indigenous Nationhood). Corntassel also spoke of the need for “[melding the] historical” with the “contemporary,” for “reinvisioning” ways of using the “substance” of Native understandings and values in a “new world,” and for reinforcing relationships that he contends “determine [the Native] right to sovereignty” (Re-envisioning Indigenous Nationhood). Still, Corntassel’s proposal for what he terms cultural reinvisioning also requires a reaching beyond Native discourse communities. Land and human relationships for southeastern tribes did not and have not remained intra or intertribal. Thus, maintaining a kinship with the land and people for Southeastern tribes also entails acknowledging the ways in which Southern colonial culture impacted and coexistence in the American capitalistic south continues to impact tribal discourse and practices. This project seeks to inform southern discourse communities — both past and present — of the existence and importance of Native discourse communities, their ideologies, understandings, practices, and cultural values, as these inform current Native social and political activism. It also calls for a reexamination of Native representation in traditional southern literature, one that acknowledges appropriation of Native voice and experience and seeks to revisit the roles and experiences of southeastern tribal peoples from a Native-centric perspective in order to promote a dialogue that revisits and rewrites the history of the American south.

## Chapter One

### Stories of Self and Power by Chickasaw Author Linda Hogan

The works by Linda Hogan discussed in this chapter — like many other works by Native women authors — not only include distinctive Native versions of historical events but also provide opportunities for tribal cultural reimagining for Native women. In Hogan’s case while this possibility for cultural reimagining is suggested to all tribal women in general, the details of her works are specifically applicable to the women of her Native Chickasaw tribe. Given the contemporary, social aspects of these particular works by Hogan, an experiential, Postpositivist Realist Approach – as described in the introduction of this dissertation - may at times be employed in examining these texts; however, overall, these texts will be examined first and foremost from a Native scholarly perspective. Indeed, examining literary analytical techniques, this chapter will investigate how Native texts such as Hogan’s are often unintentionally misrepresented by employing privileged Western critical techniques and understandings.

Chickasaw author Linda Hogan begins her Native memoir *The Woman Who Watches over the World* by examining the importance of remembering Native ways of knowing and existing. Hogan contends that although some may argue that “memory is a field full of psychological ruins ... memory is also a field of healing that has the capacity to restore the world, not only for the one person who recollects, but for cultures as well” (15). In stating this, Hogan is not insisting that absolute restoration of precolonial, Indigenous Chickasaw mods of living are possible; instead, she is emphasizing that an inclusion of Native knowledge is available in shaping contemporary Native lives. Throughout her memoir, Hogan proclaims the possibility of a cultural reimagining based on “old ways and intelligences,” intelligences that are “waiting for [Native Americans to] return to their beauty, their integrity, [and] their reverence for

life” (14-15). She expresses this idea of cultural reimagining repeatedly both in *The Woman Who Watches over the World* and in her novel *Power* (14-15).

This idea of “reimagining culture” was first introduced by Native scholar Louis Owens. Owens acknowledges in his theoretical book *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel* that “Native Americans have fought an unending battle to affirm their own identities, to resist the metamorphoses insisted upon by European intruders and to hold to that certainty of self that is passed on through tribal traditions and oral literatures” (21). Fortunately, today these tribal traditions and oral literatures are being documented for future generations through various genres of writing. As a part of their fight to establish their own Indigenous identities and retain their ways of knowing, Owens explains that the “‘great narrative of entropy and loss’ which is the Euromerican version of Native American history since the fifteenth century is being revised and rewritten in contemporary Indian literature from an Indian perspective” (22). He further clarifies that in this contemporary Indian literature there is a “consciousness shared of the individual attempting to reimage an identity, to articulate a self within a Native American context” (22). In Owens’ theories, once again we see, as discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, the importance of Native stories told from Native perspectives in reclaiming histories and in reimagining contemporary tribal life in contrast to the appropriated stories of Southern writers and misrepresented histories privileged in American history and in Western literature.

Recognizing the importance of reclaiming Native identities and Native knowledge through Native stories and of incorporating these identities and knowledges into the lives of contemporary Chickasaws, in this chapter I will examine two works by Chickasaw author Linda Hogan: *The Woman Who Watches over the World*, a Native memoir and *Power*, her novel that

addresses multiple historical and contemporary issues faced by Native Chickasaw women as they struggle against Euro-American culture in an effort to reclaim a native identity based on traditional intelligences. Also, I assert, in contrast to mainstream and several scholarly readings (Melanie Cummings, Pascale Mccullough Manning, Roland Walter, Eric Gary Anderson) of Hogan's works, that through the above-mentioned texts, Hogan attempts to reclaim Chickasaw traditional values and practices from their rewritten Western forms and to privilege traditional Chickasaw understandings regarding the importance of the balance of power in the physical world between man and the rest of nature, in the metaphysical world between Native spirituality and professed Christian values, and between power roles in Native gender relationships — I will first explore Hogan's Native Chickasaw perspective as presented in her memoir then later revisit these conclusions as they pertain to her novel *Power*.

In contrast to the ideological assumptions expressed by critic Eric Gary Anderson in his article "The Inaccessible Worlds of Linda Hogan's *Power*," I will propose that an understanding of Hogan's *Power* is possible from an entirely tribal perspective and that her memoir provides a gateway to understanding the novel. While Eric Gary Anderson correctly concludes that "non-Native writers and other custodians of southern literature and history often downplay the longstanding indigenous presence," he inaccurately presents Hogan's *Power* as an affirmation of the ideology that "even an Indian-centered, Indian narrated history of the American South will be incomplete" (166). Although Anderson's statement may be true in general, this is not the focus of Hogan's novel. *Power* does not "[enforce] the inability to know or access" Native tribal cultures by incorporating a fictional Native tribe (166). Instead, her novel does "[remove] or [throw] into question all the usual deceptively reliable Euro-American sources of knowledge about a given American Indian culture," in this case Hogan's Chickasaw culture (166). In order

to understand Hogan's reasoning for setting *Power* in Florida but for creating a fictitious tribe, the reader must understand that rather than appropriating Seminole tribal knowledge, Hogan is simply using pieces of an actual account that intrigued her – according to personal interviews with Hogan – to write a novel that reimages her own Chickasaw culture. In a personal interview for the "Missouri Review," Hogan explains that "there are kinds of restraints that you have as a writer from a particular community. You can't just assume that you know another community." She explains that her stories "[have] to be from a Chickasaw point of view because [she] would never pretend to presume to understand ... or to speak for a person of another tribe." Hogan concludes by stating that she is "creating a totally fictional community, and yet the story is really about the truth" from her own Chickasaw tribal point of view.

Therefore, examining the novel *Power*, I will demonstrate how Hogan's novel, while depicting a fictional tribe, actually provides a depiction of historical and contemporary issues faced by Native Chickasaw women, many of which are also discussed through *The Woman Who Watches over the World*. These historical issues which continue into the present for Native Chickasaw women as seen in *Power* include the struggle to reimagine and establish identity in the face of continued cultural genocide and historic appropriation, continued religious oppression through Christianity, and subjugation through the idea of Southern womanhood. Contemporary issues faced by Chickasaw women that are depicted in Hogan's *Power* include intellectual racism and the struggle to maintain environmental kinship.

*The Woman Who Watches over the World* has remained virtually ignored by Western literary critics other than in limited book reviews which simply describe the novel as an autobiographical memoir. On one level, this is true. The memoir follows Linda Hogan through a variety of locations from Europe – the site of her earliest personal memories - and across the

United States, describing her diverse experiences of poverty, neglect, abuse, cultural discovery, and growing environmental awareness. However, the memoir is also unified through a discernable Chickasaw perspective which reaches beyond Hogan's own personal time and experiences to facilitate a reimagining of Chickasaw culture both for Hogan and her reader. In a description of events occurring clearly before her time, early in her Native memoir, Hogan describes Chickasaw removal from their ancestral southeastern homes, purposefully referencing the few "eyewitness accounts" of "what [their] Indian world was like a little over a century ago" (54). First, by stating this timeframe, Hogan emphasizes the relatively short amount of time during which "[her] people became so fragmented [they] are nearly tragically missing from the pages of history" (54). However, she also makes clear that accounts from this time have survived and elevates the words from these accounts. Her purpose in including these details in her autobiographical memoir is to allow for a reimagining of traditional Chickasaw culture both for herself and her potential readers. She explains that when "Indian people say, 'I want to tell you my story,' [the] stories do not begin with [Indians] as individuals ... [but begin] a hundred years ago" (78). Hogan's story, then, is not simply a telling of her own life but a telling of lives and ways of living that she and others can incorporate into a modern understanding of a functioning Chickasaw society.

Continuing with the importance of Chickasaw stories from both the past and the present, after briefly relating a few accounts of the many atrocities committed during the Chickasaws' removal from their southeastern homes, Hogan emphasizes the importance of "words" in "accounting for the human place in the world" as well as for "[creating]" the "self," ideas again reflective of Owens reimagining theory in creating self and culture (56-57). She asserts, "Words, I see now, are the defining shape of a human spirit. Without them, we fall apart" (56). Hogan

maintains that human power to claim and reimagine in general and Native power particularly lies in “the power of our talking, our stories,” an idea which is further explored in her novel *Power* which will be discussed later in this chapter (16). Hogan proposes that although Native peoples “had not been meant to survive ... yet [they] did, some of [them], carrying the souls of [their] ancestors, and now [those ancestors] speak through [them]” in their words and stories (49). In this passage, she is once again going beyond the scope of a personal memoir, presenting the ideological Native practice of reimagining one’s own history - something she herself has practiced – and suggesting that such reimagining remains possible due to a clear unbroken link to pre-removal Chickasaw history through stories.

The stories included in Hogan’s autobiographical memoir not only describe historical attempts toward the physical genocide of the Chickasaw people, they also examine the cultural and material results of relocation and deculturalization efforts on those who survived. In this way, her memoir again goes beyond personal experiences to address both historical events and political positions which must be understood in reimagining Chickasaw culture in today’s world. In Hogan’s memoir, she makes clear that more than physical lives were endangered during Indian removal, elevating the importance of recovering and reimagining traditional Native knowledge. She writes of “what had been stolen from [them] and broken,” citing the loss of a type of “intelligence” or “ways of knowing” that not only included “rituals and ceremonies” but a “great knowledge of plants, minerals, and medicines” and a “knowledge of ecosystems” (28). Explaining the conditions which lead to a further loss of Chickasaw knowledge and culture, Hogan laments that for the survivors who still understood and revered the land in their new Western homes, “most of [these] Chickasaws ... during the 1930s, if not earlier, found

themselves landless” and many thus “fell into [material] poverty” as well as cultural poverty

(52). Hogan laments that

when the sacred animals were killed, when killers, like Buffalo Bill, became heros, when knowledge that had evolved over tens of thousands of years was suddenly interrupted, forbidden, and untaught, the people who had believed harmony was the measure of wealth were now lost, and surrounded by a different kind of human being. (63)

In this statement, Hogan clearly juxtaposes the communal and naturalistic values of the Chickasaw people against the individualistic materialism practiced by their Western conquerors. Again, she has clearly left the genre of autobiographical memoir to include statements of political and cultural significance, statements which are essential in understanding and reimagining Native Chickasaw tribal culture.

Because these divergent communal and materialistic values Hogan describes could not easily coexist, efforts to Westernize southeastern tribes soon became a dominant focus in history and, therefore in Hogan’s memoir which, as the reader may have realized by now, is as much a historical and political document for the purposes of reimagining Chickasaw culture as it is an account of a Hogan’s own life and the events in which she participated. Hogan next chronicles how, in order for the conquerors to affect their desired change in Indigenous cultural values and beliefs, “Native languages, larger and more encompassing than English, were forbidden and changed” and “spiritual traditions were banned,” while Western Christian ideologies were imposed upon Chickasaws and other Native tribes (60). Here Hogan establishes Christianity as an agent in Native cultural destruction, an idea she repeats in *Power*.

Indeed, while Christianity was forced on Indigenous Chickasaws as the religion of the civilized, in *Recovering the Sacred: The Power of Naming and Claiming* Winona LaDuke expresses the sentiment of most Native scholars in stating that “some of the most virulent and



disgraceful manifestations of Christian dominance found expression in the conquest and colonization of the Americas” (12). Native scholar Craig Womack further asserts that “land theft was engineered by the Christian church from the very beginning, a fact that can be established by simply reading Pope Alexander VI’s papal bull *Inter Caetera*, issued after contact, calling for conquest of the so-called New World” urging that “the barbarous nations be overthrown and brought to the faith” (9). Like these Native scholars, Hogan also conveys this idea of Christianity as one source of material and cultural poverty for the purpose of “re-elevating” Native spiritual understandings and for facilitating cultural reimagining. In her memoir, she quotes Charles Eastman’s “The Soul of the White Man” in which he agrees with LaDuke and Womack that “the new people, the Christians, did not live their ‘wonderful conception of exemplary living,’” explaining that “they were ‘anxious to pass on their religion to all races of men, but [kept] very little of it themselves” (61). In Christian reality, Hogan’s Eastman “[had] not seen the meek inherit the earth, or the peacemakers receive high honor” (61).

With many members of Southeastern tribes easily and early recognizing the hypocrisy in their Christian conquerors, the idea of Christianity became less than appealing to many Native tribes, thus making its use as an agent of cultural change ineffective. Therefore, since Native conversion to Christianity was not entirely successful in accomplishing the desired deculturalization of Native southeastern tribes, other organized efforts were required, and consequently, the now infamous boarding schools for Native children were established, schools which while not attended by Hogan personally were nevertheless also chronicled in her memoir to facilitate understanding of the substantial changes which have taken place in Chickasaw tribal culture and to more importantly facilitate possible cultural reimagining for Chickasaws.

“In the late nineteenth century, the U.S. government implemented a program to ameliorate the nation’s ‘Indian problem.’ This solution was to relocate thousands of Native American children to one of the approximately 150 government-run boarding schools” in order to “reeducate the young Native population in the “ways of the whites” (Paxton 175). In her memoir, Hogan politically asserts that “the boarding schools created many of the troubles [Indigenous peoples] still have in [their] communities today,” (86) because they were not places where one “[learned] humanity or love” (87). Instead, missionary boarding schools such as the one attended by Chickasaw girls like Hogan’s grandmother made efforts to “Americanize the girls,” to teach them subjugation and the place of a proper lady (120). In her essay “Learning Gender” which was published in the compilation *Boarding School Blues: Revisiting American Indian Educational Experiences*, Katrina A. Paxton explains how these schools “worked” to “indoctrinate young Native women” who would have held positions of power within their tribal culture into white Protestant gender and domestic ideals” (175). Paxton describes how “nationwide, young girls at Indian boarding schools experienced instruction regarding ‘proper’ housekeeping, or more specifically, culturally specific domestic ideals” (176). Paxton maintains that these “boarding schools supplied white, middle-class women with a captive audience for two of the Victorian era’s most prominent domestic gender ideologies: the ‘cult of true womanhood’ and ‘separate spheres’” (177). Conversely, boys who had been raised in a Native communal society were taught the American capitalistic values of individual success and the importance of individual property ownership. For both boys and girls, these schools were successful in the deculturalization of many Native Chickasaw children. Hogan explains in her memoir that

when the children returned, their families often did not recognize or know them. They looked, dressed, and spoke like the ones who had stolen them. The children thought in smaller ways, too, having lost the great tracks of knowledge and ways of being contained in their own languages, the words that came from living on and with

the land. Most of the stolen said they were not able to go back home, to wholly go back, so it became a tragedy in many parts, some of it still with [Native communities] today. (87)

Regardless of the terrible cultural and social impact of boarding schools on tribal identities, Hogan and other Native scholars assert that the power to create, to understand, and to share tribal knowledge has not been totally lost, although it remains threatened. Today, while Indian boarding schools no longer exist, modern Western educational indoctrination is a continuing problem within Native communities, a problem which Hogan further explores through Omishto's experiences in *Power*.

As discussed in the introductory section of this dissertation, the appropriation of the histories of southeastern tribes by acclaimed Southern writers also remains problematic in reimagining tribal identities and reaffirming tribal ways of knowing. However, it is important to recognize that it was not only novelists who were guilty of this practice and whose works remain today as a misrepresentation of Native reality. Describing the period after Chickasaw removal from the Southeast, Hogan writes of how "living bodies of tribal people were destroyed" while at the same time "photographs and paintings romanticized Indian lives" (60). She explains that "the traveling photographers created posed depictions of people living traditional lives they no longer, in reality, by American law, were allowed to live" (61). In a stinging indictment of these appropriations, Hogan writes, "Our fallen worlds, our anguish, became their curiosities and souvenirs" (62). Nor does Hogan confine her reproach for the culture that destroyed while at the same time romanticizing to the past. In her memoir she contends that "there was then, as now, a search by Euro-Americans for what they thought American Indians represented. Not the best of what we have to offer, our knowledge of the world, our complex theologies, our remembered ecology, but for a [imagined] romantic tie" (62). Significantly, Hogan's reference in this passage

not only points to false appropriations of Native histories but to the denial of the importance of actual Native environmental and theological knowledge, of a balance among and between all humanity and all nature. Hogan further explores the importance of this balance and the consequences of dismissing its essentiality in *Power*.

Describing the balanced philosophies and knowledge of “eastern woodland tribes” embraced by traditional Chickasaws and expressed by Hogan both in *The Woman Who Watches over the World* and *Power*, Native scholar Donald L. Fixico, in his book *The American Indian Mind in a Linear World*, explains that

Native peoples treat the natural environment on a social and kinship basis ... From most types of animals, native peoples have learned that group behavior is important to life and that social ability is equally significant even in human- animal relationships. In the Natural Democracy of human-animal relations, both parties are equal and mutually respected, thus allowing people to develop respect for life, including the life of plants. All three- human, animal, and plant – [possess] life, whose spirits [live] within the bodies. (53)

Here Fixico expresses ideologies that are in direct conflict with Western ideologies of a hierarchical relationship – one where man is on top and all of nature is below, available to him to be used as a commodity without respect and retribution. Describing the consequences of Western hierarchical ideologies, in *Dwellings: A Spiritual History of the Living World*, Hogan writes, “[Native peoples] have been wounded by a dominating culture that has feared and hated the natural world, has not listened to the voice of the land, has not believed in the inner worlds of human dreaming and intuition, all things that have guided indigenous people since time” (82). Hogan expresses this conflict between her Native culture and a materialist dominating culture most clearly in her novel *Power*, examining each of the contrasts between Native and Euro-American culture introduced in *Dwellings* and privileging Chickasaw cultural values in an effort to facilitate cultural reimagining for her Native readers. In her memoir she also explains a part of

this rejected Native knowledge by stating that “for the Native mind, the world creates and gives birth to us and our spirits, along with all the rest. The soul resides in the world around us; it shares itself with us. We breathe its breath. We are blessed by its light” (63). Having described the consequences of the Western disconnection with and dismissal of these worlds and knowledges, in passages from her memoir, Hogan privileges Chickasaw ways of knowing by purporting that “we humans have diminished because we have failed to understand how each thing connects with all the rest” (25). Further, she esteems the connectedness of traditional Chickasaw people and contrasts it with Western individualism by explaining that Chickasaw peoples “love” the fact that their “elders ... honor [them] when [they] care, not when [they] win, but when [they] look after the earth and show compassion” (30). She warns that “we are together in this, all of us, and it’s our job to love each other, human, animal, and land, the way the ocean loves the shore, and the shore loves and needs the ocean, even if they are different elements” (29). In these passages, Hogan purposefully esteems Chickasaw values, juxtaposing them with the consequences of Western practices. In doing this, she not only warns non-Native readers of the consequences of their cultural and environmental practices but also encourages a pride in Chickasaw ways of knowing which may facilitate a desire for cultural reimagining for her Native readers.

Hogan also firmly connects and extends this importance of equal respect for all living things in the environment to the idea of gender in her memoir. Traditionally, Chickasaw men and women maintained a balance of power within the functioning of their tribal communities. Hogan begins her aptly named memoir by describing the statue of the “broken ... exposed ... woman who watches over the world,” and by establishing the statue as an extended metaphor for the human and particularly the female relationship with the world (18). Hogan presents the

statue woman as “fragmented and unhealed ... as broken as the land, as hurt as the flesh people” both of which have been used as commodities and discarded by Western society (18). Yet, by later employing the phrase “the world that gives birth to us and our spirits” Hogan discernably references the importance of female power in the continued balance of the universe (63).

Women here are connected to the power of birth, to the power to bring life, to sustain it, and to recreate it. Hogan also describes the essential element of water as a “mother element,” an essential element for all living things that significantly is found above, below, and within humanity (31). This essential mother element of water will provide a catalyst for the Native rebirth she depicts in *Power*. Hogan writes that “for most of us, water is the true element of our origin. Broken birth waters signal our emergence into the air world, and through our lifetimes it is water that sustains us, water that is the human substance, the matter of cells” (31). Continuing this metaphor of birth and creation, in *Dwellings* Hogan asserts that “in many creation stories, caves [like the womb] are places that bring forth life” (31). She explains that “caves are not the places for men. They are a feminine world, a womb of earth, a germinal place of brooding,” a place of power (31). In all of these passages from her various works, Hogan communicates the importance of women in bringing overall balance to the world, depicting the traditional Chickasaw belief of women as a source of power.

In order to understand the important cultural implications communicated through these two texts by Hogan, one must understand that power for the Native Chickasaw is not a matter of the privileged verses the non-privileged or even of power dichotomies in the perpetual motion of deconstruction. Power for the Chickasaw, as well as for many Native southeastern tribes, is not only through us but is around us in the physical and metaphysical world. It is a force of balance,

respect, and understanding. It is a power both in humans and beyond them, in the earth and beyond it. Expressing this ideology, Hogan asserts that

there are places of power on the earth. They have meaning not just because humans associate meaning with them, but because they resonate. They are designated sacred places not only because of stories humans tell about them, but because of the energies of the places themselves. They are alive. Stone. Clay. Mica. Minerals. They are associated with healing, or with other kinds of aid. They may be mountains, they may be a bend in a river, but they are sacred sites. (149)

Further, this power is not confined solely to the earth in Native Chickasaw beliefs. Describing the metaphysical power recognized by Native Chickasaws, Hogan maintains that

dreaming articulates the terrain of night, the range of a human soul, 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. We are the dreamed as well as the dreamers. (136)

In this passage, Hogan's idea of dreaming as knowledge starkly contrasts Western understandings and values in science and intellect; in fact, it may be beyond current traditional Western comprehension. In *Dwellings* she advances the statement of an Indian elder who emphasizes that, "there are laws beyond our human laws, and ways above our ways" (45). Hogan further dismisses what she views as a limited Western spirituality, contrasting it with Native spirituality by emphasizing the prominence of worldly, mundane Western materialistic values, asserting that "[Westerners] have no words for this [Native type of spirituality] in [their] language, or even for [their] experience of being there" as theirs "is a language of commerce and trade, of laws that can be bent in order that treaties might be broken" (45-46). Hogan continues by explaining that Western language "is a language that is limited, emotionally and spiritually," like its people, "as if it can't accommodate such magical strength and power," and so it limits its users both in emotional and spiritual exploration and understanding (46). In contrast, Hogan asserts that for the traditional Chickasaw, "at night, in the cornfields, when there is no more

mask of daylight, you hear the plants talking among themselves. The wind passes through. It's all there, the languages, the voices of wind, dove, corn, stones. The language of life won't be silenced" for those who know how to listen (Dwellings 62). Clearly, Hogan is privileging not only historical, traditional Native spirituality in these passages but also Native spirituality as it can be reimagined in the modern world.

Hogan also records the Chickasaw elders' belief that "there are events and things that work as a doorway into the mythical world, the world of the first people" and that it is possible to wind a way backward to the start of things, and in so doing find a form of sacred reason, different from ordinary reason, that is linked to forces of nature" (Dwellings19). Hogan includes this idea in both her memoir and *Power*, as the ability to accept this Native way of understanding is essential in reimagining Native culture. Native scholar David Fixico explains this "circular thought and logic" accepted by Hogan that "[influences] the logic of Indian people and how they 'see' and 'understand' the world" in his text *The American Indian Mind in a Linear World* (34).

Fixico states that for these Native tribes

the mind combines the physical and the metaphysical to achieve a balance that influences logic or acting and reacting to stimuli. The real world and the surreal world are one, due to the metaphysical forces that have power over human life ... This combined reality of the physical environment and metaphysical environment reflect the people's belief in a combined reality. (34)

Fixico goes on to assert that "stories convey this reality of spiritual beings interacting with people on a regular basis" (34). This is certainly the case in Hogan's *Power*; however, the idea "that nature and its phenomena of metaphysics interact with people in a nonconcrete fashion [is an idea] that Western society usually dismisses" (34). Still, understanding this connection between the physical and the metaphysical is essential in understanding Native American writings, including Linda Hogan's *Power*, in which this ideology is prominently figured. In



order to fully understand *Power* one must incorporate a “sense of logic” which is “related to a circular thinking process” (Fixico 34). Examining and explicating both Hogan’s memoir and her novel *Power* require the reader to understand that “unlike the linear process of western society, the circular process addresses items as to their relationships within a system or base of knowledge. Basic elementary functions of perception, causality, and reality work in a circular fashion that does not differentiate time and historical events, so that conscious knowledge becomes a part of subconscious knowledge” (Fixico 34). This Native way of knowing may be difficult to understand given the predominant privileging of Western linear thought and academic elitism. However, also given that many standardly accepted Western scientific theories continue to be proven false and with the scientific advent of String Theory, perhaps Native circular understanding, though marginalized, may have been ahead of Western science all along.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will explore how Linda Hogan’s novel *Power*, parallels the Native Chickasaw ideologies presented in her memoir *The Woman who Watches over the World*, drawing parallels between the understandings and issues discussed above and her fictional work. Again, my purpose will be to discuss how stories of traditional Chickasaw identities and knowledges can be used to reimagine Chickasaw women’s places in contemporary society. Significantly, I will employ Native scholarly techniques in examining these Native texts.

Further examining the theoretical implications of the article “Native American Literature, Ecocriticism, and the South: *The Inaccessible Worlds of Linda Hogan’s Power*,” by focusing on Hogan’s *Power* as an inclusive study of the “multicultural history of Indian Country” in the American South and by failing to delineate the different tribal beliefs and practices of the many Native tribes in this geographic area, thereby leaving the reader with the impression that

grouping all southeastern tribes together is adequate for understanding the values, concerns, and cultural practices of specific southeastern Native tribal peoples, Eric Gary Anderson employs a theoretical practice distained by many Native scholars. Equally as important, rather than using Native scholarly techniques and sources in examining Hogan's novel, Anderson relies on Western poststructuralist understandings by arguing that "the elements of Florida Indian history that [Hogan] transmits remain inaccessible, or grow increasingly so, even to the Florida Indian characters in question" and suggesting that "by packaging this construction of history in the form of a novel, [Hogan] raises additional, poststructuralist question about the historicity of fiction and the fictionality of history" (166-167). While Anderson's explanations appear plausible from a Western theoretical perspective, there are several problems with his study and conclusions. Theoretically placing Native history into modes of deconstruction disallows the possibility of cultural reimagining, a Native American theoretical approach supported by both Native scholars and Hogan herself. Native scholar Donald Fixico asserts that "too often, studies about American Indians have been produced from the non-Indian point of view" (8). Fixico explains that traditionally, studies about Native peoples have been approached from the point of view of what he labels one of two "Dimensions" (8). The "First Dimension" is written from "an external point of view" and, "like a door or window ... is basically the linear mainstream's interpretation or perspective 'about' American Indian history" (8). Fixico describes "the Second Dimension [as] the two-way door like a mirror effect which allows a common subject like treaties or war between Indians and whites to be viewed by both sides" (8). He provides "contact literature" as an example, literature which theoretically "[includes] both the perspectives of the colonizer and the colonized" and which "scholarly studies of involve speeches and quotes from native leaders to help balance the perspectives on a particular battle, treaty, or issue that involved both Indians

and whites” (8). However, Fixico argues that only a “Third Dimension” which provides a “native perspective about an issue, a battle, an event, or about an entire history” and which “addresses the Indian point of view in relationship to traditional knowledge and developing an Indian intellectualism” is adequate in examining the histories of Native tribes and their literature. Based on this Native theoretical perspective, then, Anderson’s poststructuralist theories are at best inadequate in interpreting Hogan’s *Power*

Conflict between a dominant colonizing culture, an indigenous culture, and an ecosystem frames the action for Hogan’s novel *Power*, a novel which significantly questions the values of cultural assimilation and the rightful source of voice for Native people, particularly for women. While Hogan incorporates her fictional version of an actual case involving the shooting of a Florida panther in her novel, the essence of the novel is much more in keeping with her Chickasaw ideologies expressed in *The Woman Who Watches over the World*. Hogan examines otherness, agency, and assimilation through this novel, while also juxtaposing Native Chickasaw understandings of temporality and spirituality against those of the colonizers. Further complicating the issues of cultural representation, otherness, and assimilation in the novel, Hogan sets *Power* in the American South, the historic home of her Chickasaw tribe and an area often traditionally identified through particular and at times somewhat idiosyncratic modes of cultural performance and religious beliefs. Hogan explores all of these issues - particularly focusing on the possibility for authentic voice and cultural reimagining for colonized indigenous peoples as individual members of distinct Native American tribes - through the characters of Omishto’s mother, Omishto, and Ama Eaton.

In Linda Hogan’s *Power*, Omishto’s mother represents the marginalized Native American woman who consciously chooses to ascribe and assimilate to the ideologies and

practices of the colonizer. In describing Omishto's mother, Hogan describes many of the choices being made by Native Chickasaw women and the cultural and physical consequences of these choices. Hogan also describes the results of continued cultural marginalization on tribal women. Through Omishto's mother, Hogan echoes the issues of lost gender balance, the destruction of Native communal and environmental values in the face of Western materialism, and the role of Christianity in the destruction of Native Chickasaw cultural understandings presented in her memoir.

Beginning with the idea of cultural marginalization, explaining why she left Kili, Hogan's fictional tribal community where Omishto's mother had found acceptance and protection for herself and her children from an abusive husband, Omishto's mother justifies her decision to leave the tribal community and its values by stating,

I would have stayed, too, but one day I just woke up and thought, what good would any of this do us in this world? What good would it be for us? I could stay there, and then we'd be the ones all foreign in the world, and stared at, maybe even hated, and so I left. (222)

In this passage, it is clear that Omishto's mother believes that embracing her Native heritage is simply an either-or choice. She is "of a split mind," and so makes her choice to "[try] to pass for white," a strategy employed by many people of color, particularly Native Americans in the South. Yet, as a result of her choice to exist as a creation of her colonizer, in Hogan's story Omishto's mother lacks not only voice as a Native American woman but also the most basic element of human individuality, a name. Physically, Omishto's mother willingly surrenders her Native feminine power of self-determination – an integral part of Hogan's Chickasaw values expressed in her memoir- to a white man, Herman, accepting a subservient role as his wife in which she must "overlook" his behaviors in order to be physically provided for. Hogan's depiction of "Herman's wife" also clearly mimics the subservient roles of Southern ladies in a

Southern patriarchal society, roles taught to Native girls through the boarding school system. Thinking of her mother, Omishto reflects that “she is lost ... my mother who has made her choices and they did not include the tribe, not even me. I know full well that she’d take a man over anything. It’s her weakness, not loving, not seeing what I see, where we stand in history, what we stand to lose” (144-145).

Not only has Omishto’s mother denied her tribal heritage and relinquished her power as a tribal woman in order to obtain material security in southern society, she has also become complicit in the abuse of her own daughter, a social issue also presented in multiple works of fiction by Native American women authors. When questioned by the sheriff about her mother’s knowledge of Herman’s abuse, Omishto muses that although her mother would be “blind to miss it,” her mother “would have to deny it” because of “the part of her mind that needs Herman” (204). Ultimately, Omishto deduces that her mother would “be forced to call [Omishto] the liar” in order to “rearrange the world as she always does, by her own needs” (205).

One of Omishto’s mother’s needs apparently met by submitting to this patriarchal relationship originates with another value of the colonizer and another issue addressed by Hogan in her memoir, an unbalanced valuing of manmade material possessions over nature. Omishto’s mother values the manmade things that Herman provides. Hers is the proper lady’s world of “blue chenille [spreads], ... fresh linens,” and the “artificial flowers” that she loves so much she even plants them outdoors” (151). In this description, Hogan presents Omishto’s mother as devaluing the natural which is traditionally honored in her Native culture by “planting” artificial flowers and by asserting that “houses are alive things” that should have their “[wishes respected], thus assigning manmade houses the same significance as the living natural world (26). Further, being truly immersed in the colonizer’s capitalistic society, Omishto’s mother embraces the idea

of acquiring more material possessions, even at the expense of others who have been displaced. For example, while visiting Ama's home after Ama's banishment by the tribe, Omishto's mother "opens a cupboard and looks inside. Her eyes are greedy when they move to the dishes, a taking-inventory kind of look, as if she might find something she could carry home with her" (210). In this passage, by having Omishto's mother unquestioningly assume the materialistic values of the colonizer in the face of human suffering, Hogan depicts with disdain the character's complete separation from her traditional community values.

Moreover, Hogan has Omishto's mother choose to adopt the spiritual beliefs of the colonizers, beliefs clearly described and rejected by Hogan in her memoir. Rejecting balanced tribal gender understandings, she embraces the Christian church in search of "a place where women receive love of another kind than what they wish for [but do not receive] at home" (100). This love and value that she seeks in church is neither the controlling love of the patriarch nor the material love of possessions; however, it is ironically, equally limited in scope for women when compared with the ideologies of most Southeastern Native tribes, particularly the Chickasaw. In the colonizers' church, Omishto's mother futilely hopes to find a healing solution for, among other things, "the wedding ring she can't remove," the symbol of her subjugation (187). Yet, she has convinced herself that she cannot remove it because of some undefined "venomous fluid of this world" rather than acknowledging that it results from her own continuing act of embracing the values of both Christianity and Western society.

Finding no solution for her loveless marriage in this church, Omishto's mother also fails to "love herself ... [believing] like they tell her in church that it was [the natives'] fate to be destroyed by those who were stronger and righter," concluding "that the old gods could not be real" because "if they were, they failed [the native peoples] when they let [them] be killed and

sickened” (187). Here, Hogan clearly uses Omishto’s mother to present the ideas of American exceptionalism and Manifest Destiny, and the consequent religious subjugation described in her memoir and in history. Yet, significantly, while worshipping in the subjugator’s church, Omishto’s mother’s “voice, when she sings, sounds treacherous and untrue,” leading Omishto to speculate that her mother “stopped believing in anything her in this church” and that she “only pretends that she still does” (100).

In Hogan’s *Power*, the love and “faith” Omishto’s mother cannot find in the colonizer’s church still resides in the place where she left it, with her fictional tribal community in Kilo. Realizing “she is the lost,” as she chooses to deny her traditional beliefs, it is the “old people” from Kilo who “look at [Omishto’s] mama with love,” the love she has been unable to find by isolating herself in the Western society. Omishto concludes that “as hard as she tries to believe otherwise, my mother, I know, is one of us. And I know this, too, that she loves Ama like a wayward sister, and when she prays, it is Oni [the spirit, the breath of the wind] that passes through her” (188). Up to this point, the reader has viewed Omishto’s mother as a less than a potentially redeemable character; however, in this passage, Hogan presents her through the eyes of Omishto as still capable of reimagining her Native self within her culture, of reclaiming her feminine power. In doing this, Hogan suggests the possibility of cultural reimagining for all Chickasaw women.

While Omishto’s mother represents the marginalized Chickasaw woman who consciously struggles to ascribe and assimilate to the Western ideologies and practices that she has been educated to believe are superior, in juxtaposition, Hogan presents the “wayward” Ama who signifies the ultimate “other” for the colonizer, the colonized, and the tribe itself. In Ama, Hogan depicts the reimagined Native woman, who practices Native cultural values in a modern world.

As a woman, Ama, lives alone, retaining both her feminine power and her voice. She lives openly at the edge of two cultural worlds, the ultimate place of reimagining, providing an example of Native beliefs and spirituality to outsiders and to those who, like Omishto's mother, have entirely left the old ways of the Taiga tribe. Yet, conversely, she stands apart from the old people of the tribe, serving as a buffer between them and the realities of the modern world of the colonizers and shielding the tribe from the true condition of their spiritual grandmother, the panther. Upon leaving her original tribal home with Janie Soto, Ama explains that "the old ways are not enough to get us through this time and [that] she was called to something else," called "to living halfway between the modern world and the ancient one" (22-23). Significantly, this in-between existence is a place Hogan has described herself as attempting to dwell in and negotiate. Like Hogan, "Ama's skill [is] to live with the world," even though "she has given in to nature or to something [her Native ways of knowing] inside herself" (46-47). Appropriate to Ama's role as the "other" who provides an interpretive voice and a barrier between the tribe and the modern world, her home, upon leaving Kilo, "sits on the very edge of Taiga land," land which is designated as separate through "lines drawn by the government," much like most other modern tribal lands (6). While in her "hut, sitting in the shadows of a jungle, even though it's close to civilization" (6-7), "she lives in a natural way at the outside edges of [their] lives ... [keeping] up relations ... with nature and the spirit world" (17) while still maintaining a necessary awareness of the modern world around her. However, her awareness of the environmental ruin caused by the pursuit of the colonizer's values does not equate with an understanding or acceptance of this unbalanced world view and reflects Hogan's own personal views.

Speaking of the Western version of civilization, Omishto muses that "this world of theirs is none of [Ama's] affair. [Their] lives are too narrow and brief for her. It is nothing that she



can understand or know or imagine. She has rarely been in the bleached and tamed confines of their world” (130). Similarly, it seems the colonizing culture does not understand Ama’s world view. While testifying during Ama’s trial, Omishto wonders,

What do these people call life and what can I tell them that they will hear,  
that we traveled through the storm, through downed trees, covered in mud,  
that in the swamps that surround them, their houses, their children, an older  
world exists, a hungry panther, a woman who doesn’t think like them? We are  
all around them. (131)

In the passage above, Hogan presents the Native Chickasaw beliefs in both circular reasoning and the connection between the physical and metaphysical worlds. However, she also presents these Westernized jurors in such a way that the reader is certain that they would diminish Ama’s “different intelligence” and devalue her material and spiritual belief as those of a lesser “other”. Still, even though she is fully aware of their perspective, Ama, unlike Omishto’s mother, refuses to abjure her native knowledge.

Another obvious distinction that Hogan makes between Omishto’s westernized mother and Ama who has reimagined her Native culture is that in contrast to Omishto’s mother who willingly surrenders her feminine power of self-determination to a man, accepting a subservient, patriarchal role as a wife in order to maintain security, Ama’s one husband “left because she,” being a part of a matriarchal culture, “wasn’t tame” or submissive “enough to be his wife” nor was she interested in the cultural materialism that a husband could facilitate (19). At peace in her world, materially, Ama has “herself and that’s all she has. She doesn’t even have a stick to shake,” according to Omishto’s mom, and while “it’s true, she has no lights or television or washing machine, ... sometimes, even so, [Omishto thinks Ama’s] got more than the rest of [them] because she believes in herself ... [living] in a natural way at the outside edges of [their] world” (16-17).

This natural way that Ama lives which is elevated by Hogan also includes her spiritual beliefs as well, beliefs that do not embrace the colonizer's Christianity, beliefs that will ultimately set her apart as Hogan's essential reimagined Native woman. Certainly the ultimate tension of otherness is to live between two worlds, a difficult position which must be negotiated by Native women. Physically, as discussed earlier, Ama does this; yet, through her spiritual beliefs, she also lives between the physical and the metaphysical world, worlds not separated by government established borders or the linear time of Western history. Through her tribal beliefs, Ama moves between these "other worlds" that are "beside us all the time," worlds where "every now and then we cross over and enter one, and every so often, too, one passes over and enters ours" (55).

Ama's spiritual, metaphysical journeys in the novel allow Hogan to express her own Native understandings and values. Implicit in the novel, Ama begins these spiritual journeys between these worlds as "a weak and sickly girl who disappeared from Walker Town when she was only twelve" and who "showed up, weeks later," mysteriously wearing dry clothing during the rainy season, seeming to be a "different" girl, with "a still gaze, unwavering and strong" (21-22). Commenting on Ama's disappearance, Omishto's 'grandmother said it was like Ama was from another time when she came back and that she's been out of place in this world ever since" (23). Rumors followed Ama, rumors that she was taken by "the little people," rumors that she was "a spirit that [had] changed bodies," rumors that "she'd met and married a panther, and now she was an animal come back to observe them to see if [their] manner of worldly conduct toward [animals] was right and kind" (22). Regardless, whatever the circumstances of her disappearance, Hogan has Ama return spiritually gifted, naturally aware, able to communicate, in her way, with animals and able to see messengers and understand messages from the past.

Through this spiritual link, the reimagined Ama is enabled to become the ultimate agent to bring balance to the unbalanced natural world and becomes Hogan's fictional representation of the woman who watches over the world. Messages received through Ama's spiritual ability to communicate between the physical and metaphysical worlds compel her to kill the sickly panther whose sickness is a symptom of the conditions of the present physical world. Thus, Ama is able to step through time and become the panther woman who kills the panther, transforms into one herself, and steps into the "opening between the worlds, opened by a storm" of rebirth (111). Ama "believes" that by killing the panther, "she has saved [her people], that animals are the pathway between humans and gods" (188). Spiritually, she believes that animals

are one step closer to the true than we are. She says skin was never a boundary to be kept or held to; there are no limits between one thing and another, one time and another ... She believes in stars and their gifts, that the wind speaks in intelligent trees that look bright as bonfires to eyes that are open. For Ama the other world is visible. It lives beside us in trees and stone. She can see it, like a path of light across water, and hear it in the swamps at night. She has touched it. The strange visitors she sees from out of the past are proof that time is not a straight line, that the course of time is a lie, and earth is still growing as it did a million years ago. And she believes her faintest move or thought is governed not only by spirits but by the desires and dreams of animals who are people like ourselves, in different skins. (188-189)

In the section above from *Power*, Hogan acknowledges Ama, the reimagined Native woman, as a saving sacrifice not only for her people but also for the natural world. Ama believes that she is this sacrifice, as do other members of the Taiga Tribe. For example, Joseph Post believes that Ama, "who took so heavy a weight on herself and violated tribal law" is "the sacrifice to appease offended spirits," an "atonement" that like "rain" must "fall" to be "nourishing" (186). Hers is a spiritual sacrifice made possible through the power of a storm, through the power of water, the feminine power of rebirth.

Still, although Ama is presented by Hogan as a saving sacrifice, it is important that readers not make the mistake of equating Ama's sacrifice as a Native affirmation of European

Christian ideologies. In her article “Encounters across Time and Space: The Sacred, the Profane, and the Political in Linda Hogan’s *Power*,” Yonka Krasteva makes this mistake by arguing that “Christianity [should not be] perceived as the ideology of colonization,” spending much of her essay defending Christian ideologies and asserting that Native and Christian religions merge together through the idea of sacrifice in the novel (207). Yet, Hogan’s narrative unmistakably rejects the colonizers’ Judeo-Christian concepts of the church, linear history, human superiority, and environmental consumption. Affirming Hogan’s rejection, Carrie Bowen-Mercer explains that

within the overall narrative structure of *Power*, which reveals the emotional and spiritual development of a young member of the tribe, Omishto, who resides in the white world, we can trace the oppositional views of life held by Natives and whites with respect to what it means to be human; what forms of behavior toward land, animals, and tradition are ethical; and what matters to survival of different people and their environments. Hogan exposes not only the inadequacy of Euro-American ideology to understand a Native ideology but also its destructive tendencies toward all ideologies that differ from it. (158)

This inadequacy in and destructiveness of all Euro-American ideologies in interpreting Native cultural beliefs and practices is most evidently revealed in Hogan’s novel through the final character to be considered in this section, Omishto.

Embodying neither the fully assimilated like her mother nor the fully separated like the old people of the fictional Kili tribe, Omishto, like Ama, represents the rebirth, renewal, and reimagining of life and hope for her Native tribe; however, in Omishto’s case it is rebirth for a new generation of Native women. At the beginning of Hogan’s novel, Omishto is seemingly inside the womb of nature, waiting for rebirth. Nearing her birth into the simultaneously existing but dissimilar natural world, Omishto reflects that “it’s as if I am curled inside an opening leaf in this boat covered with algae, as if I am just beginning to live” (1). During her symbolic rebirth in the storm, she is literally stripped bare of her material covering. Metaphorically, the storm

also strips Omishto of her certainties in Western knowledge which will allow her to begin a new way of knowing and reimagining herself as a Native woman.

Before the storm of renewal, Omishto asserts that she “[doesn’t] believe in magic ... because at school she [learned] there is a reason for everything” (13). She admits that this type of Western learning “separates” her from Ama who “never went to high school ... who swears by old-time beliefs,” who “believes in all the Taiga stories, that they are true, that they are real” and who possesses a different type of knowledge (13). At this point, Omishto refuses to explore Native knowledge, avowing that she is “not a person who believes the way [Ama] does, because it’s a different world what with the houses and highways” (13). Moreover, before the storm, Omishto admits that “there are times ... when [coming] from school,” that she “[doesn’t] even like [Ama]” and “finds her homely and strange” because she is “[seeing] her through the eyes of other people,” the non-native settlers in their communities (19). In this passage, Hogan presents Omishto like the Chickasaw children who came home from Indian boarding schools as strangers, indoctrinated into a new way of knowing, ways that marginalized tribal values and culture. The storm, however, will change Omishto’s beliefs and perspectives.

Through the fury of the storm, through Oni, the wind, the living force of the Native spirit, Hogan orchestrates Omishto’s rebirth. The “howling and roaring” wind “that is alive” takes away a part of her old spirit, taking her “breath” and thwarting her efforts to determine her own direction (35). Attempting to find reprieve from the power of this spiritual wind, Omishto tries to reach and cling to what she believes is solid and safe, Methuselah, a transplanted tree which provides a strong reminder of Euro-American power, values, and understandings; yet, the force of Oni tears the unnatural intruder from the ground. After the storm is over, Omishto remembers that the “Taiga people have that word – Oni – for breath, and air and wind. It is a force. Oni is

like God, it is everywhere, unseen. [She] thinks [she] heard this word spoken in the rush of weather. [She] is sure of it. The wind said its own name” [reaffirming itself and] introducing its spirit and its power to Omishto, awakening a new knowledge inside of her as she is reborn to reimagine.

With this knowledge, the reborn Omishto “[feels] compelled, held by something” (52) that causes her to follow Ama into the forest where they “travel the past,” awakening a new understanding of her history and herself in Omishto (54). Completing Omishto’s introduction into both the past and the future, before killing the panther, Hogan has Ama “introduce” Omishto to the cat, a cat that provides a metaphor in Hogan’s novel for the “sick and dying” Native tribe. In this introduction, Ama “[says Omishto’s] name as if [she is] both and offering and a friend,” which indeed Omishto will become at the end of the novel as she takes her place as an integral part of the tribe (65). Finally, while “destiny [moves] itself around like a whirlwind, a dark wind that comes quickly, churning” inside of Omishto, Ama takes the life of the cat, and Omishto recognizes her own rebirth (67). She realizes that “the wind leaves you changed without knowing how; you just know that something unsayable has changed and it has changed forever and you cannot go back and you can never be the person you were only a day before” (67). She realizes that “[the storm] was a beginning and an end of something” that she “feels’ but “has no words for yet” (73). In a phrase suggestively similar to James R. Atkinson’s description in *Splendid Land, Splendid People: The Chickasaw Indians to Removal*, Omishto believes that if she had words to describe this Native something reborn in herself, the words would “look like history and flowered lands and people with the beautiful ways [the] Taiga were said to have before it was all cut apart in history” (73).

For Hogan's Omishto, that beginning and that end of "something" are both inside herself. In this passage, the reader sees the beginning of Omishto's reimagining herself as a Native woman. She is now open to the stories of "the beautiful ways" her people "were said to have" (73). The storm signifies a chance of renewal for her Native people and the land, the ending of a time when the colonizer's knowledge is supreme, and the beginning of a time when Omishto, and other "young trees that have survived" the storm which removed the stronghold of the colonizer, can rewrite their own history of their past and can determine a new destiny for their future (52).

Upon returning to her mother's world after the killing of the panther, Omishto again realizes that her values and understandings have evolved to include different ways of knowing. Now, her mother's house "all looks new to [her], as if [she has] never seen it before" or has never compared the value of its existence to the world around it (91). Rejecting her mother's home as a representation of Euro-American values, she sees, instead, "the world this place has come from" (91) and "[dreams she is] a green branch beginning to bloom, to grow something strong and human and alive" (94) something which will bring new life to her fictional tribe. Moreover, at this point Omishto rejects the supremacy of the knowledge of the colonizer, believing that the "time, history, division, and subtraction, sentences and documents" she has learned "were lies" (130) that caused her to "unlearn other things" (107). Now, Hogan's Omishto "[wants] to go backwards, to forget how to read, to know the land, feel it, to enter water [and be reborn as a Native woman]. [She wants] nothing more" (176). She wants to leave her "narrow life" that she has "lived by fear and the loss of what was beautiful and strong" (231). She wants to go to "the little patch of land up behind the swamp" where "they are still human" and value the human over the material and where "the world they live in is still alive," to the

place where “they remember the stories that are the force of living,” Hogan’s stories that empower (231). Contrasting life at Kilo with modern society, Omishto determines that she will “leave [the colonizer’s] world, leave fear and war, leave success and failure, owned things, rooms of the light that was once a river and is now reduced, leave the radio, the manners of living” (232). Yet, Omishto admits that “this act, this leaving” will “[take] all [her] courage, all [her] strength” and that the colonizer’s world will “come to [her],” will “tug at [her],” and will “be [there], all around [her]” (232).

In the above passage, Hogan significantly juxtaposes the power of native stories in reimagining native lives with the acknowledgment of the continued coexistence of the colonizer’s capitalistic society and Western intellectualism. In this way, Hogan concedes that Native tribes can never return to their exact manner of existence before the appearance of the colonizers. Instead, through Omishto Hogan represents the rebirth, renewal, and continuance of the knowledge of the tribe through its young members who come to appreciate the ancient stories, histories, and practices of the tribe. Hogan’s traditional tribal character Annie Hide explains that it is this that will sustain the tribe.

She holds to the thought that if she lives long enough and can tell what she knows to a younger person, there will always be this shining in the world, an unbroken thread of light from the past where [they] were beautiful. It will curve around and into the present. And in another embrace, it will encircle the future and bring it all whole and together as one. (181)

As critic Louis Owens suggest of Native literature, in Hogan’s *Power*, the character of Omishto develops throughout the novel to provide the “temporal unification of the past and future with the present” and moves “toward an ability to unify [her own] past, present, and future” into a “coherent personal identity that is entirely dependent upon [her] coherent cultural identity” (Owens 20). Through Omishto, Hogan seeks the “transcendence of ephemerality and the



recovery of ‘eternal and immutable’ elements represented by a spiritual tradition that escapes historical fixation, that places humanity within a carefully, cyclically ordered cosmos and gives humankind irreducible responsibility for the maintenance of that delicate equilibrium” (Owens 20).

In her memoir, Hogan describes her “tribal identity” as having “always been chasing after [her], to keep its claims on [her] body and heart,” explaining that she “can’t escape the whole and be real” and that “the heart and mind are created by culture, past and present (27). As a consequence, throughout her memoir and in her fiction she explores issues of importance to the Chickasaw people. In an interview with John A. Murray for “Terrain.org: A Journal of the Built and Natural Environments,” Murray describes Hogan’s *Power* as “a self-portrait” which “relates the story of another endangered species: an author committed to excellence, a Native American woman addressing the central questions of human culture, a human being who values family over ambition, difficult truths over easy half-truths, faith and hope over cynicism and despair” (4). He also acknowledges, as I have presented both in this chapter and in the introduction to this dissertation, that authors like “Linda Hogan [inhabit] a landscape fraught with danger, a literary ecosystem with its own predators, habitat loss, and deadly traps, all set against a society that too often misunderstands, mythologizes, and misrepresents its [Native] artists and visionaries” (4).

## Chapter Two

From Assimilation and Subjugation to Empowerment: Rewriting the Past to Theorize the Future

in Diane Glancy's *Pushing the Bear* and Betty Louise Bell's *Faces in the Moon*

In the introduction to her 1993 autobiography *Mankiller: A Chief and Her People*, former Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation Wilma Mankiller emphasizes the significance of the stories of Cherokee women, describing modern Cherokee literature as “[weaving] together” the stories of today “with the history of all the people of the Cherokee Nation” (xii). Nearing the end of her autobiography, she relates that she “[wants] to be remembered for emphasizing the fact that [Cherokees] have indigenous solutions to [their] problems,” explaining that “Cherokee values, especially those of helping one another and of [their] interconnections with the land, can be used to address contemporary issues” (250-251). In the pages in-between, through her many stories and personal examples, Mankiller consistently establishes and reinforces a relationship between Cherokee women’s stories and the discovery of these Cherokee solutions to their own problems. Both in her autobiography and through her suggestions regarding the works of other Cherokee women, Mankiller exemplifies a Postpositivist Realist approach to writing and theorizing Cherokee literature. Elizabeth Archuleta explains this type of approach by stating that “an examination of Indigenous women’s primary rhetorical practices demonstrates that communication and sharing through writing constitutes an important location where Indigenous women theorize [their] lives” as “Indigenous women’s work that produces knowledge based on one’s lived experience is a form of theorizing” (89). In this explanation Archuleta confirms the theoretical position presented by Native literary scholars that through written stories, which describe both the past and the present conditions experienced by Indigenous peoples, Native women are able to theorize or reimagine their lives within their tribal cultures, using both written

and oral stories to analyze their experiences as Native women and to find Native solutions to Native problems. As discussed in the chapter devoted to Native Chickasaw author Linda Hogan, this cultural reimagining is not an attempt to restore precolonial Indigenous cultural practices. Instead, cultural reimagining stresses the importance of including Native knowledge in solving contemporary issues faced by Indigenous peoples.

Two Cherokee novels which can also be categorized and explored from the perspective of lived experience, experience then employed to theorize the basis for present day Cherokee cultural conditions and consequently to enable a reimagining of culture are Diane Glancy's *Pushing the Bear* and Betty Louise Bell's *Faces in the Moon*. This chapter will examine these two novels as they depict the destructive forces which have shaped and which continue to shape the experiences of Cherokee women in American culture and as they suggest Cherokee cultural based solutions and advocate for a reimagined Cherokee culture. Such an approach is validated by Native Scholar Elizabeth Archuleta's who in her article "'I Give You Back': Indigenous Women Writing to Survive," identifies texts that "[present] strategies that empower, [strategies] which include naming the enemy, reinventing the enemy's language, and writing to survive" as specifically belonging to the category of Indigenous Feminist theory and therefore meriting analysis from a uniquely Indigenous Feminist perspective (89). Specifically considering Glancy's novel employing an Indigenous Feminist approach, *Pushing the Bear* presents the experiences of early Cherokee women as they are removed from their Southeastern homes not simply from the perspective of the physical losses experienced but from the unique perspective of cultural losses, losses which are inadequately understood using methods of Western literary analysis and can best be understood by analyzing the enemies that perpetuated the loss and by

examining the strategies employed to facilitate a reimagined cultural survival. The first section of this chapter will analyze Glancy's novel from this perspective.

Paralleling techniques employed in other chapters of this dissertation in which I explore Native literature, specific Cherokee tribal values and understandings will be used to explicate and understand this novel based on theoretical practices established in the introduction to this dissertation. These Cherokee values include the importance of cultural continuity, traditional gender balance, communal as opposed to material values, and the importance of Native stories in conserving traditional cultural understandings and values. Most significantly, this study is based on the premise that "the significance of a literature can be best understood in terms of the culture from which it springs, and the purpose of literature is clear only when the reader understands and accepts the assumptions on which the literature is based" (Paula Gunn Allen 54). While admittedly, this perspective for analysis should be and is assumed to be applied equally to all literary works, Native authors are often not given this basic consideration in literary analysis. Too often, as Allen explains, Native literature is viewed and analyzed from a Western literary perspective. She contends that "the study of non-Western literature poses a problem for Western readers, who naturally tend to see alien literature in terms that are familiar to them, however irrelevant those terms may be to the literature under consideration" (54). Mirroring Allen's assertion, Navajo Berenice Levchuk explains that "over the years, non-native so-called experts have been responsible for putting into print and sustaining far too much flawed writing and beliefs concerning native thought and symbolism" (qtd. in Archuleta 91). Moreover, if not misinterpreted, because of Western literary analysis which fails to understand the significance both of Native cultural understandings and of Native stories within these cultures, Native literature is often academically dismissed, labeled either as folklore or ironically considered

literarily inadequate for inclusion in the canon of American literature. Thus, it is significant in this study that Native scholarly techniques which employ tribal specific understandings be given prominence.

Reflecting the Western dismissal of literature by Native authors in general, scholarly studies of *Pushing the Bear* remain limited; however, in his 2009 article for the “American Indian Culture and Research Journal,” Kenneth Hada confirms the validity of examining *Pushing the Bear* for the purpose of understanding traditional Cherokee tribal values and for the purpose of promoting Cherokee cultural survival through reimagining. Hada states that “Diane Glancy’s historical fiction, *Pushing the Bear*, follows [the] Native approach of using story in the midst of tragic chaos – not only retelling the reality of the injustice but also demonstrating the coping power of a story for healing and survival” (133). While Hada’s overall perspective in this assertion is certainly accurate, in order to fully understand the specific Indigenous feminist perspective in Glancy’s novel, it is also essential to first acknowledge the novel’s prominent focus on injustices perpetuated specifically against Cherokee women, actions which resulted in significant changes in their cultural experiences both before and after removal. Such changes included the loss of property ownership, the loss of political positions of power and thus voice in community decisions, the loss of gender balance in familial relations, and the loss of traditional control of agricultural endeavors which left Cherokee women relegated to the role of subservient housewife. Therefore, instead of considering *Pushing the Bear* as a chronicling of the overall historic injustices perpetuated against the Cherokee people as a whole, this chapter will specifically examine Glancy’s novel from the perspective of women’s literature, employing Indigenous Feminist as in writing this novel Glancy clearly names the enemies of Cherokee women during the time of removal, enemies which, while not directly experienced by Glancy,

have directly impacted her life and experiences as a Cherokee woman. Further, this chapter will discuss the fact that through the act of writing this novel, while Glancy acknowledges the traditional orality of Cherokee culture, she also depicts the importance of reinventing and employing the enemy's language as a defensive strategy and of using writing to ensure personal and cultural survival through cultural reimagining.

Reflecting one important aspect of Cherokee cultural understandings which will be discussed later in this section of the chapter, *Pushing the Bear*, like Cherokee culture itself, is a single story comprised of many stories told through many voices. In the novel, the story of Cherokee removal is told through the voices of over 30 characters who each contribute smaller stories that weave together the experience of the whole. While Glancy does not present her characters as what Western literary critics would consider to be either major or minor characters, disallowing a traditional synopsis of the novel other than to generally state that it's subject is Cherokee removal, two characters who contribute to the stories of removal consistently from the beginning of the novel in the American Southeast to the end of the trail in Oklahoma are husband and wife, Knobowtee and Maritole; therefore, these characters and their family members will be referenced several times throughout this consideration of the novel.

While many injustices were experienced by Cherokee women during relocation and these injustices were facilitated by many enemy practices, Glancy names three prominent enemies of Cherokee women through literary depiction in *Pushing the Bear*: the enemy of assimilation to Southern patriarchal practices, the enemy of capitalistic greed, and the enemy of Christianity. Glancy focuses on these three particular historical enemies as these are responsible for the initial loss of social and political power for Cherokee women and for establishing a precedence of powerlessness which would follow them to the new territory. Specifically considering the

Cherokee woman's enemy of assimilation, in her article "Yes, My Daughters, we are Cherokee Women," Denise Henning explains that before the expansion of Euro-American settlements in the Southeast, "Cherokee women had political, economic and social rights equal to those of Cherokee men"; however, as the number of settlers in the South grew and began to advance their own understandings of gender roles, "Cherokee women presented a troubling alternative [or dichotomy] to Carolinians, who acted on their own views of appropriate female behavior in their dealings with Cherokee women" (189). Among the Native cultural practices these colonizers found most disturbing, they regarded Cherokee women's "agricultural labor, sexual autonomy, control of children, and other behavior as deviant" (Perdue 62). In an attempt to placate these colonizers who were disturbed by the power and freedom of Cherokee women, many Cherokee men began to assimilate to the ideologies and patriarchal practices of Southern society thus causing a significant change in the cultural reality of Cherokee women. Certainly, Glancy depicts this enemy of Cherokee male assimilation to patriarchal practices in *Pushing the Bear*; however, she goes farther than a simple naming by describing the consequences of this assimilation for Cherokee women. Describing the basic reality of the situation, Glancy's male character Knobowtee affirms that "the [Cherokee] men had taken the power from the women to emulate the white man, to show [they] could also dominate the women" as they attempt to reflect the settlers around them (196). Similarly, the character of Tanner, Maritole's brother, also confirms that "[Cherokee men] emulated the white man. Established a capital. Took power from the women. Made a two-party government," and "farmed to prove to them we were civilized, then they took our farms" (75). Yet, one of Glancy's female characters more fully explains the reality of the loss for women, declaring that "once the Cherokee women had power. The women still owned the land that the men signed away. Didn't we tell them that?" (96).

Through these passages the reader understands that Cherokee women not only lost equal gender status and political power but also land which ultimately belonged to them, not the men who had signed it away.

Glancy similarly depicts other earlier losses Cherokee women had already suffered as a consequence of assimilation. For example, as Cherokee men began to expect Cherokee women to model the Southern women around them, Cherokee women lost not only power but also lost voice. In a reflection of this loss, in her novel Glancy has Knobowtee esteem his sister, who significantly, although spoken of many times, never speaks in the presence of the men. Knobowtee asks “Why couldn’t Maritole [his wife] be like my sister, who never [says] anything?” (141). Yet, Maritole, too, has learned to defer to Knobowtee in silence. An example of this patriarchal deference occurs when Maritole, who is reasonably fearful after being forcibly removed from her home, wants to ask Knobowtee to which stockade she and her family are being taken. Instead of asking, however, she remains silent in her fear because “[she knows] that [Knobowtee] would not want his wife talking” (7). Ultimately, this enemy of assimilation to patriarchal practices provides a path for the physical abuse of Cherokee women. As they walk the trail, Maritole notes that “some Cherokee men hit their women” (11). Later, Maritole will experience this type of violence as well when “Knobowtee [raises] his hand and [hits her] across the face because [she] had provoked him” with her words (94). While in this passage Glancy demonstrates the physical power of the assimilated patriarchy – the same power responsible for removal – she also subtly suggests the power of words to effect situations, a power which will be discussed later as a cultural survival strategy suggested by Glancy.

Although the power of the patriarchy became more and more firmly established in Cherokee society, another enemy equally intensified the struggles of Cherokee women, the



enemy of capitalistic greed. In her 2008 text *Disturbing Calculations: The Economics of Identity in Postcolonial Southern Literature*, Melanie Benson asserts that “an inherently exploitative economy like that of plantation slavery needed another erased integer – the removed bodies and claims of its native inhabitants – to stage its spectacles of agricultural, social, and hierarchical prosperity” (166-167). Indeed, the removal of Native Americans was essential in the creation of the exploitative Southern plantation society and in the illusion of a black and white dichotomy in the South. Glancy also reflects this greedy, exploitative economic enemy in her novel through the metaphor of the bear. Glancy’s primary female character, Maritole, feels the power of this “bear,” describing it as “something over us ... some dark animal we [push] against” (27), but it is Knobowtee who explicitly names the bear as “greed,” the Southern colonizers’ greed that says “I’m going to have it all. I’m going to push them out of the way” (221). Yet, unlike Benson, Glancy depicts capitalistic greed as an internal enemy to the Native inhabitants of the South as well, one that has entrenched itself into Cherokee society. Listening to the voices of the men in council, Glancy’s Maritole remembers that “once [their] leaders were holy men and chiefs;” however, now, “[she hears] the voices of traders and landowners” in their place, voices that rose to prominence through their positions in a capitalistic society rather than by traditionally honorable practices (64). Ironically, many of these prominent former landowners were also slave owners who had attempted to become a part of the plantation society; however, their material assimilation was not enough to provide them with equal racial status, and, therefore, even though these men had assimilated to the colonizers’ capitalistic practices, as an anomaly to the understood black and white power dichotomy sought in the South, their removal became inevitable.

Significantly, in the only passage from the novel not told through individual Cherokee first person voice from the past, Glancy herself narrates the story of the bear, acknowledging the historic self-destruction of traditional Cherokee values that resulted from embracing the enemies' values of individualist, capitalistic greed. Glancy writes:

A long time ago the Cherokee forgot we were a tribe. We thought only of ourselves apart from others. Without any connections. Our hair grew long on our bodies. We crawled on our hands and knees. We forgot we had a language. We forgot how to speak. That's how the bear was formed. From a part of ourselves when we were in trouble. All we had was fur and meat to give. (176)

In this passage, Glancy depicts the deterioration of the Cherokee communal society, into an individualist, capitalist society that "[thinks] only of [themselves] apart from [each other]," without the responsibilities of communal "connections" (176). "In trouble" from the influences of the society surrounding them and this society's desire to push the Native tribes from the South, the Cherokee find value in themselves only as commodities, as the "fur" and "meat" from which they gain individual prosperity. Rejecting the communal values of their ancient civilization, they become as uncivilized and predatory as the settlers around them. They become animalistic; they too become the bear.

Ironically, that which was supposed to be the Southern cure for societal ills at the time, the deterrent for predatory practices, Christianity, is also named by Glancy as a facilitator of these practices and an enemy of the Cherokee. In the novel, Maritole's brother, Tanner, asks, "'Who were these white soldiers with their Manifest Destiny? And the idea that they were sent from God and could steal the land?'" (76). Another of Glancy's characters also names the enemy of Christianity by astutely declaring that the colonizers "call us unchristian so it's even easier to take our land" (20). While in the excerpts above, Glancy names Christianity as a tool used by a Southern patriarchal society to remove the Cherokee and thus makes their lands

available, she also goes on to invalidate these Southern assertions made by employing the concept of Manifest Destiny. Glancy demonstrates that while these Southern colonizers claim the importance of creating a society based solely on Christian principles as their reason for wanting Cherokee land, this claim is inherently false. She does this by having her characters note the extraordinarily contradictory behaviors of the Southern Christian colonizers. For example, Glancy's character Tanner asks, "What kind of God was this who had some of his men talk of loaves and fish while others took the land and beat an old man to get him to walk?" (40). Similarly, the character of Lacey Woodard notes that while one Christian minister walks with them and suffers as they suffer, the "other white men who believe in Jesus ... push the people into the water" and "beat a screaming animal to pull a heavy wagon it cannot" (56). In the above excerpts from the novel, Glancy's juxtaposing of these paradoxical behaviors by the colonizers leads the reader to conclude that while there may indeed have been those with Christian principles among the Cherokee, these principles were not the force that drove the Cherokee people out of the Southeast. Instead, Christianity was employed to cloak the behavior of what Benson rightfully termed the "exploitative economy" of the racialized plantation society whose goal was a "hierarchical prosperity" in which the white male came out firmly established on top (166-167).

While the majority of Glancy's *Pushing the Bear* reflects injustices experienced in the South and along the trail, as the novel ends, Glancy foreshadows the future economic exploitation that will follow the Cherokee to the new territory. Through the character of Maritole who "[thinks] she [hears] the distant growl of a bear," – the bear identified earlier as exploitative colonial greed – Glancy foreshadows the new treaties that will similarly be broken to facilitate white desire for land in Oklahoma territory, land from which settlers will gain a

substantive economic advantage as once again laws are written to ensure the power and prosperity of the white settlers over the Cherokee. By ending the novel with a warning of this continuing social and economic oppression that will follow the Cherokee to their new homes, Glancy in this instance goes beyond promoting cultural reimagining to include an objection to the continued political practices of the American federal government by foreshadowing the continuing social and economic injustices which will be perpetuated against the Cherokee. In his article “The Reduction of a Self-Sufficient People to Poverty and Welfare Dependence,” published in *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, Gary Anders confirms Glancy’s proposal that the colonizers continue to perpetuate practices that lead to “internal colonialism” and “economic dependency” among the Cherokee (226). Depicting the modern consequences of the historical events described by Glancy, Anders asserts that the colonizers took “a self-sufficient group of people” and “reduced [them] to a state of poverty and welfare dependence through the destruction of their demonstrated potential for tribal innovation” (226).

Although Glancy depicts other enemies faced by the southeastern Cherokee people in her novel, she specifically suggests patriarchal practices, individualistic greed, and Christianity as three of those that particularly affected Cherokee women, women who before this time had enjoyed gender balance, had held considerable political and spiritual power within their clans, and who had owned the Cherokee land. Through her novel, Glancy expresses her understanding of the Native feminist idea that “before [Native women] can focus on resurgence and recovery, [they] need to identify outside forces that have created [their] current conditions” (Archuleta 92). In this way, *Pushing the Bear* also presents a political manifesto that recognizes the reality that “following colonization, fighting race, class, and gender violence, oppression, and injustice

became a politics of necessity for Indigenous women whose bodies marked them as different and, therefore, viable” (Archuleta 101).

Further, by “speaking out and naming the enemies of Cherokee women,” Glancy reveals her understanding of “the central role language can play in [Native women’s] empowerment and continued existence” (Archuleta 92). For the Cherokee prior to and during the period of removal, the written English language was a language of manipulation and broken treaties. Glancy discusses these manipulations and broken treaties in *Pushing the Bear* through several of her characters, emphasizing the destructive role of written English in the plight of the Cherokee. For example, as they finally near Indian Territory, Tanner, Maritole’s brother, asserts, “We’ve been doomed since 1540 when DeSoto came and a scribe recorded the first sight of the Cherokee” (224). Tanner is answered by Knobowtee who agrees, stating, “Yes, writing was the beginning of our end” (224). Using Tanner’s internal thoughts, Glancy goes on to describe several instances where the written words of white southern settlers were used as weapons to subjugate the Cherokee. She acknowledges reproachfully that “the white man had a way with words,” words that became written laws declaring that “the Cherokee couldn’t mine gold on his own land or testify against a white man in court about the continual raids on Cherokee farms” (224). Depicting the ultimate misuse of written words, Glancy through Tanner laments that “the white man even got [them] to agree to their own removal” (224). Later, Knobowtee reflects that “there [is] treachery in writing. The country had found it. The government had turned the written word to expediency. They had cheated with their written words” (228).

In this section of the novel, Glancy depicts the Cherokee as fully acknowledging the power of the colonizers’ written words; however, this acknowledgment is ultimately not presented as an acceptance of defeat. Instead, the Cherokee now realize that “they [too can] do

anything with written words;” however, not wishing to emulate those who exploited them, they affirm that “[they have] to be careful [they don’t] use [their written words] that way” (224). By reinventing the enemy’s language – that being the official language of government documents and treaties – to suit their own purposes, upon reaching Indian Territory the Cherokee use the form and words of the written language of government documents, which had once been used against them, to declare their own distinct and sovereign nation. Significantly, in this section of the novel, rather than simply depicting the writing of this document, Glancy emphasizes the importance of the reinvented document by including its text in the novel. Further, while admitting that at the time “President Van Buren didn’t recognize the new nation,” by describing them as becoming “a nation to [themselves],” Glancy causes the reader to understand that these early Cherokee who reinvented their enemy’s written language to declare themselves a nation - by seeing themselves as a nation and by working together as one in the face of efforts to erase them as a people - set the stage for the recognition of their sovereignty as a culturally distinct people by the American government in the future (232). Although these early Cherokee recognized themselves as a sovereign people and gave notice of their sovereign status through this early document, it wasn’t until years later in 1936 with the passage of the Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act that practices of attempted assimilation and allotment were abandoned by the colonizing government and American federal acknowledgement of Cherokee sovereignty began to be established. The constitution presented by Glancy at the end of *Pushing the Bear* presents a symbol of the continued Cherokee struggle against their colonizing enemy and their enemy’s values and a struggle for recognized sovereignty, a struggle which would continue until 1976 when a new Cherokee constitution was written and finally officially recognized by the American federal government.

Still, this acknowledgement of an official sovereignty for the Cherokee people does not negate their continued struggle to overcome the consequences of the enemies established in the colonial South, and Glancy's *Pushing the Bear* is, as a whole, an example of writing to survive, an aspect of Feminist Indigenous theory and Postpositivist Realist theory discussed in the introduction to this dissertation. By conveying this period of Cherokee history in writing while using Cherokee voice and perspective, Glancy takes back from the dominant Euro-American society the power of the Cherokee to write and describe their own historical experiences. Yet, even while claiming the power of the written word, Glancy also stays true to Cherokee cultural practices by emphasizing the importance of orality, the importance of the stories of Cherokee women in ensuring cultural survival and in reimagining culture for future generations. It is the voices of women telling the stories of the Cherokee that carry the essence of the people on the trail in this novel. In fact, Glancy purposefully uses multiple characters in her novel to reinforce the essential nature of Cherokee women's stories, stories woven together like a basket to hold the cultural history of the Cherokee people together. As Glancy's basket weaver tells her stories, one of the men responds, "You women have to have talk so you make a story. You have to have something to carry yourself in. What are we without something to say?" (156). Through this quotation, Glancy acknowledges the importance of stories in creating a sense of cultural belonging in the Cherokee women, a sense of being Cherokee both as an individual and as a part of a greater society. Further, Glancy uses the confused reactions of Maritole's father to explain the significance of these woven words in maintaining the Cherokee as a people while they walk the trail and afterward as they attempt to rebuild their society:

But how much more like a basket were our stories? They held our fear and hurt and resentment and anger. They gave us a place to order our disorder, a direction for our directionlessness. They gave us a place to argue with ourselves. Men felt a need to fight sometimes. Even women. Not because soldiers took our land, but

because they took the order that couldn't be seen. They opened us up to the old disorder, and we would have to build the world again – and that took so much time and energy. They were unweaving the weaving that we had taken generations to complete. (158)

In the text above, Maritole's father views the stories of the trail as a coping mechanism and laments the overall "unweaving" of the Cherokee society. Maritole, however, realizes the importance of Cherokee stories in their power to conserve a cultural understanding of self, even on the trail. She states, "I had heard the stories. I thought of Nancy Ward. I would not ignore them and fall into darkness. I didn't care how much it looked like I would, how much it looked like the stories didn't matter. I trusted in those stories. They would hold when I couldn't" (184). Even the character of Reverend Bushyhead who has assimilated to the colonizers' religion admits that "[The Cherokee] hope is in words, [in our stories] ... We are in this predicament now, but's there's a place we won't be. We're on our way to it now" (159). Here Glancy intentionally employs the religiously assimilated Bushyhead to reflect a hope of reweaving the cultural order of Cherokee society in the new territory through Native stories told in Native voices, stories which will bring the people, however changed, together and help them reimagine and maintain Cherokee cultural identity and practices.

While Glancy's *Pushing the Bear* considers historical occurrences that deeply impacted and continue to impact the place of Cherokee women in Cherokee society, often leaving them to face subjugation and abuse, another novel by a female Cherokee author, Betty Louise Bell's *Faces in the Moon*, addresses continued contemporary issues faced by Native Cherokee Women. Again employing both an Indigenous Feminist and Postpositivist Realist approach, in *Faces in the Moon*, Bell, like Glancy, chooses to depict enemies which have allowed the perpetuation of abuse of Cherokee women; however, in Bell's case these enemies have been identified through painful, personal lived experience, as many aspects of *Faces in the Moon* are from Bell's own



life. Still, Bell's novel is more than a personal, political statement decrying continued injustices faced by Cherokee women, although such a statement in itself would make *Faces the Moon* an important novel for consideration. Instead, for Bell, like other Native authors who struggle to reclaim their appropriated Native voices, writing a novel "represents a process of reconstruction, of self- discovery and cultural recovery" (Owens 5). Novels such as *Faces in the Moon* – much like traditional oral stories that convey a "sociocultural history about the community in general" – afford an opportunity for "teaching youth, conveying values, ideas, beliefs, and for providing much insight about the people," thus also providing a venue for reimagining cultural identity and reclaiming appropriated Native voice (Fixico 33). Thus, in *Faces in the Moon*, Bell not only openly depicts and thereby opens for discussion some of the many abuses perpetuated against Cherokee women by describing the enemies she has faced during her lifetime, she also provides a pattern for healing and cultural reimagining, while denouncing those who have appropriated and misrepresented Native Cherokee culture.

Providing a brief synopsis of the novel, *Faces in the Moon* presents the perspectives of three generations of Cherokee women. The novel is told from the perspective of Lucie Evers – both as a child and as an adult – a Cherokee woman who narrates her complicated experiences from childhood into a present where her mother, Gracie Evers, is dying. In the novel, Bell presents Gracie Evers as a representative of a generation of acculturated Cherokee woman. Bell presents Lucie's Great Aunt Lizzie as a representative of an older generation who are attempting to retain and pass on Cherokee cultural values and beliefs to their families. Finally, Bell presents Lucie herself as one searching, stepping between two worlds, at times rejecting and at times accepting herself as a Cherokee woman. While Bell includes men in her novel, they are only presented as they affect the lives of these Cherokee women. For example, through the eyes

of Lucie, Bell presents Great Uncle Jerry, a Cherokee man who through his reactions to the world around him will provide Lucie with a greater understanding of what it means to be Cherokee. Through the eyes of Lucie, Bell also depicts the white men, J.D., Roy, and Melvin, who will each in his own way abuse Lucie.

It is through the character of Great Uncle Jerry as experienced by Lucie, that Bell presents an ironic calling out of appropriated and misrepresented Native histories and cultural practices. Reading casually, one might assume that Uncle Jerry is at least a bit senile, if not “crazy,” as he spends a great deal of his time responding to things that he hears on the radio. Seemingly confirming Jerry’s state of mental illness, Bell has Lucie describe him as believing that “the voices [speak] directly to him and [wait] for his response” (94). Lucie sees Uncle Jerry “[sit] there, intent and polite, giving the voices the courtesy of a good hearing” then providing “replies [that are] courteous and quick, if a little formal” (94). Given Lucie’s impressions, at first Bell’s reader may be tempted to dismiss Uncle Jerry’s behavior as that of a simple, somewhat comic elderly character, or as that of the stereotypical “crazy” Indian, a stereotype created and perpetuated by non-Native sources. However, Bell’s readers come to understand that, even though Jerry’s responses can’t be heard by the speakers on the radio, these are Jerry’s attempts to reclaim his Native voice and power, especially over appropriated and misrepresented Native histories. In response to the radio and ridiculing the Hollywood movie creation of an Indian, Uncle Jerry proclaims, “Now whoever heard of a Indian named Tonto? ... I ain’t never heard a no Indian named Tonto” (102-103). Later, he explains to Lucy how his fellow soldiers in the army “had seen a whole lotta movies, and they thought Indians could walk and talk without making no noise” (115). Jerry goes on to describe how based on this Hollywood appropriation and misrepresentation, “ever’ time [they] come in to a new place a-fighting, they’s

always talking ‘bout ‘send that little Injun first,’” telling Lucie that acting on this erroneous belief is “how [her] Uncle Henry lost his leg, and [he] ... well, [he] just made it home” (116). Even though physically Uncle Jerry came back from the war, he explains to Lucie that he “come back with a lot more respect for meanness” and that he “[listens] real hard [now], and [he tries] to catch” the mind he lost at the hands of his fellow soldiers (116). Yet, this mind that Bell’s Jerry listens for is not his sanity; instead, it is the sound of his own Native voice, confirming the traditions and beliefs he has been taught and elevating these understandings over those of the white soldiers in his past and the white men on the radio. This listening for himself through the remembered cultural practices and beliefs of his people is explained expressly by Uncle Jerry who also explains his habit of talking to the radio by stating, “I git tired all these white voices talking, and I try to give ‘em the Indian point of view. Like my daddy woulda done” (116). Juxtaposing Lucie’s initial Westernized perception with Uncle Jerry’s explanation, Bell presents the dangerous physical and emotional consequences for the Cherokee presented by assumed and appropriated understanding of Native practices and culture. Still, while in this specific passage of *Faces in the Moon*, Bell presents Uncle Jerry as a victim of abuse perpetuated through appropriations and erroneous understandings of Native traditional practices by the dominant white culture, throughout the novel she depicts numerous incidents from her own experiences of the physical and mental abuse resulting from the many enemies faced by Cherokee women.

Paula Gunn Allen describes the plight of Indigenous women in a chapter of her book *The Sacred Hoop* entitled “Angry Women are Building: Issues and Struggles Facing American Indian Women Today.” In this chapter, Gunn emphasizes that “the central issue that confronts American Indian women throughout the hemisphere is survival, literal survival, both on a

cultural and biological level” (189). She clarifies this statement with a description of Indigenous women’s specific struggles and survival practices, both contemporary and historic. Gunn writes:

American Indian women struggle on every front for the survival of our children, our people, our self-respect, our value systems, and our way of life ... We survive war and conquest; we survive colonization, acculturation, assimilation; we survive beating, rape, starvation, mutilation, sterilization, abandonment, neglect, death of our children, our loved ones, destruction of our land, our homes, our past, and our future. We survive, and we do more than just survive. We bond, we care, we fight, we teach, we nurse, we bear, we feed, we earn, we laugh, we love, we hang in there, no matter what. (190)

In the above passage, Gunn’s depiction of the historic and contemporary struggles faced by Indigenous woman and their everyday practices of survival presents an almost perfectly mirrored reflection of the injustice, abuse, and survival strategies depicted by Bell in *Faces in the Moon*. As Bell names and describes some of the enemies of Cherokee women in the novel, she presents at times a disturbing reality of the above conditions and of the practices which brought these conditions into being. The multiple injustices described by Bell in *Faces in the Moon* occur primarily as a consequence of the enemies of poverty, racism, and acculturation, enemies which lead to many of the horrific consequences listed by Gunn.

Examining one enemy or source of many of the injustices experienced by Cherokee women, in his article “Women’s Status among the Muskogee and Cherokee,” Richard A Sattler asserts that although Cherokee women “retain their [language], much of their traditional religious beliefs and practices, and some elements of Indigenous social and political organization, economically, however, [they] are integrated into marginal positions within the larger American economy, and most experience significant degrees of poverty” (215). While Bell’s novel, however, contradicts Sattler’s assertion that in general Cherokee women “retain their [language], much of their traditional religious beliefs and practices, and some elements of Indigenous social and political organization,” by acknowledging the reality of acculturation,

a condition discussed later in this chapter. Still, *Faces in the Moon* does reflect Sattler's assertion regarding Cherokee women's marginalization and poverty, depicting as well these women's experiences of poverty's often cruel, generational consequences and depicting how colonial destruction of traditional Cherokee practices left Cherokee women without traditional cultural safeguards against poverty (215). For example, like many Native Cherokee women of her generation, Bell presents the character of Hellen Evers, Gracie's mother, as suffering from the enemy of poverty and its many associated outcomes. Hellen is depicted as either battling poverty or suffering from its effects throughout her life as a young adult, initially as a young Cherokee woman abandoned by her white husband and forced to make a home for herself and her children "in an abandoned car" (12). In this early description from the novel, Bell reflects poverty's consequence of often denying Cherokee women and children even the most basic of physical necessities for survival, necessities once controlled by women in Cherokee culture. Further, she addresses the breakdown of traditional Cherokee communal care for children during this generation, as in this car and later in a run-down house, the child Gracie waits and is the sole caregiver for her baby sister while Helen "[walks] those five miles to town" to clean houses for "those white women [who] worked her to death" and their white husbands who "[were] always touching her up" (17). In this passage, through describing this type of domestic work and openly portraying its propensity for abuse, subtly, Bell also reminds the reader that this was a role specifically taught to Native women by the colonizer in compulsory boarding schools as a means for their physical survival, and therefore, the abuse Helen suffers is a consequence of not just poverty, but also of efforts to marginally assimilate Native women. These boarding schools "assisted in the creation of the Native American domestic worker, trained in Euro-American 'homemaking' and prime for [marginalized] employment in white middle class homes" (Paxton

175). Thus, in this small passage from the novel that portrays Helen's historical struggles, Bell makes the reader aware of the cultural, physical, and sexual abuse endured by this generation of Cherokee women whose poverty and diminished social status left them to work as unskilled laborers in marginalized positions, dependent on those who abused and degraded them for their physical survival and for the physical survival of their children.

Upon the death of her mother Helen, at only nine years old Gracie "[steps] into [fulltime] motherhood," becoming responsible for her sister Auney, and it is at this young age that Gracie Evers, like her mother before her, begins to suffer the substantial consequences of generational poverty that have impacted many Cherokee women (183). Although Bell never explicitly states that Gracie was sexually abused by "that old devil Jeeter" with whom the girls were forced to live after their mother's death in order to physically survive (16), this abuse is implied when Lucie describes the details of her mother's private journal as giving "the details of a girl child growing up abandon and unprotected" by a traditional Cherokee family clan (184). Continuing her depiction of the cycle of poverty and its cultural and physical consequences, Bell presents Gracie, like her mother Hellen, as a poor, uneducated, unskilled laborer. Gracie, like her mother, works at certain points during her life as a housekeeper for wealthy white people; however, Gracie is also forced to work at grueling jobs that break down the physical body. She tells her daughter Lucie, "I was pickin cotton, when ya was born. Twelve hours a day in that Oklahoma sun ... Going from place to place, living on nothing but beans ... hands a-bleeding and calloused ... ya think people are born with these kind a hands. All crooked and feeling like the bottom a somebody's shoe" (31). Though not experiencing the same level of hunger and physical pain, later, Gracie would "stand twelve hours [a day] behind the cafeteria counter" to help provide for herself and Lucie; still, alone without communal support, this grueling physical labor was not

enough to overcome poverty and provide the necessities for herself and little Lucie. As a consequence, Bell's Gracie is forced to endure the most degrading consequence of poverty faced by many Cherokee women of her generation, a patriarchal dependence which leads to physical and sexual abuse.

In her need, poverty leads Bell's Gracie Evers down a path of Western patriarchal dependence which ends in physical abuse and sexual exploitation. For most of her life, like many Cherokee women of her generation, Gracie Evers must be dependent on a man for physical survival. Yet, significantly, in what Bell describes as Gracie's most prosperous marriage, Bell also depicts Gracie as suffering terrible physical abuse. Bell writes, "When he beat her, she collapsed like a child in front of him. He blackened her eyes, broke chairs and coke bottles over her head, and if he was really angry, he unscrewed the leg from the coffee table and came after her with that" (37). Later, describing the sexual exploitation Gracie experiences at the hands of a patriarchal society as a direct result of her impoverished state, Bell provides an excruciatingly detailed and degrading depiction of Gracie using her body, the only thing of value available to her, in exchange for a material necessity - her car not being repossessed - which will allow her to continue to work and provide for herself and Lucie (59-60). Bell's inclusion of this description allows the reader to experience the shame and powerlessness of this consequence of poverty, both for Gracie and for her child Lucie who is an unnoticed witness to the event.

Finally, Bell presents Lucie, the modern day Cherokee woman, as an early victim of generational poverty and its effects as well. Lucie's mother, Gracie, "could not believe her luck" in becoming involved with J.D. who provided her with goods he had stolen from the commissary and PX where he was stationed as a supply sergeant; yet, these goods were not as free as Gracie appeared to believe. Lucie pays both the emotional and physical consequences of this decision

made in an effort to elude poverty. In an indication of the price that will ultimately be paid, J. D comes home with a jar of stolen peanut butter and asks Lucie, “What’re ya gonna give me for this?” Day after day, J. D. torments the four year old Lucie until, finally, he punches her in the face and rapes her, claiming it is a punishment for her bad behavior, while Gracie drunkenly sleeps near-by. In Bell’s depiction of this scene, the reader feels the child’s pain, confusion, and powerlessness. “The next morning,” the reader further feels the child’s rejection as her mother, not wanting to lose the material security against poverty that he brings to her, obeys J.D.’s command that she “get rid of that brat or [he’s] a-leaving!” (70). Moreover, this is not the only time that as a child Lucie will face sexual abuse in exchange for the food needed by herself and her mother. Bell describes Lucie as an adult, sitting in her mother’s house and remembering that “the last week of every month,” a time when many poor Cherokee families run out of food, “[she] walked across town to Roy’s General Store” since “he was the only storekeeper to give credit” (43). Knowing that the child is more likely to receive a positive response, “Momma sends her to ask” (43). Yet, just as with J.D., there is once again a price to be paid, and the reader can’t help but wonder if, given her own history of being sexually exploited by men, Gracie is aware of this price. Bell describes the scene as Lucie “turns to leave” the store and says “thank ya,” with Mr. Roy replying, ‘Ain’t ya forgetting something? Ain’t no way to be treating your uncle Roy. Come on back here and give your uncle Roy a kiss. Come on, he ain’t a-gonna eat ya” (44). Still affected into adulthood by the trauma of this poverty induced abuse, Bell’s Lucie recalls that “sometimes, when Melvin [her husband] touched [her], [she] remembered” Roy touching her and “when [Melvin] fell asleep, [she] went down to the kitchen and ate potato chips, ice cream, kosher salami sandwiches ... taking pleasure in her choices,” choices she had been denied years before (44). Certainly, this passage and many other



descriptions of poverty's consequences included by Bell in the novel are disturbing. Yet, by portraying some of the consequences of Cherokee generational poverty for those who read her novel, Bell not only acknowledges poverty as a historical enemy of Cherokee women and children, she also opens a discussion, its goal being to analyze ways in which a reimagining of traditional Cherokee cultural practices and values can address the problems that still echo from the past and to create Cherokee cultural based solutions for addressing contemporary Cherokee poverty.

While poverty might appear to be the greatest problem faced by Bell's generations of Evers women, as already explained, poverty initially became a problem after removal due in part to the cultural deterioration of the Cherokee way of life that began in the South. Many Cherokees had already begun to assimilate to Western individualistic, capitalistic practices, representing the colonial way of life as a more desirable lifestyle. In response, even some of those who were left behind in poverty by capitalistic practices, like Gracie Evers, began to see themselves as inferior and attempted to erase their Cherokee cultural identity. In *Faces in the Moon*, Bell employs Gracie Evers to exemplify this type of Cherokee woman who has actually diminished herself through her attempts toward acculturation, thus naming another enemy of Cherokee women through narrative portrayal. Bell describes Gracie as rejecting many aspects of her traditional Cherokee identity and values. Physically, Bell's Gracie "[chooses] high heels over moccasins," blond hair over her natural black color," and "would have chosen blue eyes over black eyes" (58). In this depiction, the reader understands that Gracie is attempting to recreate herself into something that she views as more physically desirable, the stereotypical white woman. Intellectually, Gracie also has a "respect for education and white ambition;" however, she doesn't believe higher education is achievable for Native women, viewing her

daughter from the white man's perspective of intellectual inferiority (47). Her attitude is evident as when Lucie "[becomes] a teacher, [Gracie acts] as if [Lucie has] lied about college, [her] degree, [and her] work. [Gracie asks] no questions, [but walks] around [Lucie's] achievement with a careful disbelief" (47). In her attitude, once again, Bell has Gracie diminish not only herself and her daughter but, by association, all Cherokee women by both assuming that acculturation is better and by further assuming that higher education is unattainable for Native women. In a further example of her acculturation, materially, like the capitalistic society around her, Bell's Gracie "[looses] touch [with] and interest" in people, while at the same time, "she [keeps] every material object that ever [crosses] her path," revealing her departure from tribalism and her adoption of American capitalistic values (40). Still, Bell cautions her Cherokee reader against choosing Gracie's path through the culturally traditional character, Gracie's Aunt Lizzie, who describes the changing trends followed by those like Gracie to Lucie by stating

I aint gonna say I approve of your momma's ways. I weren't raised thataway. And your grandma weren't raised thataway. Always dancing and drinking and going around with soldiers. Leaving their families and hightailing it to the cities. It seems like we lost a whole generation of children. The Cherokee always been a proud people. They took care of their children and families. That always come first. When my granddaddy come from Georgia he didn't leave nobody behind. Nowadays it seems like people forget how to look out for their families. But it ain't their fault I reckon. Times is different. No truer words been said. Now, you're gonna grow up 'out knowing your people. We's not always gonna be round, and ya gonna have to count on your momma, And she can't count on herself. (122-123)

Here Bell describes the consequences of Gracie's acculturation as a failure to maintain traditional extended familial bonds, child neglect, and a failure to practice and pass on traditional Cherokee cultural knowledge and communal values. Once again Bell presents the consequences of an enemy, in this case acculturation, in an attempt to elevate Cherokee cultural identities and practices through juxtaposition with the consequences of acculturation. In presenting

this contrast, Bell further advances the idea of cultural reimagining to contemporary Cherokee women.

Finally, again closely associated with the enemies of poverty and acculturation, in *Faces in the Moon*, Bell names racism as an enemy of Cherokee women and the Cherokee people in general. In a definition disassociated with any particular event or occurrence in the plot of the novel, Bell provides the following definition as a part of Lucie's thoughts:

Trash: Garbage. Refuse. The spoiled, the unusable, isolated into dumps, packed into landfills, burned in great incinerators on the edge of the city. Crap, litter, debris collected and bagged. Recycle, a mind is a terrible thing to waste ... Injun trash: Disposable, throwaway, sweepings from rotting lives and faiths, fragments of feathers and beads and paint, smut braves and squaws, the remains of a republic, the detritus of discovery. (178)

Through this passage, in her general definition of trash, Bell depicts the racist rejection of the Cherokees as a people and their subsequent removal from their southeastern homes. She describes the original Cherokee way of life as being rendered "unusable," beyond recovery in its original form, as being "spoiled" by the colonizers who then "isolated" the Cherokee into poverty on unwanted lands in Oklahoma, "packing the many different Native tribes together with what was left of their "rotting lives and faiths" and thus disposing of them like "trash" on the "edge" of Western society where they would attempt to "recycle" some through an education that's aim was assimilation (100). Yet, Oklahoma lands did not remain unwanted areas for the disposal of unwanted people very long, as Euro-American settlers expanded into the West. Therefore, Bell also depicts these racist land acquisition practices as following the Cherokee to the new territory in the form of the KKK. In speaking to Lucie, Bell has Uncle Jerry describe a "gang" who were "dressed like ghosts" with "white sheets all over themselves" and who came "banging up a door in a middle a night" (100). Uncle Jerry explains that "they wanted Frank Sixkiller to sell off his pasture land" and that "he did, too, because he "didn't wanna lose his only

milk cow” since “they done kilt the first one” (100). Bell also notes the continuing failures of the legal system to protect Cherokees property rights even in the new territory, by having Uncle Jerry explain that even though Frank Sixkiller “got ‘im a lawyer, that lawyer ‘vised ‘im to keep out of trouble” so “one ‘em ghosts bought that land for no money atall” (100). Through this incident, Bell portrays the history of racist southern organizations and racial injustice that followed the Cherokee people as a whole into the New Territory. Further, returning to Bell’s seemingly isolated definition presented through Lucie’s thoughts, in her specific definition of “Injun trash,” Bell depicts the modern racist images of “feathers and beads and paint, smut braves and squaws” which are associated by Westerners with “[remaining]” Native identity (178). Bell portrays this modern racism and some of its consequences on a personal level through the experiences of both Gracie and Lucie. For example, the abusive J.D. asks Lucie, “What’s wrong with you damn Injuns? Don’t none of y’all talk?” Here, Bell presents the racist stereotype of the silent Indian. J.D. then identifies Lucie as a “fucking Injun brat,” telling her to “show [him] some respect,” since he’s “paying the bills and putting food in [her] mouth” (67). Finally, before raping her he tells her that she “t’aint nothing but Injun trash,” that [her] momma’s trash, and [she’s] trash, too” (68). In this passage, by designating them as “Injun” in his racist rants, Bell provides J. D. as an example of the modern racist, one who attempts to elevate and justify himself and his atrocious behaviors as being above reproach from those of color - in this case both Lucie and Gracie - and therefore somehow appropriate. Later in her life, even after Lucie fully assimilates to Western society, achieving education and middle class status, in her relationship with her husband Melvin’s family, Bell’s Lucie realizes that as a Cherokee, she is still racially “an unmentionable” (51). Through these passages, Bell depicts the continuing injustices suffered by Cherokee people as a result of the racist beliefs of those around

them; however, she also goes on to acknowledge the problem of internal racism among the Cherokee people, again through the experiences of Lucie.

Ironically, since childhood Lucie has embraced acculturation into Euro-American educational, religious, and capitalistic practices, seeing them as a “fix,” a certain shield against being the victim of racist association with her Native Cherokee relatives; however, she does this without seemingly understanding that her sense of shame and denial are also a form of racism that grows through her acculturation. Although “as far back as [she] can remember, [Lucie has] belonged to a secret society of Indian women, meeting around a kitchen table in a conspiracy to bring the past into the present,” in an effort to preserve some knowledge of the personal struggles of Cherokee women, Lucie attempts to leave that past behind (56). Already, as a child, while Lucie [listens] to [her] mother’s stories, she is “[planning] where and how [she] will be born” anew, outside of her Cherokee heritage (74). She lies to a school friend, telling her that “the short, fat woman, working in the cafeteria is not [her] real mother, [her] real mother [lives] in New York, the daughter of an industrialist, forced to give up her only child because of a teenage pregnancy” (49). In this lie, Bell’s Lucie already associates herself with upper-class capitalism. She also associates herself with white, upper-class religion, refusing to attend the “Southern Baptist church” with “Mamma and Auney” and instead, “at age ten,” being “baptized Antoinette” in “the Catholic church on the other side of town” where “[she has] fallen in love with the rituals and rich purple garments” (49). Through these actions, Lucie demonstrates racial shame in both her family and her name, an increasing result of her attempts toward acculturation. She becomes an educated college professor and marries “a rich man,” not “[realizing]” for “many bad years” that she, just like her crude and uneducated mother, “is an unmentionable” to the man’s family (51). She even momentarily feels “gratitude” as she

imagines her mother dead, believing that “[she] would never have to speak of her again” and that she would have finally “outlived the clutch of those [Cherokee] women’s voices,” severing any connection to her own racial identity as a Cherokee woman (175). In this passage, Bell’s depiction of internal racism presents perhaps the most insidious enemy of all because it is an enemy that firmly closes the door on Cherokee cultural understandings, values, and practices. Had Bell ended the novel as this point, her reader would be forced to assume that her depictions of cultural appropriation and misrepresentation as well as her portrayals of the consequences of the enemies faced by Cherokee women were displayed simply as a record of historical injustices. Instead, as the novel closes, Bell makes her purpose in sharing her experiences through *Faces in the Moon* clearly evident by providing a pattern for healing and cultural reimagining, again through the character of Lucie.

Although as a young woman Lucie “[grows] tired of living in the past and [craves] to find [her] stories in narratives of [Euro-American] direction and purpose” - as she “[lives] in the time of choice, where a person has only to believe to make it true” - she admits that “no matter how great [her] desire to run away from home, to live in a place and history free from secrets, [she] always [takes] up her position at the table, in the early morning hours, and listens for those [Cherokee] women’s voices” (5). As Lucie grows older, Bell describes her as unable to escape the identity of her Cherokee heritage, recognizing herself in the memory of her Great Aunt Lizzie. “In [her] own time [Lucie] grows into [Lizzie’s] face, [her] mouth turning into stubbornness, [her] spirit becoming still and erect, [her] hair growing dark and [her] body brown in its latent truth” (162). Lucie acknowledges that “every year [she becomes] more Indian, [her] hair darkens, [her] eyes grow fierce and still” and “the blood rises” (33). Through these descriptions, Bell portrays Lucie as beginning to accept herself as Cherokee. Later she depicts

Lucie as going beyond mere acceptance toward reimagining herself as a Cherokee woman, as she actively goes in search of more information about her family's heritage. Significantly, during this search, rather than submitting her academic credentials or passing herself off in the middle-class acculturated role she has played for so long, Lucie defies the racist Western patriarchal system that presents itself in this case through the "[smirking] ... pink middle-aged man" in charge of the Dawes Commission rolls who belittles the idea of Cherokee heritage (191). In her warning to this condescending white, male librarian, Lucie not only articulates her rediscovered Cherokee female power and cultural sense of self, she also summarizes the effects of Bell's named enemies of Cherokee women, juxtaposing them against her newly discovered sense of power by stating,

Let me put it to you this way. I am a follower of stories, a negotiator of histories, a wild dog of many lives. I am Quanah Parker swooping down from the hills into your bedroom in the middle of the night. And I am centuries of Indian women who lost their husbands, their children, their minds so you could sit there and grin your shit-eating grin ... I am your worst nightmare: I am an Indian with a pen. (192)

In the passage above, as the "negotiator" of the "histories" of "many lives," Lucie becomes Bell's depiction of one empowered to reimagine herself as a contemporary Cherokee woman, employing modern tools by reinventing the enemy's language, but using these tools to retell Cherokee oral stories told in Cherokee voice from a uniquely Cherokee perspective, using them to reimagine herself but through the written language of the enemy, employing the power of the "pen" (192). Through Lucie's rediscovering of herself, Bell presents her as a model for cultural reimagining to all Cherokee women who have experienced many of the realities portrayed by Bell in *Faces in the Moon*.

Because of the autobiographical nature of *Faces in the Moon* which Bell affirms in her essay "Burying Paper," Bell's reader realizes that the fictional Lucie Evers is not the only

“Indian with a pen” (192). Through both Gracie and Lucie Evers, Cherokee author Betty Louise Bell wields the power of the pen, doing what Archuleta describes as writing to survive; however, Bell goes beyond the idea of mere coping or survival to embrace the idea of cultural reimagining. Like Lucie, while suffering from the same enemies and their terrible effects, where once Bell had trusted only in the significance of the words from canonized lives such as those of “Dickens, Bronte, or Eliot,” eventually she realizes “the worthiness of ordinary Native lives and the value of all stories informed by love” (Burying Paper 35). Through *Faces in the Moon*, Bell not only shares this realization with her reader, she challenges all Cherokee women to reimagine themselves as Cherokee women, embracing the traditional cultural values from the Cherokee past and integrating them into their contemporary lives.



### Chapter Three

#### LeAnne Howe, James Joyce, and the Cracked Mirror of Postcolonial Southern Studies

Applying Western understandings to studies of literature written by women from Southeastern tribes commonly leads to misinterpretations of these texts on multiple levels. An example of this propensity for misunderstanding is evident through an examination of LeAnne Howe's *Shell Shaker* which contrasts Western theoretical understandings against Native theoretical and cultural practices, illuminating both the barriers against and the benefits of examining literature written by Native women from Southeastern tribes by employing the intellectual practices of Native scholars. The greatest barrier against such a study is a propensity toward Western academic elitism that preemptively excludes contemporary Native literature and Native theoretical practices from serious academic discussions, even discussions investigating Native histories, cultures, and ways of creating knowledge. One example of this critical propensity to dismiss Native texts in examining Native cultural histories and knowledges can be seen in Annette Trefzer's 2007 book *Disturbing Indians: The Archaeology of Southern Fiction*. Throughout this text, in an admitted creation and appropriation of Native histories employed for Southern non-Native purposes, Trefzer examines non-Native writers "from the nation's southern fringe" who — while employing an appropriated version of tribal histories - have "participated in" what Trefzer praises as a "modernists resistance" that "positively [identifies] a Native American cultural difference in order to launch a critique of the colonizing and mechanizing impulses of U.S. capitalism" (11). While such a critique of predatory capitalistic practices is certainly relative both to Native and Southern studies, Trefzer's dismissal of Native cultural knowledge and her approval of recreating tribal histories through Western literary practices for purposes of a "greater good" outside of Native understandings and texts epitomizes the struggles

faced by Native authors from Southeastern tribes for serious academic recognition. Although presumably unintentional, in an act of what may be considered literary colonialism by Native scholars, Trefzer justifies a southern creation of Native history by asserting that “southeastern Indians [seem] to lack [a]preserved degree of cultural authenticity” (12); therefore, she validates these southern non-Native authors who have employed their Euro-American understandings “through the record of history and archaeology” (13) to create a Native southern “counterpoint to hegemonic culture” (11). Ironically, in her supportive depiction of these practices by white southern authors such as Lytle, Gordon, Welty and Faulkner, Trefzer unwittingly concedes that colonial constructions of histories, readings, and theoretical interpretations are still very much acceptable and to be embraced in literature from the American South. Further, while admitting that “many critics, especially Native American critics in the United States cannot be said to be properly postcolonial,” Trefzer dismissively advocates for employing “a way of reading U.S. history that would allow us to view the nation as postcolonial . . . shifting the discussion of post colonialism to a southern locale” in order to “[examine] the ways in which southern writers engage in discourses of colonialism and imperialism through the Native American signifier” (27). Here, Trefzer’s reducing of Native American Southeastern tribes to a “signifier,” a symbol for something else, within traditional Southern literature again reflects the continuing significant barriers to cultural, literary, and theoretical recognition and historical voice faced by Native Southeastern authors.

Espousing a position diametrically opposed to Trefzer’s work, Lisa Brooks, in her essay “Digging at the Roots: Locating an Ethical, Native Criticism,” advocates for Native stories as told by Native authors. While Brooks acknowledges that “Native American literature is perceived,” from outside Native American communities, “as a relatively undeveloped area of

inquiry, which can benefit from the application of the longer tradition of European-based literary theory,” she conversely asserts that such an approach to understanding Native literature is problematic “when it is privileged over the current efforts of many Native studies scholars to emphasize the depth and breadth of indigenous intellectual traditions” (234). Brooks argues for “Native literary critics to move toward a deeper analysis of and sovereignty over Native literature, with a focus that is more tribally specific and much more entrenched in the study of [Native] systems of knowledge” (234-235). Here Brooks describes the approach to Native literature taken not only in this chapter’s study of LeAnne Howe’s *Shell Shaker* but throughout this dissertation as I examine texts by Native women from Southeastern tribes, an approach that privileges and employs Native theoretical understandings as purported by Native scholars and applies these understandings to texts by Native women authors, specifically recognizing the tribal intellectual perspectives and cultural values of traditionally Southeastern tribes. By employing this approach, I, like Brooks, believe that “informed Native standpoints” can be brought “to the fore,” perspectives “[grounded] in [Native] intellectual and cultural traditions” that do not “rest on identity politics or on some inherent connection to ancestral voices, but instead that approach Native literature from “a perspective embedded in long-standing sources of knowledge” from within tribal communities through Native stories told in Native voices (235). Although traditional Western scholars may object to this practice, proposing it to be a type of cultural isolationism, employing Native theoretical practices in examining representations of Native culture through Native voice instead allows Native scholars and authors to reclaim and rewrite their appropriated histories and to include their traditional understandings and knowledge in expressing, analyzing, and reimagining themselves in a modern world. This practice is essential from both a cultural and political standpoint as explained by theorists such as bell hooks

and, more recently, by Paula M. L. Moya in her concept of “Postpositivist Realist Theory,” both of which are discussed in the introduction to this dissertation. Supporting these theorists, in his essay “Writing American Indian Politics,” Native scholar Sean Teuton explains that although for a time during the 1990s, certain Native scholars embraced postmodern individualism in establishing identity, “[tending] to consider external social and material forces, such as the imposition of colonial languages and the displacement of tribal peoples from their lands, to erode [the] ability to write with indigenous agency” (114), today’s Native scholars “question the usefulness of postmodern theories and fiction” (116), realizing the importance of “[recovering the] relational view of social location, identity, experience, and political transformation as they build the Indian theories of our times” (116). Like these recent scholars, Teuton “[submits] that Native scholars exchange the mixed-blood [postmodern identity] and begin to discuss the merit of particular social values to serve [Native] ethical goals” [117]. These social values, ethical goals and political concerns that must be discussed are made evident in an essential way through modern Native literature.

Returning to the analysis of the described approaches by Brooks and Trefzer to incorporating Native cultural understandings into modern texts and academic discussions, it is clear that although both propose incorporating Native stories into southern histories, each chooses discernable, diametrically opposed stances on the importance of Native literatures and Native understandings. A closer theoretical examination of Trefzer’s approach reveals that it is unsound in that it dismisses on multiple levels the histories and ways of creating knowledge that it then attempts to incorporate for its own theoretical purposes. Further, while it is academically possible to examine Native representations in texts written by traditional Southern authors by employing Native theoretical ways of creating knowledge and understanding, studies such as

Trefzer's are also fundamentally problematic in that tribal representations in southern novels are usually confined to the individual – an ironically non-tribal way of presenting stories – and are based on a fictional southern collective representation of multiple tribal histories rather than on tribally specific cultural practices and ways of creating knowledge. Thus, in order to avoid academic affirmation of fictional colonized appropriations of tribal histories and knowledges and in order to understand the social and ethical goals presented through Native texts, Native texts must be employed to explore Native understandings and to facilitate the cultural re-imagining of traditional Native values. In a practical example of the above premise — namely, that Native texts more accurately represent Native peoples and their ways of creating knowledge and that Native theoretical practices must be applied in order to analyze the meaning created in Native texts — the remainder of this chapter will present a case study that contrasts a Western theoretical interpretation with one based on the practices of Native literary scholars.

In understanding the repercussions of Western theoretically based understandings on Native texts by Native authors, it is important to examine Native texts which have been interpreted both from a Western and a Native theoretical perspective in order to evaluate the validity of both methods. Juxtaposing these theoretical approaches, the remainder of this chapter will analyze the predisposition for misreading and culturally biased conclusions given Westernized theoretical interpretations of a Native text, LeAnne Howe's *Shell Shaker*. A traditional summary of *Shell Shaker* is problematic, as Howe does not focus on a single character or group of characters but, rather, on the relationships between multiple characters, both in the present and through points in colonial history. Beginning with descriptions of cultural consequences experienced by the Choctaw people during the period of early contact, the novel intertwines these experiences with similar issues being faced by Choctaw people today, while also including perspectives from the

era of forced boarding schools and the individualist movement. The novel focuses on colonial systems and outcomes that inhibit the practice of tribalism such as capitalistic greed, individualism, and the devaluing of women. In an analytical examination of *Shell Shaker*, then, it is most important that the reader understand that Howe's novel portrays these multiple characters for the purpose of depicting relational Choctaw colonial experiences, both past and present, while also suggesting a path for the future reimagining of Choctaw culture. With these foundational aspects of the novel in mind, I will contrast a Westernized reading of Howe's *Shell Shaker* with my own reading, which is based on tribally specific Native theoretical understandings and intellectual practices, considering aspects of tribalogy, colonialism, and the process of cultural reimagining.

One example of a Westernized theoretical interpretation of a Native text can be found in a 2008 article published in *American Studies Journal*, "'Primitive' Discourse: Aspects of Contemporary North American Indian Representations of the Irish and of Contemporary Irish Representations of North American Indians." In this article, author Joy Porter derisively describes LeAnne Howe's *Shell Shaker* as "a comic novel" with "an obvious cipher" (77), an unrealistically essentialist text that relies on potentially harmful "[stereotypes]" which she believes never go beyond "re-presentation" of Choctaw culture (79). Specifically addressing what she believes to be essentialism, Porter takes issue with Howe's "[determination] to reaffirm the indestructible nature of American Indian culture" (78) and with Howe's presentation of "Choctaw culture [as] everlasting and more resilient than its recent colonizers have ever imagined" (79). In her rejection of Howe's assertions, however, Porter erroneously interprets Howe's description of Choctaw cultural resilience to mean that a return to precolonial cultural practices is possible or to be desired rather than as Howe's expression of Native Choctaw

spirituality and a tribalographical representation of cultural reimagining. Consequently, in these assertions, Porter demonstrates not only a Western individualist, poststructuralist lack of understanding of Native theoretical practices, but also a casual dismissal of Native ways of knowing. Confronting scholars like Porter who summarily dismiss the importance of Native texts while employing Westernized methods of interpretation, Native scholar Craig Womack confirms that “the most consistent and damaging critique against Native intellectuals involves labeling them as ‘essentialist,’” a label, as has been demonstrated, that Porter erroneously assigns to Howe through her analysis of *Shell Shaker*. Yet, instead of presenting an essentialist text that “[makes] universal, overarching assumptions about Indians” — as, ironically, Porter herself does in her article by grouping all Native tribes into a single representative group — Howe’s *Shell Shaker*, in keeping with the Native intellectual practices described by Womack, “[delves] into [the] particulars” of Choctaw history and culture, “[avoiding] the kind of literary work that has been so very popular” among non-Natives who are depicting Native cultures through literature in which people “avoid historical research and base their criticism exclusively on tropes and symbols” (7).

Conversely, describing her own use of Native theoretical understandings and intellectual practices, Howe, in her essay “The Business of Theory Making,” describes *Shell Shaker* as occurring within a genre she designates “tribalogy.” Similar to Native scholar Louis Owens’ theory of cultural reimagining in which Native stories from both the present and past are employed to reclaim Native histories and to reimagine contemporary Native identity, Howe’s tribalogy genre describes Native stories that “pull together all of the elements of the storyteller’s tribe, meaning the people, the land, multiple characters, and all their manifestations and revelations, and connect these in past, present and future milieu” as a venue for contemporary cultural

understandings (“The Business of Theory Making” 330). With Howe’s definition in mind, I examine *Shell Shaker* as a work of tribalogy told from a Choctaw rather than a Western perspective, as through this genre of tribalogy Howe describes past events, incorporates current lived realities, and warns against future Euro-American based ploys designed to facilitate the self-destruction of the Choctaw as a people. Significantly, in all of these descriptions, Howe depicts the acceptance of capitalistic values and of patriarchal domination as two of the primary historical and contemporary conditions which have resulted in Choctaw cultural self-destruction, thereby initiating, unlike Trefzer, a genuine “critic of the colonizing and mechanizing impulses of U.S. capitalism” as they affected Southeastern Choctaw people (11).

Speaking specifically of her novel *Shell Shaker* as a work of tribalogy, Howe emphasizes that “[her] characters are doing some of the same things that Choctaws have done in the past ... [linking] the stories they’ve heard about their ancestors with the stories they are living” and by “this linking of the narratives, [breathing] meaning into their world” (331). This linking of historically important oral stories with currently lived narratives and modern written literatures remains important in reimagining culture for removed Southeastern tribes, as was evidenced in detail for the Cherokee in my earlier discussion of *Pushing the Bear*. However, unlike Glancy’s *Pushing the Bear*, which presents the Cherokee American colonial experience, it is important to note that Howe establishes that her characters, just like her historical ancestors, are both “international and intertribal, reflecting a larger worldview that would have been as important in the past as it is in the present” for the Choctaw (330). Therefore, rather than dismissing Howe’s *Shell Shaker* because of her inclusion of international relationships as Porter does, it is essential that Western scholars research and fully understand both Choctaw historical and present-day international experiences which will provide the necessary background to



understand that *Shell Shaker* can and should be interpreted as a work of tribalogy and as an accurate reflection of Choctaw historical experiences. Speaking to the historical and cultural representations in *Shell Shaker*, Howe asserts that “while [*Shell Shaker*] is ‘fiction,’ much of the history is as accurate as [she] could interpret it, especially the skirmishes in 1738 and 1739 between the Chickasaws, who supported the English, and the Choctaws, who supported the French” (“The Business of Theory Making” 336). In this same essay, Howe includes examples of traditional “Choctaw stories collected by ethnographers” that “[informed her] contemporary written story” in *Shell Shaker* (335). Greg O’Brien authenticates Howe’s assertion of accuracy in *Pre-removal Choctaw History*, stating that “though a work of fiction, *Shell Shaker* is based on deep research in historical sources and on first-hand experience with Choctaw cultural values” (16). Yet contemporary non-Native scholars such as Porter have summarily dismissed both the accuracy and the value of Howe’s novel, failing to explore and understand these historical and cultural connections apparent to Howe and therefore included in *Shell Shaker*. In fact, understanding the international connection presented in *Shell Shaker* is imperative to understanding the novel, as this connection reflects the Native understanding of circular time presented throughout the novel — with past events tied closely with and affecting current realities — and as it depicts the similar effects of capitalist corruption on colonized peoples who were connected through historical ties. Thus, Howe’s depiction of the Choctaw and the Irish as an enemy of the British and of the British overall predatory capitalistic values and practices plays a justifiably significant role in the novel, just as it played a significant role in Choctaw history. Later in this chapter, I will examine the consequences to tribal Choctaw culture both through those who embraced these British colonial values and through those who attempted to impede them. First, however, I want to specifically address Porter’s

misinterpretation of Howe's inclusion of the international Irish influence presented in *Shell Shaker*.

Applying a Western theoretical perspective, Porter argues that “the James Joyce we are more familiar with is in one sense a surprising figure for a Native American author to empathize with” as he was a writer who “acknowledged that British and Roman imperialism had irrevocably shattered indigenous Irish culture and who held that to try to revive it was to immerse oneself in kitsch and foolishly to attempt to navigate ‘by the broken lights of ancient myth’” (77). However, in this comparison it is evident that Porter does not understand the difference between the Western concept of cultural revival which focuses on specific identical practices as implemented in their specific original form and Native cultural reimagining, which emphasizes values over exact practices, stressing the incorporation of traditional cultural values into modern Native realities. Moreover, Porter does not understand both the significance of the colonial connections between the two cultures and Howe's use of the character James Joyce. Howe is not attempting to express empathy with famous Irish author James Joyce in *Shell Shaker* as Porter suggests; rather, Howe identifies with those Irish who similarly suffered under the practices of British colonialism as seen through her inclusion of corresponding instances of racism, historical injustices, and assimilated capitalist corruption.

In *Disturbing Calculations —The Economics of Identity in Postcolonial Southern Literature*, Melanie Benson astutely describes the colonizing forces that invaded Southeastern Native tribes such as the Choctaw as “a reflection of a widespread imperial, colonial drive to condition, calculate, and control those perceived to be darker, weaker, and lesser across the globe” (165). Howe, employing the genre of tribalogy, acknowledges these past racial-based colonial practices described by Benson and demonstrates her historical understanding of

the comparable global colonial atrocities and their similar consequences, paralleling the Irish physical suffering and cultural struggle under British colonialism with that experienced by the Choctaw tribe. Describing these similar colonial experiences in her article “Ireland’s Troubling History: British Colonialism’s Effect on Irish Research,” Jean Roth significantly depicts original Irish society as being tribal, much like the Native tribes of the Southeast, with the country ruled by multiple “Gaelic chieftains” (1). Similarly, employing methods identical to those later utilized in attempts to deculturalize the Choctaw, according to Roth, the English imposed their own “law, language, and culture” on the Irish, forbidding traditional language, cultural, and religious practices, and implementing “Anglicanism as an institutional religion” (1). Katie Kane discusses several authors who share Roth’s perspective in an article for *Cultural Studies* titled “‘Will Come Forth in Tongues and Fury’: Relocating Irish Cultural Studies.” Kane quotes Glen T. Morris from his article “International Law and Politics: Toward a Right to Self-Determination for Indigenous Peoples” in which he confirms that “English colonizing doctrines, perhaps the most enduring for Indigenous peoples, were employed first on the Irish and then exported to the Western hemisphere” (62). Further, Kane acknowledges that English colonial forces created “the stereotypes of ‘barbarity’ and ‘incivility’ from the ‘native’ population of Ireland” and then transferred this approach to the Native populations of the Americas for “reasons of social discredit” which would aid them as they attempted to justify brutal colonial practices (106). Later, moving on from ideologies of social to cultural inferiority, Nicholas Canny notes in “The Ideology of English Colonization: From Ireland to America,” “that the colonists in the New World “used the same pretexts for the extermination of the Indians as their counterparts had used in the 1560s and 1570s for the slaughter of number of the Irish” (qtd Kane 108).

However, with complete extermination impractical, as was the case with the Southeastern Choctaw tribes, Irish chieftains were eventually given the choice between death and removal to an undesirable land in the West, “the western Irish province” that similar to the rock and clay soil of Oklahoma “had the poorest land in Ireland” (Roth 2). Just as many Choctaw starved on their journey to the western territory while occupying soldiers were well supplied, many Irish would starve in a land where “there was no shortage of food,” where “eight ships a day filled with food [were] being exported to England” (4). Roth concludes that “it was not simply a ‘famine’ but a starvation based on systematic British exploitation of the Irish people, inaction in the face of the potato crop failure, and a vindictive, racist attitude toward the Irish,” citing that, like the many Choctaw who died while forced to walk on what would come to be known as The Trail of Tears, “nearly two million [Irish] died out of a population of eight million” (4). Roth draws on Frank O’Connor memorable statement that “famine is a useful word when you do not wish to use words like genocide and extermination,” words familiarly associated with the Choctaw colonial experience as well (4).

Still, despite the obvious similar experiences at the hands of British colonialists described by both Choctaw and Irish historians, what Porter more importantly does not grasp is that Howe includes the Irish in her novel because historically her Choctaw ancestors purposefully included themselves in the Irish colonial experience; thereby, each became a part of the other’s history, a part of each other’s tribalogy, a part of a circular experience through time. Howe introduces this Choctaw/Irish connection early in the novel, immediately after introducing the Native idea of circular time expressed at the death of Shakbatina which was incited by the acts of Red Shoes, moving into the present corruption of Redford McAlester, yet still circling back in time to the connections of the past, significantly linking the experiences and lessons of time. Later in this

chapter, I will discuss the modern corruption of this international relationship; however, focusing for now on connections to the past, it is important to note that in the novel *Howe*, through the character of Red McAlester, immediately makes readers aware of the “potato famine anniversary” when “the old chiefs donated seven hundred dollars to the starving Irish in 1847” and of the coinciding modern reenactments of the Great Irish Potato Famine of 1847 and the Trail of Tears, reenactments which would occur in 1990 in County Mayo and in 1992 as a part of a walk from Oklahoma to Mississippi (25). Here, *Howe* draws from her own international knowledge of the sacrifice of the initial Choctaw monetary gift to the Irish which came shortly after their own removal, starvation, and impoverishment in 1831, a sacrifice she will later juxtapose against a corrupt, modern Choctaw involvement with the Irish in an attempt to demonstrate through the content of her novel the need for modern Choctaw reimagining of traditional cultural values. Referencing international historical events once again, this time through the character of Tema, *Howe* also derides the British colonial idea of a superior cultural civilization, an idea devised as an excuse for the brutal British treatment of the Choctaw and the Irish. Tema argues that although “the English have had Shakespeare, [their boosted representative of cultural excellence] “for five hundred years ... it didn’t stop [them] from colonizing the world” (36). Speaking of the British dismissal of Choctaw human and cultural significance, *Howe*’s character Isaac Billy “is amazed that the English [journalist is] paying any attention to the Choctaws,” even given the violent death of their chief, as Choctaw tragedies would be historically unimportant to them; however, “he understands why the Irish are interested in [the Choctaw]. They have something in common: colonialism and potatoes” (53). Finally, in explaining the history of her legal case, *Howe*’s character of Auda recites actual historical occurrences, encouraging Gore to “remember, [the] tribe gave money to the Irish in 1847 for

famine relief. The Irish were starving because English bureaucrats withheld food from them. The English, who would become the ruling class of the Americans, forced Indians to walk on the Trail of Tears, and they withheld food and supplies from them” (94). Through such dialogues from *Shell Shaker*, Howe emphasizes the similar circumstances and experiences faced by the Choctaw and the Irish. Further, she juxtaposes the greed and sense of superiority held by the English, against the communal, sacrificial nature of the Choctaw people, and it is from this point that Howe’s circular tale of tribalogy launches into outcomes of these colliding values.

According to Native scholar Louis Owens, the “attempt at the center of American Indian fiction” is “recovering or rearticulation of an identity, a process dependent upon a rediscovered sense of place as well as community” (5). For Howe, this place is a Choctaw place and is therefore specific to Choctaw cultural beliefs, values, and practices. While Western-based scholarly analysis such as that presented in the article by Joy Porter combine all Native tribes together, stressing the importance of dealing with what they see as common modern social and economic problems in a singular, often paternalistic fashion, such scholars do not consider that these issues can and should be addressed in very tribal, culturally specific ways. Throughout her present day descriptions of the Choctaw experiences of her characters, Howe juxtaposes the colonial influences of capitalistic greed and standards of patriarchal control with traditional Choctaw communal tribalism as propelled by a matriarchal society.

Howe’s ultimate juxtaposition of the values of Choctaw communal, matriarchal tribalism and Western capitalistic, patriarchal values is presented through the characters of Redford McAlester and Susan Billy. Through Redford McAlester, Howe presents the Western patriarchal paternalistic attitude that assistance may be given or withheld at the pleasure of a male power figure. McAlester’s indifferent, contemptuous wielding of power is most evident in his dismissal

of Fred Tubby's request that the tribe assist him by "[drilling] him a water well" (84). In keeping with Choctaw communal values, Tubby "[cultivates] large tracts of land for corn, beans, squash, and pumpkins," traditional Choctaw foods, and then "[gives] away the produce to single Choctaw mothers" (84). In contrast, causally dismissing the needs of the Choctaw mothers he has been elected to care for, Redford McAlester chides Tubby, replying that "this is not a welfare state, Mr. Tubby, we can't help you" (84). However, while serving the same food grown by Tubby, food that "Choctaws had eaten before contact with whites," Susan Billy attempts to shame Auda for her support of McAlester by pointing out that "even though McAlester knew Fred Tubby was growing Indian crops for Choctaw women, he still refused to help him" and by asserting that "in essence McAlester was starving his own people" (84). Yet, although he is unwilling to help those of his people who are currently in need of food, McAlester, in a true show of patriarchal paternalistic power, instead provides Choctaw funds to those outside of the tribe in support of the ideology of fighting colonial abuse and past starvation based on his personal ideologies and desires. Although the Choctaw "elderly have dire health care needs," and the tribe "can't hire a competent surgeon for the hospital in Talihina," McAlester "[funds] the Irish Republican Army," indulging his personal interests, as "Red appreciated historical ironies," and "helping the I.R.A. get their revenge on the English was his own little joke" (94). Ultimately, even Auda admits McAlester's propensity for patriarchal paternalism in his decision making, acknowledging that "he'd reach into his pocket and give away all the cash he had on him, which infuriated [her], 'cause he could turn down his own people but give to strangers," based on his own whims (113). Through McAlester's obsession with assisting others over his own people, particularly the IRA, Howe presents McAlester as having been internally colonized. She has her character Adair specifically define the condition of internal

colonialization by stating that “the things the English and the French taught the Indians [are] to love foreign things above all else ... If you think foreigners’ things, ideas, and religions are better than what your own culture has, then you’re internally colonized. Then you don’t care about your own things, culture, or land” (162). Privileging the ideological battles of the Irish over the physical needs of the Choctaw people, McAlester clearly fits this description; moreover, in his willingness to support “the gambling business that had, with the stroke of a pen, mortgaged a thousand years of Choctaw sovereignty – in one night,” McAlester shows a casual disregard for his own culture and his own people (108).

Further, Howe makes it clear that even in acts of seeming philanthropy McAlester’s decisions are not predominantly altruistic in nature. McAlester’s character is defined by a predilection toward a capitalist patriarchal paternalism which focuses not only on flaunting hierarchical power relationships but also on material acquisitions which will support the hierarchical entity. Consequently, his desire for power and his focus on the entity rather than on the needs of those it is ultimately supposed to serve leads to greed and corruption in McAlester. Certainly Howe reflects both of these outcomes through Redford McAlester who was accountable to the Feds, and to a large corporation, but not to his own people” (112). Affirming McAlester’s privileging of his office and corporate corruption as well as his disregard for the Choctaw people, Howe’s Auda reveals that

over the years the dirty tricks of [McAlester’s] administration – the lies, double-dealing with corrupt outsiders – had consumed them all. Sometimes his political enemies died. Other times they moved out of the community. In some instances he had them “de-tribed.” Their voter registration cards were revoked, and the official letter from the tribe bluntly read: “No longer enrolled,”

as though his official word could alter their identity as a Choctaw (22). Moreover, opposing anyone who might question his actions and authority, “McAlester had passed a law barring



anyone from speaking at the tribal council meetings, except the chief,” a move diametrically opposed to the Choctaw tradition of communal decision making but very much in keeping with the practices of a Western patriarchy (58). Also, proving himself an adept capitalist as well as a patriarchal leader, McAlester views the Choctaw participation in the ceremony for the Irish potato famine anniversary as “one interest-bearing media account we can’t let go of,” irreverently announcing that because of this opportunity for financial gain – as opposed to as an act of respect - he is “so thankful the old chiefs donated seven hundred dollars to the starving Irish in 1847” that he could “kiss all their graves” (24). Throughout the novel, Howe presents McAlester as “a true Osana, what Choctaws abhorred most. A predator of his own people,” (24) a bloodsucker [who] always hungers for more,” (2) a man corrupted by assimilation to Western capitalism. As Howe’s Isaac Billy points out,” McAlester wasn’t all bad. He turned bad. Greed got him” (67).

Howe significantly presents this colonial capitalistic corruption as an element problematically experienced by both the Choctaw native government and by the organization known as the I.R.A. Yet, Howe’s purpose in presenting this connection proves to be another element of the novel misunderstood by Joy Porter in her assessment of *Shell Shaker*, as Porter views it instead as Howe’s “cipher” employed so that “the novel resolves happily,” with James Joyce facilitating both Auda’s vindication and Adair’s romantic reconciliation with Gore (77). In this assertion, Porter shows a lack of understanding of both Choctaw cultural beliefs and Native literary practices on multiple levels. First of all, by focusing on a simple romantic reconciliation, Adair’s reconciliation with Gore, Porter does not examine Howe’s novel in its entirety, as such an examination must conclude that Howe is portraying an example of the Native understanding of time as having a circular nature in which events from the past touch and

influence events in the present. Because Howe's novel depicts Choctaw cultural beliefs and understandings, the events and consequences experienced by Adair and Gore as well as all of the characters in *Shell Shaker* are outcomes not simply of their current physical experiences but instead of their common links to a spiritual past. In an interview with Howe for Oxford University Press, interviewer Kirstin Squint notes that *Shell Shaker* "[deals] with intersections between historical and contemporary figures" which she believes is made "possible through a series of century-crossing ceremonies" (218). Howe responds to Squint by acknowledging that

for almost all of us Native-centric-types (my tongue is in my cheek), the past is ever-present whether it's through the ceremonies, ghosts, or land. Think of it land is past tense and present tense at the same time. The land is actually a wonderful place in physics that is all things at once – past, present, and future – so for me, I can't imagine a worldview without it or without action that unites all these things at once. (219)

Here, Howe is expressing her view that the past and present reconnect as one, particularly through land and events, and this is the basis for her novel. Indeed, a close examination reveals that all of the characters and events in *Shell Shaker* are closely connected with past Choctaws and the events they experienced. Since it is not the purpose of this chapter to discuss this particular aspect of Howe's novel, I will not present an in-depth analysis of the characters and plot in relation to the ways in which Howe connects past and present people and events; however, acknowledging Howe's Native based intent in the way in which she presents her characters does verify that Porter's Western based analysis of *Shell Shaker* has led her to simplistic and erroneous conclusions about the characters, the action, and the message of the novel as a whole. Moreover, Porter misinterprets Howe's main purpose in using the connection between the Choctaw tribal government and the organization known as the I.R.A., the purpose being to demonstrate that embracing the methods of colonial capitalistic patriarchal paternalism corrupts and obscures the purposes of both organizations, organizations which ironically profess

themselves to be leading their respective efforts to reimagine and reclaim the culture of a group of tribal people. Much as McAlester — in an act of patriarchal colonialism — has placed priority on the tribal organization itself rather than on its service to the people, Joyce gives evidence to Gore which will implicate the I.R.A. because he “is angry with his own organization,” knowing that “the money that McAlester paid them didn’t go toward” the stated goals of the organization, but to “the I.R.A. bureaucracy,” which Joyce seems to suggest has turned into another colonial capitalistic patriarchal organization (208).

Based on the evidence I have presented, it is clear that in keeping with Native literary practices and Choctaw traditional cultural values, Howe’s *Shell Shaker* focuses on “understanding relationships,” (Fixico xiii) on how “asking for more than a person can use might incur misfortune,” (Fixico 54) and on how “although Native Americans are individuals, the cultural emphasis is on the group over the individual so that collectivism is more influential; [making] collectivism in such communalism [preferable] over individualism” (Fixico 66). Howe presents this focus in an attempt to “[recover] or [rearticulate]” a Choctaw identity, seeking a “rediscovered sense of place as well as community,” which is the “attempt at the center of American Indian fiction” (Owens 5). However, in order to fully rearticulate Choctaw communal cultural values through *Shell Shaker*, it is also essential that Howe depict the Choctaw as a matrilineal society where women hold great power and influence.

Although Redford McAlester had believed himself to hold definitive power over the Choctaw tribe and over his own circumstances, when considering “the fire [and] the chief’s bloody death,” Isaac Billy concludes that “like all other major events in his life,” these occurrences must somehow “revolve around Indian women,” noting that these events “occurred during the autumnal equinox” and that “of course, Tek inhashi! “ or “Girls’ Month is a time

when things break open,” and “when major changes happen,” when “the old is sloughed off” and “the new begins” (61-62). Supporting her Uncle Isaac’s belief that Choctaw life events and existence flows from the power of women, Howe’s Tema affirms that in Choctaw culture, “women are the essence of Mother Earth. [Choctaw women] create life and, during the Green Corn Festival, they shake shells to reconnect with all living things” (152). Further, as “the seventh daughter of a seventh daughter” who mysteriously survives and is connected through time with the female leader Shakbatina around whom the action of the novel is structured, Howe’s character Susan Billy specifically depicts a powerful, female spiritual force in *Shell Shaker*, especially as she is also intimately linked with the trickster Sarah Bernhardt and thus is ultimately responsible for helping to dismantle the patriarchal power of the mob over the Choctaw tribe. Aside from spiritual power, Howe portrays Choctaw women as still holding the ultimate political power within their communities as well. Howe’s Auda explains that “if you want to get elected in Choctaw country, you must have the women on your side” (21). This political power of women is also evident in the character of Susan Billy as she “stands extremely erect and self-assured, . . . rallying the Choctaw tribal elders and the young people, — “a dangerous combination” of wisdom and energy — by calling out, “Anyone who believes there’s no power on earth who’ll return Choctaw land to the Choctaws except the casino Mafia, I have news for you. We’re going to take back our tribe, our lands, and kick out the gangsters. Just wait and see” (109). Here, in her physical stance and through her words, Howe presents Susan Billy as a matriarchal force.

Yet, in juxtaposition with Redford McAlester’s paternalistic, patriarchal practices, through her depiction of the character of Susan Billy, Howe both portrays and privileges a traditional Choctaw communal, matriarchal tribalism that emphasizes the collective good. For

example, although as a teenager Auda can think only of escaping the Billy household to pursue what she believes to be a greater cause, to be a part of something more important from a Western perspective, Auda also significantly remembers the Billy house, under her mother Susan's influence, as "a kind of Choctaw day care center for adults, and children, and stray animals," remembering it as "always jammed with Indians needing something" (85). Through this memory, Howe makes clear to the reader that in keeping with tribal matriarchal values, Susan Billy uses whatever she has physically, emotionally, and materially to meet the needs of the people of her tribe. In her descriptions of Susan Billy's service to the tribe, Howe notes the personal nature of Susan's service, stressing the importance of her human interconnectedness in meeting tribal needs. In an example of one of the relationships that Susan Billy develops by helping others, Buster - who saves the Billy family from the mob outside as the family attempts to enter the clinic - states in "a voice filled with love" that "Aunt Susan practically raised [him] and [his] sister after [their] mother died," remembering that "when [he] had only one pair of hand-me-down jeans, [Susan] brought [him his] first new pair of Levis" and proclaiming that "[he'd] do anything for her" (125). It is at this point that Howe's Auda finally realizes the value of her mother's communal tribalism, her human interconnectedness to others in the tribe. Auda "realizes now that no matter how many dirt roads she and McAlester paved, no matter how many gas stations and subdivisions they built for the elderly with the casino money, it could never compete with the simple act of giving away a pair of jeans" (125). She remembers how after the death of her father, her mother "took a job as a grocery clerk and went on to raise [her], her two sisters, and many other Choctaw children whose parents were down on their luck, in jail, or dead" (118). In her willingness to feed, to clothe, to support, and to raise her fellow Choctaw,

sharing whatever little she had, Susan Billy presents Howe's example of one who has preserved traditional Choctaw values in a reimagined modern culture.

The discussion above makes clear that, in keeping with established Native literary practice, a large part of Howe's purpose in writing *Shell Shaker* is to stress the importance of the continuation of a reimagined Choctaw tribalism for the purpose of the cultural survival of the tribe and the physical survival of its people. From the past, Nitakechi expresses Howe's warning against cultural assimilation to Western patriarchal cultural structures, capitalistic greed, and individualism by declaring that "the foreigners will never be strong enough to destroy the [Choctaw], the [Choctaw] will do it for them" (11). From the present, Auda also expresses the challenges faced by the Choctaw people in maintaining themselves as a culture and as a tribe in the face of cultural assimilation. Arguing with Gore she states,

Somebody's got to stay home. Maintain the land, maintain the community, if we All move away and do our own thing, who is left to be the tribe? ... Individual Indians can do whatever they want, but not without a price. We, the Choctaw people, are the assets of our tribe – not the buildings, not the HUD houses, not our tribal bank accounts. Chances are, though, if all the Indians are off doing their own thing, tribalism will die. I don't have all the answers, but I've seen what happens when a tribal leader is accountable to the Feds, and to a large corporation, but not to his own people. (112-113)

Further, Howe ultimately reinforces the above idea that Choctaws should privilege tribalism and Choctaw cultural values and practices through the character of Delores Love. Through Delores Love, Howe illuminates a path for the return to a reimagined practice of Choctaw cultural values and traditions. Howe depicts the traditional ritualized bone-picking ceremony performed by Koi Chitto for his wife Shakbatina in detail in the novel; yet, juxtaposed against these ancient burial customs no longer practiced by the Choctaw, Howe also presents a form of this burial ceremony, an adaptation to suit modern Choctaw circumstances, a reimagining of Choctaw burial practices that has moved forward from ancient times and which also serves to "[prepare] Choctaws for

their journey to the spirit world” (144). Howe’s Delores first practices this reimagined form of the bone picking ceremony during which she will “[lay] out the dead [and sing] the soothing words that [will] coax an unyielding body into its transformation into dust, as she buries her mother” (144). Before she can honor her mother with this traditional burial, however, Delores must go to the lone remaining elderly Choctaw woman who can provide instruction on their practices, a woman who rightly claims that “Delores is” the one we’ve been waiting for,” the one who will serve as a cultural liaison to her own generation and as a conduit for cultural knowledge to future Choctaw (149). Through the lone remaining elderly woman who remembers the traditional burial songs and practices, Howe depicts the fragility of continuing Choctaw tribalism; however, Howe also clearly depicts the possibility for cultural renewal. Delores’ role in the preservation and continuation of Choctaw cultural practices is evident, as after attending her mother’s funeral and witnessing Delores [begin] the funeral cry, just as Nowatima had instructed [and] then [sing] four songs that Nowatima had taught her . . . Choctaws from other towns [begin] asking her to sing at their relatives’ funerals” (150). Committed to the preservation and continuation of these reimagined Choctaw burial practices and “[realizing] she [doesn’t] know enough,” Delores “[returns] weekly to the Billy house to sit with Nowatima. She [continues] learning the old songs and, without realizing it, she [starts] a revival of Choctaw music and traditions,” as “many other women [begin] coming to Nowatima to learn traditional songs and rituals” (150). In this portrayal of Delores learning and practicing a reimagined form of ancient Choctaw customs and thus encouraging others to follow her lead, Howe reinforces the idea that “[Choctaws] have to live the life to know the ways” (145) and that preserving these reimagined yet traditional ways is more valuable than anything Choctaws may gain through assimilation to Western practices and beliefs. Although Delores has had a successful Hollywood

career - one considered enviable from a Western perspective - ultimately privileging her identity as a Choctaw, Delores concludes that “her role as a modern *foni miko*, bone picker, is the only useful thing she’s ever done” (146). Thus, Delores provides Howe’s role model for the importance of privileging and preserving a reimagined Choctaw tribalism.

This chapter’s analysis of LeAnne Howe’s *Shell Shaker* ultimately reveals the inadequacy of Western literary understandings and practices when applied in an effort to understand Native texts. Only by applying Native ways of knowing and Native literary theoretical understandings and approaches can Native texts such as Howe’s *Shell Shaker* be adequately and accurately explicated. Further, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, only by employing texts which express the reimagined cultural practices and ways of creating knowledge accepted by Southeastern tribes when examining the practices and beliefs of those Native Southeastern tribes can academic conclusions prove relevant or provide insight into that culture’s reimagined tribalism. In her speaking of the Choctaw with Kirstin Squint, Howe asserts that “we still are people who have maintained our culture as we change to meet the new centuries sprawling before us” (220). Thus, just as her character Auda — who in defending the authenticity of her knowledge of the tribal history of Southeastern tribes against a white woman who presents a colonialized version of history emphatically asserts that she is not “one of those perverse William Faulkner Indians, a mute character of the Southern literati,” — Howe as well refuses to remain mute in depicting the condition of her own people (*Shell Shaker* 46).

Purposefully, in *Shell Shaker*, Howe connects the removed Choctaw people to those who remained in the southeast in defense against those who would appropriate their history and deny their place there. Again in her interview with Squint, Howe “[reminds] the people who live in [Choctaw] territories today” that rather than representing the history of the South, those who are



today often presented as traditional southerners are “newcomers” in these ancient places,” places where in ancient times the Choctaw “sprang up out of the Lower Mississippi Valley (223). Thus, the Choctaw and other Southeastern tribes as well have the inherent right to their own cultural understandings, their own voice in expressing their culture, and their own interpretive theories in analyzing these written cultural representations. As noted earlier in this chapter and in the introduction to this dissertation, this does not imply that Native peoples from Southeastern tribes are attempting to return to and maintain all of their traditional practices and the lifestyle which existed in their original Southeastern home. Rather, they are reimagining their traditional cultural values in a modern society. One way Native peoples are accomplishing an analysis of the role of traditional Native values in modern culture in order to facilitate this reimagining is through Native literature written from the perspective of Native authors and analyzed employing Native theoretical practices which acknowledge Native understandings. Therefore, writings and examinations of Native texts which mirror the practices of Western postcolonial southern studies are not reflective of the intentions of Native texts. Rather, they present the broken reflection of an appropriated voice that impairs the ability of Native peoples to receive deserved academic recognition; to write their own history; and to reimagine their cultural identities through cultural values, seeking social and political justice.

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