

Regeneration through Kinship: Indian “Orphans” Make Home in Works by Linda Hogan and Leslie Marmon Silko

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***Abstract:** Literary representations of orphanhood immediately activate the question of community through kinship and relation. In simple terms, “orphan” is unthinkable without its opposite—family or kin. The language of orphanhood and family has been central to the study of national American literature, but recently indigenous notions of “kinship” have been proposed as key critical tools for examining Native American literature. In readings of Linda Hogan’s *Solar Storms* (1995) and Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Gardens in the Dunes* (1999), I find that attentiveness to kinship focuses inquiry squarely on literary responses to the historical disruption of Native kinship networks, broadly conceived, but also to the state’s creation of Indian “orphans” through various forms of child removal. These works employ the motif of the Indian orphan’s return to place Native thought and culture in critical relation to Euro-American social, ethical, and environmental practices. While previous scholarship has examined the critiques of Western, colonial cultures in the works of Hogan and Silko, the importance of the orphan figure to these projects has been largely overlooked. The literary orphan, I propose, is a particularly complex site in contemporary Native fiction for narrative interrogations of the limits and possibilities for community.*

***Keywords:** Orphanhood—kinship—child removal—American literature—Native American literature—community*

. . . the Indian is the representative of a culture and a social order that offer a radical alternative to the established order of Euro-American society.

—Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence*

Indigenous intellectual traditions have survived not because they've conceded to fragmenting Eurowestern priorities, but because they've *challenged* those priorities.

—Daniel Heath Justice, “Go Away, Water!': Kinship Criticism and the Decolonization Imperative”

Native literature and literary criticism have worked with unflagging persistence to resist stereotypes about vanishing American Indians and to reclaim, recover, or affirm indigenous identities.¹ In works as different as N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* (1966) and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977), “mixed blood” orphans struggle to overcome their alienation from modern American and tribal societies, and to forge, with varying success, revitalized Native American identities. In these ground-breaking novels, Momaday and Silko grapple with the issue of literary de/colonization, bringing to literary modernism and to newly emergent Native fiction the myths and storytelling traditions that allow them to explore varied and complex understandings of contemporary Native American identities. These works are important instantiations of Native survivance—survivance referring to “an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories . . . renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry” (Vizenor *vii*)—that counter the colonial ideology of disappearance with practices of agency, with manifestations of contemporaneity.

Recent accounts of the development of Native American fiction suggest that from roughly the 1990s on, Native literature, as well as Native criticism, has continued to build on the success of such projects of cultural decolonization and affirmation. Increasingly, Native writers begin, rather than end, with the integrity of indigenous identity; increasingly, they use this situated perspective to interrogate the value of Euro-American thought and practices. Arnold Krupat early characterized this turn as an outward one, away from preoccupations with indigenous identity and towards cosmopolitanism. Shari M. Huhndorf has recently identified a shift toward the transnational, which she exemplifies with the “different emphases” (*Map-*

1 I use the terms “Native,” “indigenous,” and, less often, “Indian” interchangeably. Though none of these terms convey the diversity of real tribal identities, and though the use of “Indian” is more contested as a white construct, they function to mark differences from, and alternatives to, non-Native perspectives explored by the authors I examine. The terms “Euro-American” and “White” have similar drawbacks, and similar analytic usefulness.

ping 15) of Silko's early *Ceremony* and later *Almanac of the Dead* (1991).² Critics espousing forms of literary nationalism such as Craig S. Womack and Daniel Heath Justice also observe that Native American criticism today has arrived at a point where Native perspectives are being turned both on Native literatures and cultures, and also more critically on the literatures and theories generated outside of or alongside of indigenous paradigms. While such critical observations have a history as long as Indian-White contact, the ways that Native artists and intellectuals have influenced theoretical developments in literature and the history of ideas have, Womack maintains, reached a "historical threshold," a "turning point" (95). For Justice, an important task for Native critics is to assist in Native survivance by examining literatures and cultures, particularly Native literatures and cultures, through the interpretative lens of Native thought.³

Justice proposes "kinship" as a key critical framework for it allows critics to be "fully attentive to the endurance of indigenous peoples against the forces of erasure and determine, in various ways, how the survival of indigenous peoples is strengthened by the literature we produce and the critical lenses through which we read them" (149). My reading of two novels from the 1990s that place Euro-American colonial practices, past and present, under critical examination takes its cue from Justice's idea of kinship criticism. Attentiveness to kinship squarely places the focus of inquiry on literary responses to the historical disruption of Native kinship networks, broadly conceived to include relationships with the environment, and the state's creation of Indian "orphans" through various forms of child removal. My analysis of Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms* (1995) and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Gardens in the Dunes* (1999) focuses on the dynamics of kinship that take shape in relation to the trope of orphanhood and the figure of the orphan. These works are two of many novels by Native writers that employ the motif of the Indian orphan's return to explore not only or pri-

2 Huhndorf considers that *Ceremony* "puts the community at the center of indigenous resistance" while *Almanac* "finds revolutionary possibilities in transnational alliances . . ." (15). Krupat sees *Gardens* as informed by a syncretic, cosmopolitan worldview, and Hogan's work to be more in line with an "indigenous" perspective.

3 The notion of "indigenous thought" or "indigenous epistemology" is fraught, as Justice also observes, because it posits a unity among indigenous peoples and it can be taken to imply a near absolute difference from a monolithically conceived Western thought. Yet, the recent turn to Indigenous Studies has explored complex contacts, influences, commonalities, migrations, and other movement between groups, Native and non-Native.

marily Native identity, but the place of Native thought and culture in critical relation to Euro-American social, ethical, and environmental practices.⁴ While scholars have elucidated the social and political critiques of Western, colonial cultures in the works of Hogan and Silko, the importance of the orphan figure to these projects has been largely overlooked. The literary orphan, I propose, is a particularly complex site in contemporary Native fiction for narrative interrogations of the limits and possibilities for human community, for its survivance, perpetuation, and development.

Literary representations of orphanhood immediately activate, through the relentless logic of binaries, the question of community through kinship and relation. Put simply, “orphan” is unthinkable without its opposite—family or kin. Moreover, as a trope, orphanhood suggests loss, abandonment, trauma, the abject, at the same time as it creates the possibility of alternative family and new kinship structures. Indeed, for this latter reason, the myth of the American Adam, characterized indirectly by R.W.B. Lewis as an orphan—“an individual emancipated from history, happily bereft of ancestry, untouched and undefiled by the usual inheritances of family and race” (5)—has been so integral to the imagination of a national American “family” and a “new” national literature.⁵

Native representations of parentless children also evoke questions of community and kinship, particularly since kinship care and informal adoption practices are deeply rooted among many indigenous peoples, and since the varied kinship patterns among Native peoples do not privilege the nuclear family, which the designation “orphan” strongly implies. Moreover, as the epigraph from Richard Slotkin suggests, the very existence of alternative Native social orders on the North American continent could be perceived as a threat to emergent American identity, ultimately necessitating—even justifying—the violence at the heart of the myth of White cultural regeneration, including violence against Native peoples. Thus, the cultural logic that binds literary orphan figures to issues of belonging and regeneration can be seen to work differently, though just as powerfully,

4 Native American authors such as Sherman Alexie, Diane Glancy, and Louise Erdrich, for example, feature orphans in their writing. Non-Native writers also use orphan figures to probe the limits of community. The ways in which American writers use literary orphans to explore nation and community in today’s multicultural context is the subject of a co-authored project, nearing completion, generously funded by the Swedish Research Council.

5 See Pazicky for a discussion of colonial and early American uses of orphanhood as metaphor.

under the force of specific histories. Representations of orphanhood, I propose, have particularly strong resonance in Native societies devastated by the loss of children, societies in which various forms of child removal, such as capture, boarding- or mission-school placement, adoption, and foster care have historically served as tools for cultural genocide. Orphan figures in contemporary Native American fiction embody this history, and Native writers use tropes of orphanhood not to bolster American national identity but to critique its basis in colonial practices and to affirm the survivance of Native kinship and its appropriateness as an alternative model of ethical relations, perhaps even of moral regeneration.

The work of historians and social scientists confirms the ubiquity of indigenous child removal—a practice established in early colonial times. Pauline Turner Strong, for example, observes that “in numerical terms the captivity of English colonists among Indians pales in comparison to the abduction, imprisonment, and enslavement of Indians by the English” (13), even though the “selective tradition” of captivity narratives emphasizes Native people as captors, rather than captives. Other scholars have written about the repressive assimilative practices of Indian boarding schools. More recent is the widespread adoption of Native children by White families—a deliberate campaign of removal driven by the Child Welfare League of America and the Bureau of Indian Affairs from the 1950s to the 1970s. Until the passage of the Indian Child Welfare Act in 1978, Indian children were adopted at a highly disproportionate rate, and 90% of Indian adoptions were in non-Indian homes.⁶ An estimated 25% to 35% of all Native children were taken from their families in the years leading up to the Act. As one scholar concludes, “many American Indian children in this century have grown up separated from their families of origin, away from their tribal localities, and outside their culture” (Halverson et al. 322). In the novels I examine here, Indian orphans embody and overcome this history, reclaiming and remaking forms of kinship which offer viable, contemporary *alternatives* to dominant systems of Euro-American life. In contrast to the myth of “regeneration through violence” that Slotkin saw as “the structuring metaphor of the American experience” (*Regeneration* 5) in American literature,

6 For a brief overview of Native adoption and the ICWA, see Askeland. The act appears to have succeeded to some extent, but not wholly, in assuring that decisions about child removal, adoption, and foster care practices are enacted by tribal authorities, and the “best interests” of the tribe are taken into account. See also Halverson et al. For important work on boarding schools, see Adams and Lomawaima.

Hogan and Silko present what I would like to call “regeneration through kinship,” and they use Indian orphan figures to do so. Taking my cue from Justice, I show how Hogan’s and Silko’s texts revise and expand, in different ways, the notion of indigenous kinship, forwarding it as an ethical basis for regeneration for modern societies—Native and non-Native alike.

Solar Storms is a first-person, coming-of-age narrative that concerns the struggle of indigenous peoples to preserve the natural environment and their way of life against the aggressive incursions of a hydroelectric company operating in the Boundary Waters between the U.S. and Canada.⁷ The novel, which fictionalizes a conflict that took place in the 1970s, features multiple female orphan figures— orphaned both in the literal sense of having lost one or both biological parents, and in the metaphorical sense of being neglected, cast off, destitute.⁸ Indeed, we learn that the very first women at Adam’s Rib, the community on the boundary waters between the U.S. and Canada to which the protagonist, Angel Wing, returns, called themselves “the Abandoned Ones” (28). Angel, protagonist and narrator of the novel, is the most prominent orphan in a legacy of abducted, abused, and abandoned females of fictional tribal affiliations. The orphan figures in the novel—Angel’s grandmother, Loretta, who, having witnessed her people die of starvation, had then been captured and “kept” by Englishmen; Loretta’s daughter, Hannah Wing; Hannah’s daughter, the protagonist Angel; finally, Angel’s mixed-blood, half-sister, Aurora—chart a path from colonial destruction of family and tribe to the Native regeneration of an inclusive form of kinship.

Angel’s mother Hannah is a windigo figure, strongly associated (as is Loretta) with gnawing cold, starvation, loss of soul, and cannibalism.⁹ Simultaneously, she is the embodiment of the horrors of colonial history

7 See Tarter for a discussion of Hogan’s rendering of the opposition of Crees and Inuits to Hydro-Quebec’s development of hydropower in the James Bay area.

8 In simplest terms, an orphan is a motherless or fatherless child, but the *Oxford English Dictionary* also notes the extended and figurative uses of the term: an abandoned or neglected child and [a] person or thing deprived of protection, advantages, benefits, or happiness previously enjoyed; something which has been abandoned or ignored. These extended and figurative uses of the term follow socio-historical developments concerning the condition of orphanhood in the United States, though not necessarily among Native peoples, who have tended to adopt parentless children within extended family or tribal networks. Indian children and young people have also been made into “legal orphans” by the state, through removal and termination of parental rights, to a disproportionate extent.

9 Castor discusses Hogan’s use of this mythic Cree and Ojibwe figure to create a site of healing, for Angel but also for “global manifestations of *windigo*” (173).

and the twin subjugation of women and Native peoples. The novel figures this horror in terms of scars.¹⁰ Hannah is the offspring of Loretta and the husband of Bush, one of Angel's three grandmothers. When Bush takes in 10-year-old Hannah, abandoned by her parents, she finds that: "Beneath all the layers of clothes, [Hannah's] skin was a garment of scars. There were burns and incisions. Like someone had written on her. The signatures of torturers . . ." (99). The novel refers to this macabre personal history and the obvious, irredeemable damage it causes Hannah, leading her into self-destructive behavior and child abuse, as "memory," but also as a place, a house, a crossroad, "where time and history and genocide gather" (101). In this and other ways, Hannah's loss of soul, clearly connected to Native myth, is also explained in terms of the larger history of conquest, in which devouring greed, first of the colonizers, and later, in the present of the novel, of the energy conglomerate that seeks to dam and divert rivers to produce electricity, devastates the land and the Native peoples who live on it.¹¹ In addition, Hogan's linking in plot and imagery of practices of scarring and writing provides a horrendous twist to the notion of children as blank slates—as a *tabula rasa* Hannah is literally written upon—for *Solar Storms* attributes this not to the innate emptiness of childhood, nor to the pure potential of children for development and social formation, but to the vulnerability of Native peoples to sadistic exercises of imperialist power, the evils of conquest.¹² To the extent that Hannah represents the history of North American indigenous peoples, her Indian childhood is not empty but full, full of an embodied trauma and its silent yet graphic, telling history: Hannah's scarred body, claimed and "signed by torturers," becomes a confession and a record of colonial, male abuse of indigenous women.

Rendered incapable of forming bonds of kinship, Hannah remains enthralled to this historical trauma and first repudiates, then bites, tortures, and scars her infant daughter, Angel. Saved from her mother by Bush, Angel is

10 See Arnold for a discussion of how Hogan uses the imagery of scars and mirrors to alter Lacanian theory.

11 Agnes's lover, John Husk, and Bush syncretize Native and Western science. Husk's "main desire in life was to prove that the world was alive" (35), and Bush uses her knowledge of traditional stories to interpret the maps of the Boundary Waters. Indigenous epistemology is a central preoccupation of Hogan's work.

12 Sánchez-Eppler has shown how different conceptions of childhood co-existed in 19th-century America, including the Calvinist idea of children as sinful, the Lockean idea of children as blank slates, and the romantic notion of children as natural, innocent beings. Such conceptions continue to have currency. Nelson characterizes childhood in modernity as gaining in emotional value to adults. In Hogan and Silko children are portrayed both as individuals *and* as re-incarnations of ancestors.

later removed from Bush's care by white social workers, and placed in a series of foster homes from which she repeatedly runs away. Hogan represents these homes and escapes somewhat peripherally, but she uses the language of captivity to do so, thus referencing but reversing the power relations in traditional tales of captivity by stressing Angel's status first as victim but then as an agent who effects her own escape, return, and empowerment through the reclamation of kinship.

With her return as a teenager to her birth community, Angel gradually ceases to be defined by her scars and instead increasingly defines herself by way of her own gifts, actions, and ethical relations to the natural and social world. Indeed, Angel discovers commonalities between herself, the land, and the mother who scarred her. Angel reflects: "We were shaped out of this land by the hands of gods. Or maybe it was that we embodied the land. And in some way I could not yet comprehend, it also embodied my mother, both of them stripped and torn" (228). Through Angel, Hogan compares the abuse of Native women, particularly of Hannah, to the exploitation of the land: "My beginning was Hannah's beginning, one of broken lives, gone animals, trees felled and kindled. Our beginnings were intricately bound up in the history of the land" (96). But Angel's end is not Hannah's end. Angel is instead presented as a turning point in a long history of environmental exploitation, sexual victimization, and internalized self-hatred which Hogan attributes primarily to the violence of colonialism in its historical and current forms.

In sum, the narrative thrust of *Solar Storms* describes a movement, centered on orphanhood and kinship, from woundedness to health, from loss to plenitude, from isolation to community and kin. As Bush tells Angel, "Some people see scars and it is wounding they remember. To me they are proof of the fact that there is healing" (125). Psychological health and regeneration, though, are profoundly connected in the novel with the reclamation of kinship and the enactment of community. Rather than repudiate her mother, Angel claims kinship with her and the history she embodies. Unlike Lewis's Adamic figure, then, Hogan's Native orphan must acknowledge her ancestry to achieve what Justice observes is the basis for peoplehood, "an understanding of a common social interdependence within the community, the tribal web of kinship rights and responsibilities that link the People, the land, and the cosmos together . . ." (151). While conceptions of Native communities have undoubtedly been, and continue to be, subject to romanticization, considerable Native American cultural production affirms that in

many indigenous frameworks, kinship is not only a term for human relations to other humans, but it also refers to human relations to the entire non-human world.¹³ From Hogan's perspective, individual, communal, world health involves attentive maintenance of these relations. Broken relations, Hogan explains elsewhere, are healed by way of story and ceremony: "In the language of ceremony, a person is placed—bodily, socially, geographically, spiritually, and cosmologically—in the natural world extending all the way out into the universe" ("First People" 14). In another essay, Hogan describes a sweat lodge ceremony: "It is part of a healing and restoration. . . . The participants in a ceremony say the words 'All my relations' before and after we pray; those words create a relationship with other people, with animals, with the land. To have health it is necessary to keep all these relations in mind" (*Dwellings* 40). In *Solar Storms*, the journey through the Boundary Waters becomes a ceremony of healing and restoration for Angel, for during this journey she enacts and affirms kinship with her grandmothers and with the non-human environment:¹⁴

The four of us became like one animal. We heard inside each other in a tribal way. I understood this at once and was easy with it. With my grandmothers, there was no such thing as loneliness. Before, my life had been without all its ears, eyes, without all its knowings. Now we, the four of us, all had the same eyes, and when Dora-Rouge pointed a bony finger and said, 'This way,' we instinctively followed that crooked finger. (177)

A deep sense of place in, and kinship with, the natural world is represented partially in terms of family and tribal descent, for Angel's new-found ability to dream the locations of medicinal plants has been passed on to her from her great-great grandmother, Ek. But her relation to the environment is also represented as human, beyond tribe or nation, for she comes to understand this gift as coming from "a place inside the human that spoke with land,

13 The point is not that all Native communities are harmoniously in tune with nature, nor that all Natives live ecologically exemplary lives, but that kinship is a culturally inflected term, with wider and more varied meanings among Native peoples than among Euro-Americans. In the history of contact, at least since the 1800s, different views about what constitutes kinship have had disastrous consequences for those Indian children who have been removed because they were viewed as being without kin of the proper kind. Hogan, Silko, Justice, and many other writers and critics attest to the continued importance of Native conceptions of kinship.

14 Hogan's novel, *Power*, involves a similar ritual journey. In both novels, the protagonists come to positions outside of mainstream society, but *Power* involves a greater, uncompromising distance from non-Native culture. Omishito must *choose* one culture or the other, for these are presented as mutually exclusive.

that entered dreaming, in the way that people in the north found direction in their dreams" (170).¹⁵ In the timelessness of the Boundary Waters, Angel learns "I was equal to the other animals, hearing as they heard, moving as they moved, seeing as they saw" (172). Angel's journey and her understanding of relation make her, as her great grandmother Dora-Rouge finally says, "a true human being" (347).

In the last part of the novel, Angel continues to enact kinship through the political struggle to protect the Boundary Waters and the native lifeways connected with them. Two things are particularly important in this regard. First, indigenous kinship provides the conceptual framework for understanding the failures and critiquing the workings of Euro-American power: Angel understands, for instance, that "when the officials and attorneys spoke, their language didn't hold a thought for the life of water, or a regard for the land that sustained people from the beginning of time. They didn't remember the sacred treaties between humans and animals" (279). The legacy of Euro-Americans is "the removal of spirit from everything" (180)—Loretta's and Hannah's *windigo* condition—coupled with the desire for money and power, represented in the novel by hydroelectric power. Second, indigenous kinship is represented not only as genealogical or tribal but as a potential result of the performance of resistance and solidarity. The elder Tulik and Dora-Rouge, both of the fictional Fat-Eater tribe, have "a special kind of kinship," Hogan writes, for "they came from the same place, the same people, the same grief, and the same stories" (275). Tribal affiliation is one of many types of important relations, and the term "tribe" in *Solar Storms* comes to mark not an entity based on ancestry or blood quota but, instead, an alternative grouping informed by cultural, spiritual, and ethical affinities. For instance, prior to their protests and blockade against the dam builders, Angel reflects that the group collected at Tulik's house constituted "a tribe"—tribe here referring to the small community's work of living in ethical relation to one another and to their surroundings (262). While Hogan clearly anchors this form of kinship in indigenous thought, she also consistently demonstrates that kinship is in part an epistemological question. Understanding connection, relation, and reciprocity is something that is socially, sometimes ritually, transmitted and learned. Just as Angel learns to claim her difficult past, and to feel compassion for the mother

15 See Brody's *Maps and Dreams* for one account of dream-hunting and hunger maps among First Nations people.

who abused her, so other figures in the novel also learn and practice ethical relations: LaRue, for instance, whose name suggests regret, gives up the practice of taxidermy and learns instead to value living creation, and Bush, who assembles bones of animals, describes her work as a practice of respect. Throughout the novel, kinship with the natural world, envisioned as a deeply ethical relation, performed through solidarity, is proposed as a genuine alternative to capitalist exploitation of the land.

Angel's half-sister, Aurora, is another orphan child who, like other children in literature, functions as a symbolic point of regeneration. Angel discovers her as she cares for Hannah on her deathbed. Unlike Angel, who was *taken* from her birth community as an infant, Aurora is *restored* to a Native community and grows into a happy baby, "the child of many parents" (264) who the people refer to as "Our Future" (318). In spite of the child's unknown paternity, the Fat Eaters around her see in her their ancestors, so she is called "grandfather" and is respected as an elder (258). Though her life is threatened in the conflict over the dam, Bush, Angel, and others are able to save her, though the final victory over the power company comes late: "It was too late for the Child River, for the caribou, the fish, even for our own children, but we had to believe, true or not, that our belated victory was the end of something" (344). The novel ends in a ritualized performance of regeneration through kinship, with Angel and her boyfriend Tommy in a marriage dance, holding Aurora up over Tommy's head, showing her off to the people, incorporating her into an indigenous context and a kinship community. This kinship community and the future represented by Aurora revise the idea of tribe toward inclusiveness, however, based not exclusively on genealogy or race, but on kinship as the enactment of indigenous ethical imperatives.

Like Hogan, Silko (Laguna/Pueblo) uses orphan figures to conceptualize kinship, to advance a critique of Euro-American social and environmental practices, and to affirm indigenous alternatives. Critics have commented, though only in passing, on Silko's strong focus in *Gardens in the Dunes* on the child, Indigo, of the fictitious Sand Lizard tribe. Forcibly removed from her family and their desert lands in the southwest of the 1890s, Indigo comes to travel eastward through the U.S. and Europe in the company of a newly married, highly educated white woman, Hattie, and her botanist husband, Edward. Indigo's identity and indigenous perspective remain unshaken by the potentially assimilative pressures of boarding school, extensive travel in the U.S. and Europe, and close interactions with White

society.¹⁶ Indigo's perspective has been said to "endow the world with strangeness and newness" (Murray 124), to foreground "the visionary and prophetic aspects" of the Ghost Dance (Murray 129), to animate the novel with "a fundamental optimism" (Moore 95) but also, writes David Moore, to raise the question of the suffering of the innocent — children but also Indians, since "Indigo, though a child, stands in for a Native voice" (Moore 105).

Indeed, in spite of the obvious hazards of equating a child's perspective with a Native perspective, this is what Silko does in *Gardens* (and what Hogan does in both *Solar Storms* and *Power*). It is, moreover, through the figure of the orphan child that Silko brings a Native perspective to bear on Euro-American patriarchy and imperialism of the late nineteenth century, critiquing not only the methods of cultural eradication of indigenous peoples, but also the values that deny ethical relations and result in the subjugation of women and exploitation of the environment. The novel shows that it is the colonial world of global capitalism represented by Edward's and others' schemes for botanical theft, profit, and environmental destruction that is the true wasteland, the world in need of regeneration.¹⁷

Indigo's orphan status provides special opportunities for Silko to rework the deplorable histories of Indian-White relations in the late 1800s, for it immediately references and then counters disruptions of indigenous kinship through Indian removal policies, boarding school practices, religious persecution, and outright murder. The capture of Indigo and Sister Salt by Indian agents, for instance, is presented as an outrage, but Silko stresses Indigo's courage and her ability to deal with her situation at the boarding school; Indigo does not cry, does not "mind" the darkness of the closet she is locked up in, and she escapes from the captivity of the school as quickly as possible.¹⁸ Indigo *chooses*

16 Indigo and her sister Salt are forcibly "orphaned" by removal from tribe and family, but they are, Arnold Krupat observes, "entirely secure in their Indian identities" (113). David Murray also situates Silko's novel in the general move in Native American writing away from "crises of identity, authenticity and origins" and toward "hybridity and transnationalism" (119).

17 Considerable commentary on Silko's novel has dealt with representations of gardening practices in order to discuss Silko's understanding of hybridity. Terre Ryan asserts that Silko uses the series of gardens and garden imagery to illustrate levels of imperialism and she does this by "pointedly contrasting nineteenth-century American gardening aesthetics and ideologies with the Sand Lizards' subsistence farming. In doing so, Silko reaffirms the authority of Native lifeways . . ." (116). This pointed contrast is made by way of multiple narrative perspectives, by Silko's treatment of issues of fertility and sterility, and also by way of Indigo's attentive, knowledgeable observations of the world around her.

18 Holt and Lomawaima have documented the complexity of experiences in Indian orphanages and boarding school, which sought to eradicate Native cultures but unwittingly provided a basis for survivance and coalition.

to accompany Hattie east, because she thinks she will find her family and the Messiah there. In fact, Silko makes clear that Indigo never considers herself an orphan, and her steadfast loyalty to her sister, her mother, and her people draws attention to the way that colonial practices seek to orphan her, and the way that she resists these efforts. Though Hattie considers adopting Indigo, upon learning that Indigo's sister is alive, Hattie renounces her privilege to adopt and instead assists Indigo's return to what remains of her family, actually helping to transform a tale of child removal into a tale of homecoming and liberation.

Gardens is full of this type of reversal. Although Hattie ostensibly educates Indigo, teaching her to read and write, the novel is as much about the education of Hattie by Indigo. For example, when Hattie and Indigo are detained by Italian authorities because of Edward's smuggling of plant material, it is the child—simultaneously innocent and savvy—who assures the shocked Hattie that such ordeals can and will be survived: “. . . she told Hattie the stories about the times Grandma Fleet was caught by soldiers or by the Indian police, only to escape later; Mama even escaped Fort Yuma. . . Hattie mustn't be sad—at home people got arrested for no reason all the time. There was nothing to be ashamed of; this wasn't bad at all” (322). Indigo's comment on Hattie's situation brings into relief the unjust treatment of Native peoples under U.S. law, the genuine culpability of Edward and his boundless sense of entitlement, and also Hattie's vulnerability as a woman in a patriarchal system.

The unshaken clarity of Indigo's indigenous perspective grows at a pace with the uncertainty of Hattie's position. After she returns Indigo to Sister Salt, Hattie realizes that she is emotionally unprepared to leave Indigo, whom she has genuinely grown to love. In addition, she is overcome by “a dreadful sense of how alone she was” (410). Sexually harassed and expelled from Harvard, exploited, betrayed, and bankrupted by Edward, Hattie becomes farther and farther removed from the values of her own family, class, and nation, until, as Silko puts it, “Hattie realized, oddly enough, she was the one who no longer had a life to return to” (439). The “oddly enough” in this passage draws attention to the unprecedented aspects of Silko's characterization of these two “orphans.” The dispossession—of lands, family, tribe, and culture—that is routinely associated with Native subjugation is here imaginatively altered, so that Hattie, rather than Indigo, is divested of all her relations. Hattie's intellectual and spiritual independence as well as her familial solidarity with Indigo render her vulnerable to the disciplin-

ary measures of patriarchal capitalism; she is raped and beaten, and even her parents betray her in what Silko portrays as a tragic re-enactment of captivity. Come to collect her after Edward has left her dispossessed and destitute, Hattie's parents find her in native garb, believing in the Messiah of the Ghost Dance, unwilling to return to "civilization." She struggles with her "captors," pretends to collapse, and then attempts "to make a run for it" (471). Silko describes how "the excitement of the escape gave her strength" (472), and Hattie manages to burn down the town that harbored her rapist. Because "she could never return to her former life among the lies" (459), Hattie disowns her U.S. kin and leaves for Europe, from where she attempts to keep up relations with Indigo, who has at last made home with her sister and her sister's baby in their ancestral gardens. In Silko's portrayal, Hattie "goes native" at great cost, and this cost legitimates Hattie's experience, distinguishing it from cultural appropriation, but also renders it unsustainable. Thus, although Silko, like Hogan, locates in her characterization of Hattie, and her relation with Indigo, Salt, and other women, a potential for ethical relations across racial boundaries, she also suggests that these boundaries are firmly entrenched.

As in Hogan's work, it is a second orphan figure, Sister Salt's baby, the little black grandfather, who represents the continuity of indigenous life at the end of the novel. The infant, though the "racially" mixed son of an African American and a Native American, is unambiguously referred to as a Sand Lizard baby, just as the mixed-blood Aurora symbolizes an indigenous future in *Solar Storms*. Silko's characterization appears to suggest that racial descent need not determine tribal belonging, even though, while in his mother's womb, he speaks the Sand Lizard language, desires the sounds and foods of the desert, and angrily repudiates the noise and greed of the camps. Born under inauspicious circumstances, the weak, tiny baby is nevertheless "a tough customer who wouldn't die anytime soon" (342). Moreover, Silko writes, "[h]e was a serious baby who didn't smile often but who cried only when he was angry; wet or hungry, he remained silent because he was a grandfather and not someone new" (432). The little black grandfather is the delicate yet durable link between past, present, and future. By using this figure, and Indigo, to project the precarious continuation of the Sand Lizard tribe into the future, Silko, like Hogan, affirms the tenacity and adaptive capabilities of Native community against forces of colonialism. Equally important, by using Hattie to suggest the possibility of respectful exchange and reciprocal obligations, Silko affirms the inclusive

aspects of indigenous kinship, which are so at odds with Euro-American values in the book.¹⁹ Silko's words from *Almanac of the Dead* are instructive in this regard:

The ancestors had called Europeans "the orphan people" and had noted that as with orphans taken in by selfish or coldhearted clanspeople, few Europeans had remained whole. They failed to recognize the earth was their mother. Europeans were like their first parents, Adam and Eve, wandering aimlessly because the insane God who had sired them had abandoned them. (258)

The orphan tales of Hogan and Silko represent indigenous kinship as a dynamic process and an active practice of relation and connection. As Justice observes, in the lines that follow the epigraph to this article:

We exist today as indigenous nations, as peoples, and the foundation of any continuity as such is our relationships to one another—in other words, our kinship with other humans and the rest of creation. Such kinship isn't a static thing; it's dynamic, ever in motion. It requires attentiveness; kinship is best thought of as a verb rather than a noun, because kinship, in most indigenous contexts, is something that's *done* more than something that simply *is*. (150)

Hogan and Silko underscore the adaptive, performative, and potentially inclusive character of indigenous kinship through their creation of orphans like Angel and Indigo who make home as much as they find home, as well as through their creation of fictional tribes. In my view, the invention of the Sand Lizard and the Fat Eater tribes allows the authors not only to side-step the fraught issue of authenticity and to stymie artifactual readings of the novels, but also to suggest in indirect but important ways the possibilities that indigenous conceptions of kinship offer not only for Native survivance, but for the development of an alternative modernity.

Both Hogan and Silko have placed Indian orphan children at the center of their efforts to re/generate indigenous kinship, conceptualizing it as potentially inclusive and affirming its value as a model for ethical relations to the social and natural world. Kinship, rather than violence, is the key to regeneration. The figure of the child, it has been noted, can be useful in generating "alternative national narratives that enable, even as they

¹⁹ According to Justice, adaptive kinship is compatible with indigenous epistemologies in a way that race is not (154). Brooks has written about the importance of preserving epistemologies other than Eurocentric ones.

threaten to rupture, the ‘official story of America’” (Levander 53). This official story, or canonized myth of national identity, too often continues to deny its basis in colonialism, and returning indigenous peoples to that story complicates the familiar narrative of America as a melting pot as well as the more recent narrative of the United States as a multicultural society characterized by tolerance and openness to difference. This is what David Moore means when he claims: “Writing the Indian back into history is to interrupt America dreaming of itself” (102). Moreover, Native writers who write Indian orphans back into literary history disrupt the myths—such as Lewis’s, such as those identified by Slotkin—that have directed and shaped American literature.

As children, the Indian orphans bring an uncorrupted perspective to bear on the communities around them; like another literary orphan, Huck Finn, they serve as a lens for social critiques of Euro-American societies. As children, as well, Indian orphans have a regenerative function. Again like Huck, they leave behind them the corruption of mainstream America for an alternative, but *unlike* Twain’s character, the wilderness they encounter is, in fact, home—the “civilized” space of kinship relations, including ethical relations with the non-human environment. In contra-distinction to Lewis’s American Adam, whose figurative orphan status is the condition for and the measure of national “heroism,” *Solar Storms* and *Gardens in the Dunes* use orphan figures to criticize the violence of colonial histories of removal and to counter it with an indigenous concept of kinship. The dreams embodied in Angel and Indigo, and in Aurora and the little black grandfather are dreams of participatory kinship and the possibility of ethical relation. The dream embodied in Hattie remains unfulfilled, but therefore remains a possibility. In the works of both writers, then, regeneration concerns indigenous identity and community first and foremost. Importantly, though, the regeneration through kinship that the novels envision is unrestricted by tribal affiliations and at least theoretically open to others who are willing to join what Daniel Heath Justice characterizes as the “fragile web of rights and responsibilities” (154) accruing to ethical relationships with all kin.²⁰

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