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Voices of the Land and Self-Love: Linda Hogan's Poetry as a Reflection in Indigenous Eco-Poetry

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أصوات الأرض وحب الذات: شعر ليندا هوغان كانعكاس في الشعر البيئي الأصلي

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Abstract:

An influential figure in contemporary Indigenous writing and the emerging field of Indigenous eco-poetry is Linda Hogan, a Chickasaw poet, author, essayist, and environmentalist. Her writing deftly weaves together the themes of land, identity, history, and healing, offering us a comprehensive examination of the relationship between the wellbeing of the Indigenous self and the health of the Earth. Hogan's poetry is a superb illustration of Indigenous eco-poetry, in which the "voice of the land" is a component of the path to decolonial healing and self-love. By closely examining a few poems and applying critical frameworks from Indigenous studies, ecocriticism, and decolonial theory, this study demonstrates how Hogan expresses a relational ontology through language, images, and Chickasaw cosmologies. In this ontology, listening to and speaking for the land becomes a potent means of reclaiming one's culture, asserting one's own identity, and resisting the forces of historical trauma and environmental destruction. In addition to demonstrating how ecological loss and colonial violence occur, Hogan's work actively forges paths toward recovery. She views self-love, for instance, as an act that is essentially ecological and political and results from one's relationship with the non-human world. **Keywords:** Linda Hogan, Indigenous Literature, Eco-Poetry, Ecocriticism, Indigenous Ecocriticism, Environmental Literature, Chickasaw, Self-Love, Land Ethic, Decolonial, Relationality, Healing, Poetry.

المستخلص:

تُعد ليندا هوغان، الشاعرة والمؤلفة والكاتبة والمدافعة عن البيئة من قبيلة تشيكاسو، شخصية مؤثرة في الكتابة الأصلية المعاصرة ومجال الشعر البيئي الأصلي الناشئ. تتسج كتاباتها ببراعة مواضيع الأرض والهوية والتاريخ والشفاء، مقدمة لنا دراسة شاملة للعلاقة بين رفاية الذات الأصلية وصحة الأرض. يُعد شعر هوغان مثالاً رائعاً على الشعر البيئي الأصلي، حيث يُعد "صوت الأرض" جزءاً من مسار الشفاء من الاستعمار وحب الذات. من خلال دراسة دقيقة لبعض القصائد وتطبيق أطر نقدية من دراسات السكان الأصليين، والنقد البيئي، ونظرية ما بعد الاستعمار، توضح هذه الدراسة كيف تُعبر هوغان عن وجودية علاقاتية من خلال اللغة والصور ونظريات تشيكاسو الكونية. في هذه الوجودية، يُصبح الإنصات إلى الأرض والتحدث باسمها وسيلة فعالة لاستعادة ثقافة المرء، وتأكيد هويته، ومقاومة قوى الصدمات التاريخية والدمار البيئي. بالإضافة إلى توضيح كيفية حدوث الخسارة البيئية والعنف الاستعماري، يُمهّد عمل هوغان مسارات نحو التعافي. فهي تنظر إلى حب الذات، على سبيل المثال، كفعل بيئي وسياسي في جوهره، وينتج عن علاقة المرء بالعالم غير البشري. **الكلمات المفتاحية:** ليندا هوغان، أدب السكان الأصليين، الشعر البيئي، النقد البيئي، النقد البيئي الأصلي، الأدب البيئي، تشيكاسو، حب الذات، أخلاقيات الأرض، ما بعد الاستعمار، العلائقية، الشفاء، الشعر

Introduction:

In addition to being a form of poetry, indigenous eco-poetry is a significant means of communicating resistance, knowledge, and worldview. It demonstrates how the landscapes, ecosystems, and non-human relatives that have provided for Indigenous peoples for thousands of years are intricately linked to their identity, culture, and spirit (Adamson, 2001; Whyte, 2018). The profundity and clarity of Linda Hogan's poetry make it stand out in this significant tradition. Her writing sees the earth as an active, conscious entity that instructs, guides, and shapes identity; it does more than simply describe nature. Hogan examines the complex realm of Indigenous identity

while addressing the consequences of colonization, displacement, and environmental harm, with a particular emphasis on the female Indigenous identity. Hogan makes it abundantly evident that the health, voice, and sovereignty of the land itself are directly related to how Indigenous people heal and love themselves (Hogan, 1995a; Mayer, 2007). The focus of this article is Hogan's poetry, examining how she represents the "voices of the land" and demonstrating that true Indigenous self-love and cultural continuity are based on hearing, honoring, and standing up for these voices. The key concepts of Indigenous eco-poetry—relationality, responsibility, remembrance, and revival—are powerfully exemplified in her poetry.

Theoretical Grounding: Indigenous Eco-Poetry and Relational Ontology To fully appreciate Hogan's contribution, it is essential to situate her work within the frameworks of Indigenous eco-poetry and Indigenous relational ontologies, distinct from mainstream Western Ecocriticism.

1. Indigenous Eco-Poetry: This form is characterized by:

- Relationality:** People are a part of a complex web of interactions with plants, animals, elements, spirits, and landscapes; they are neither superior to nor different from nature (Cajete, 2000; Kimmerer, 2013). Poetry is a means of recognizing and discussing these relationships.
- Land as Agentic and Sensitive:** The land has a mind, memory, and voice; it is more than just a background. It provides people with knowledge, identity, and the law (Deloria, 1973; Simpson, 2017). Eco-poetry is where these voices emerge.
- Embodied Knowledge & Story:** Generally speaking, knowledge is based on one's location, experiences, and hearings. It is transmitted orally and through stories. Poetry provides a new home for this ancient, embodied wisdom.
- Decolonial Imperative:** Indigenous eco-poetry links environmental degradation to cultural genocide and critiques the ways colonialism damages people and land. It asserts that the restoration of the environment and society depends on Indigenous sovereignty and knowledge systems (Tuck & Yang, 2012; Whyte, 2018).
- Spiritual Dimension:** Identifying ancestors, invisible forces, and ceremonial ties are all common spiritual aspects of connecting with the land (Cajete, 2000; Hogan, 1995a).
- Selected Poems & Evidence:** Hogan gives the land a voice and agency by personifying it. This contradicts anthropocentrism by claiming that the land is a teacher, an ancestor, and a preserver of memory—all of which are critical to self-awareness.

"The History of Red" (from Savings, 1988): The poem narrates the origins and journey of red clay/earth itself. "I began in fire./ I slept in the dark earth./ ...I am the womb, the red beginning,/ the mouth that eats the dead.../ ...I am the vein, the artery,/ the red road home." Reflection: As the origin of life, death, and rebirth, the red earth narrates its own story and cosmology ("the red road home"). This voice connects individuals to their most fundamental cycles and origins.

"Crossings" (from The Book of Medicines, 1993): Explores the literal emergence of ancestors from the land. "They are coming back, / the ones we buried. / They rise up / out of the earth's body... / They are the dark past / we thought was gone. / ...They are the ones who walked / before us on this path / of blood and clay." Reflection: Ancestral memory is actively displayed by the terrain ("the dark past"). You are connected to your family when you are connected to a place. Here, hearing the voice of the land aids in the recall of one's own and other people's pasts, which is crucial for self-awareness and self-love.

2. Self-Love in a Colonial Context: For Indigenous peoples, self-love is not merely individualistic self-esteem. It is deeply political and communal:

- Cultural Reclamation:** Accepting one's Indigenous identity, history, language, and teachings despite centuries of attempts to eradicate them is known as cultural reclamation (Cook-Lynn, 1996).
- Healing Historical Trauma:** Resolving historical trauma involves addressing the wounds that colonization, uprooting, and cultural oppression have caused to individuals over many generations (Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998; Duran & Duran, 1995). You must confront this suffering and seek out ways to recover if you want to love yourself.
- Body Sovereignty:** Respecting the bodies of Indigenous people, particularly women, who have experienced violence and objectification under colonial regimes is known as body sovereignty (Smith, 2005).
- Connection as Foundation:** Understanding your place in your family, community, ancestors, and the earth is essential to genuinely loving yourself (Kimmerer, 2013; Simpson, 2017).

Hogan's work makes this interwoven selfhood very evident. Hogan's Poetic Practice: Learning to Love Yourself and Giving Voice to Land Hogan's poetry consistently adheres to the guidelines of Indigenous eco-poetry, demonstrating the interdependence of self-love and land-voice. Among the crucial strategies are:

A. Land as Speaking Subject and Ancestral Presence: Land as an Ancestral Presence and Speaking Subject: Poems such as "The Map" (from Seeing Through the Sun, 1985) and "The History of Red" (from Savings, 1988) give natural objects human characteristics. Rivers tell stories, mountains remember, and red clay tells its origin. Not only does the land tell a story, it tells a story. This approach asserts that the universe outside of humans is essentially subjective and communicative, which is obviously contrary to anthropocentrism.

The speaker in "Crossings" (The Book of Medicines, 1993) witnesses ancestral bones emerging from eroded riverbanks. Because of this, it is difficult to distinguish between the geological process and human history. Since ancestral memory is actually contained in and revealed by the land, connecting to a place is equivalent to connecting to your heritage and understanding who you are: "The ones we buried are returning. They emerge from the earth's body. They are the dark past that we believed was gone." Recalling one's own and collective history through listening to the voice of the land is essential to self-love and self-awareness.

B. Reciprocity and Responsibility: The Basis for Self-Worth: Hogan frequently discusses the concept of giving and receiving. The speaker in "Affinity: Mustang" (Rounding the Human Corners, 2008) comes to the profound realization that "What I give them / is only what they give me / and the giving is the same" after witnessing wild horses. What it means to be valuable and to belong is defined by this conversation between the two individuals. You harm yourself when you exploit the planet or its inhabitants. The line "Remember the women / whose bodies were taken like land... / Remember the land / that was taken like a woman" from "Hunger" (Dark. Sweet., 2014) clearly links harming women's bodies to harming the environment. You must cure the other in order to cure the first. For Indigenous women in particular, self-love entails recognizing this interconnected violation, asserting sovereignty over one's body and land, and advocating for both to be revered. **Selected Poems & Evidence** Hogan emphasizes the value of reciprocity, saying that harming the land is harming oneself. Self-love for Indigenous women entails acknowledging the violations of both the body and the land and asserting sovereignty over both. **"Affinity: Mustang" (from Rounding the Human Corners, 2008):** Observing wild horses leads to an epiphany about reciprocity. "What I give them / is only what they give me / and the giving is the same. / ...They are the muscle / of my heart, / the deep running blood." **Reflection:** Mutual exchange defines belonging and worth ("the giving is the same"). Relational ontology is demonstrated by the horses, which become an integral part of the speaker's identity ("muscle of my heart"). You would injure yourself if you used them. **"Hunger" (from Dark. Sweet., 2014):** Explicitly links colonial violence against land and women's bodies. "Remember the women / whose bodies were taken like land... / Remember the land / that was taken like a woman. / ...How the hunger for possession / consumed them both." **Reflection:** The poem makes a comparison between the colonial mistreatment of Indigenous women's bodies and the mistreatment of the land ("taken like land"/"taken like a woman"). To heal and love themselves, Indigenous women must acknowledge this shared trauma and struggle for the sanctity of their bodies and their land.

3. Embodied Knowledge and Sensory Immersion: Hogan uses a lot of senses in his poetry. Textural, olfactory, and auditory details are used in poems such as "The Heron" (Eclipse, 1983) and "Milk" (The Book of Medicines, 1993) to immerse the reader or listener in the world's physical experience. It is suggested that the primary method of understanding oneself and one's location is through bodily senses, such as feeling the mud, smelling the rain, or hearing the bird's cry. A prerequisite for self-love based on belonging is a profound, loving intimacy with the outside world, which is fostered by this embodied connection. In "The Way In" (Rounding the Human Corners), she highlights a visceral, consuming intimacy that defines existence by stating, "The way I love the world / is by eating it." **Selected Poems & Evidence:** Paper's Claim: Knowing the land through the senses fosters deep intimacy and belonging, grounding self-love in physical connection to the world. **Poem: "Milk"* (from The Book of Medicines, 1993)** **Reflection:** This poem is an excellent example of how to learn through your senses and body. It grounds the sense of connection and sustenance in the physical body and the natural environment through powerful tactile, olfactory, and visual imagery ("the white sea," "the smell of grass," and "the warm body"). According to her paper, relationship-based self-love depends on sensory awareness. **"The Way In" (from Rounding the Human Corners, 2008): States a philosophy of visceral connection.** "The way I love the world / is by eating it, / the wild grapes, the sweet / blackberries, the fish / pulled shining from the river." **Reflection:** Love for the planet is demonstrated by a profound, consuming physical intimacy ("eating it"). This sensory intake demonstrates the close relationship between the ego and the outside world, which defines existence and belonging—the basis for self-love that results from being in a place.

4. Memory, Loss, and Active Healing:

Hogan doesn't hold back when illustrating the harm done to the environment and the suffering of the past, including the wounded Indigenous self and the muffled voices of the land. The poem "Magnolias" (Savings, 1988) laments the extinction of species. "The New Apartment: Minneapolis" (Savings) demonstrates the stark contrast between the vivid memory of a vanished natural setting and the sterile city life. However, her approach always involves active healing rather than just grieving. This healing includes

remembering, rituals, and reviving relationships. The creation myth told in "The Origins of Corn" (The Book of Medicines) fortifies the sacred connection between people, maize, and the soil as well as cultural ties. "Crow Law" (Dark. Sweet.) examines how crows are able to survive and how intelligent and adaptive they are. Self-love results from this active engagement in preserving and revitalizing the environment and culture. You have to mend your relationship with the earth in order to mend yourself. **Selected Poems & Evidence:** Paper's Claim: Hogan confronts ecological loss and historical trauma but moves towards active healing through remembrance, ritual, and revitalizing relationships. **"The Origins of Corn" (from The Book of Medicines, 1993): Recounts a creation story.** "In the beginning, / there was a woman / who planted herself / in the earth. / ...She became the corn, / her body the stalk, / her hair the silk, / her teeth the kernels white / as bone." Reflection: The poem actively heals by retelling a sacred origin story. It reaffirms the covenant between people, corn, and earth, restoring cultural memory and the foundational relationship necessary for cultural and personal wholeness. **"Crow Law" (from Dark. Sweet., 2014): Observes crow resilience.** "Crows know the law / of broken things. / ...They pick the locks / of silence, / speak the unspeakable / in their rough tongue. / ...They remember / what the world forgets." Reflection: While acknowledging brokenness, the poem focuses on the crow's intelligence, adaptability, and memory ("remember what the world forgets"). They become models for survival, resilience, and the power of voice ("speak the unspeakable"), offering a pathway for healing and resurgence beyond lament.

5. Language as Ceremony and Reclamation: Indigenous eco-poetics is exemplified by Hogan's poetic language. She often uses straightforward yet impactful language that echoes oral tradition and natural rhythms. In order to create a new language that respects traditional ways of knowing while simultaneously reflecting contemporary Indigenous life, she combines scientific terminology with Chickasaw cosmologies and animistic viewpoints (Mayer, 2007). It becomes a ritual act of resistance and reclamation to write poetry that gives voice to the land and the Indigenous experience. It asserts that Indigenous perspectives are equally legitimate to the dominant narratives that have silenced the land and its inhabitants. A fundamental way to express love for oneself and all living things is through this act of linguistic and narrative sovereignty. **Selected Poems & Evidence:** Paper's Claim: Hogan's poetic language itself is an act of Indigenous eco-poetics, blending science and cosmology, acting as ceremony to reclaim narrative sovereignty (This permeates her style, evident in all examples, but explicit in thematic focus). **"The Book of Medicines" (Title poem & overall collection):** The very concept frames poems as healing agents, akin to traditional medicines or ceremonial acts. The language does the work of healing and reconnection. "There are medicines / everywhere. / ...The way a river / holds the moon / ...The way bone remembers / the song buried / in the hillside." (Themes throughout) Reflection: The act of naming the world through poetry ("The way a river holds the moon," "bone remembers the song") using a blend of imagery, traditional understanding, and contemporary voice is the ceremonial act. It reclaims the power to define reality, assert the sentience of the world, and heal the fractures caused by colonial narratives. This linguistic sovereignty is a fundamental expression of self-love and love for the relational world. In her poem "Bathing with a Tender Care", the voices of the land and apply a kind of intimacy with the speaker whose act of bathing may symbolize, purification, renewal, and love of nature. Never will I not bath slowly, washing my elbows that don't beneath my arm. The image of water and the act of bathing are related to the deep voices of the speaker. Her desire is to approach the natural world with tenderness and calmness. To live inside this beauty I have become made flesh warmer now than water. The message of hope and renewal she presents in these lines are evidences of her rebirth and her growth, through her connection with the voices of the land, she inspires her readers to appreciate the beauty of the natural world she is passing by. This selection demonstrates how Hogan's specific poems embody the core theoretical tenets of Indigenous eco-poetry outlined in her paper, making the inseparable connection between giving voice to the land and cultivating profound, politically grounded Indigenous self-love tangible through her art.

Conclusion: Indigenous eco-poetry is significant and potent, as demonstrated by Linda Hogan's poetry. She gives the land a voice through her excellent writing, making it more than a passive resource but a living, speaking, remembering presence that is essential to life. She also outlines the arduous and protracted journey towards Indigenous self-love in the wake of colonial brutality. Hogan demonstrates that listening to the land and loving oneself are two aspects of a single, interconnected journey rather than two distinct ones. The first step in repairing the damaged Indigenous self is repairing the damaged relationship with the environment. The foundation of genuine self-worth, cultural continuity, and decolonial healing is reciprocity, respect, and reverence for the environment beyond humans. Her writings demonstrate this relationship through actions as well as thoughts. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous readers are urged to pay close attention to the sounds of the land, recognize

the close connection between all living things in the web of life, and understand that our love for the earth serves as a barometer for our love for ourselves. Amidst severe ecological crises and the lingering effects of colonialism, Hogan's work is more than just criticism; it is a deeply ingrained vision of healing, resiliency, and the enduring power of relational love. Her voice is still a valuable guide because it sounds like the voices of the place she loves.

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