

## **“But the storm, this storm, has no apology”: Extraction, Ecophobia, and the Ecoготhic in Linda Hogan’s *Power***

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ABSTRACT: Examining Linda Hogan’s *Power* in the context of the ecoготhic, a mode emphasizing the Western world’s desire to subdue and dominate the natural world, this paper contextualizes and analyzes changes imposed upon the natural world as the result of ecophobia. Hogan’s young female protagonist Omishto—a member of the fictional Taiga tribe—struggles to come to terms with these realities. At the same time, she learns the danger of disclosing information to Euro-American institutions, specifically courts of law. In this ecophobic world, the importance (and lack) of credence given to Indigenous testimonies and the danger of relying on static, stereotypical images of “eco-Indians” as models of environmental responsibility are brought to the fore. This article also argues that Indigenous literature is often treated in the same fashion in scholarship. In such readings, Indigenous-authored texts are expected to function as resources from which knowledge and lessons can be gleaned. The implementation of the ecoготhic mode in *Power*, however, thwarts such efforts on both an intratextual and an extratextual level.

KEYWORDS: Indigenous Literatures; Linda Hogan; *Power*; Witnessing; Ecoготhic; Ecophobia; Silence; Testimony

Mystery is a form of power.

(Linda Hogan, *Power*)

### **Introduction: Ecoготhic, Ecophobia, and Extractive Practices**

The ‘ecogothic’ as a field of study is currently experiencing a surge in interest as evidenced by the recent publication of two essay collections: *Ecogothic* (2013), edited by Andrew Smith and William Hughes, and *Ecogothic in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (2019), edited by Dawn Keetley and Matthew Sivils. In addition, the academic journal *Gothic Nature* published its first issue in 2019. In their introduction to *Gothic Nature*’s preliminary issue, editors Elizabeth Parker and Michelle Poland explore possible definitions of the term “gothic,” ultimately concluding that understanding it as “everything to do with *fear*” is, for the time being, the most productive (2). By extension, ecoготhic encompasses the myriad fears humans harbor towards the natural world. Keetley and Sivils echo this sentiment: “a specifically *gothic* ecocritical lens [...] orients us, in short, to the more disturbing and unsettling aspects of our interactions with nonhuman ecologies” (1; emphasis in original). One of the challenges in theorizing the ecoготhic is certainly the dual nature of the term itself, which simultaneously signifies imaginative horrors—that are not seldom frightening “Indian” stereotypes—in desolate environments and the real-life terrors of climate change and natural disasters. In *Power*, Linda Hogan’s (Chickasaw) 1998 novel about a teenage girl named Omishto, both sides of this lens are manifest: the natural world is struggling against

climate change and “noble Indian” stereotypes rooted in nineteenth-century American Gothic texts continue to flourish. Crucially, these stereotypes are not perpetuated through the Indigenous characters themselves or their depictions, but the way in which these characters are treated by settler society.

Returning briefly to Parker and Poland’s introduction, both the modern-day horrors of climate change and tales about natural threats from haunted forests to supernaturally strong animals<sup>1</sup> are rooted in Simon Estok’s concept of ‘ecophobia.’ Ecophobia, first theorized by Estok in 2009, is the “irrational and groundless hatred of the natural world, as present and subtle in our daily lives and literature as homophobia and racism and sexism” (208). Ecophobia is not limited to the environment but also affects our treatment of our own bodies, thereby “sustain[ing] the personal hygiene and cosmetic industries” (ibid.). Furthermore, ecophobia encourages the grooming of outdoor spaces frequented by humans, as is often mandated by governmental entities such as “city sanitation boards that issue fines seeking to keep out ‘pests’ and ‘vermin’ associated in the municipal mentalities with long grass” (ibid.). Ecophobia, at its core, is the motor that propels humans to dominate and exploit the natural world: “[I]t is what makes looting and plundering of animal and nonanimal resources possible” (ibid.). Importantly, according to Estok, this “irrational and groundless hatred” is not rooted in the fact of nature’s mere existence, but in nature’s *agency*:

*Human history is a history of controlling the natural environment, of taking rocks and making them tools or weapons to modify or to kill parts of the natural environment, of building shelters to protect us from weather and predators, of maintaining personal hygiene to protect ourselves from diseases and parasites that can kill us, of first imagining agency and intent in nature and then quashing that imagined agency and intent. Nature becomes the hateful object in need of our control, the loathed and feared thing that can only result in tragedy if left in control. (210; emphases added)*

The first and final lines of this passage are crucial for beginning to contextualize the ecogothic. In *Power*, Omishto feels the pull of two worlds: the Euro-American settler world in which she “learn[s] to examine stories and numbers [...] that combine to destroy life” (105), and the Taiga world that she learns about through her time with her older friend, mentor, and fellow Taiga, Ama. Omishto will ultimately come to the conclusion that living between both worlds is not (yet) possible. The Euro-American world’s desire to control the Taiga and refusal to acknowledge their agency prove too strong to allow for meaningful dialogue. In order to conduct a meaningful analysis of *Power* as an ecogothic text—a mode powered by ecophobia—we must first turn our attention to the passage above and expand Estok’s approach to reflect the realities of Indigenous peoples.

Both of the italicized passages in the quote above are potentially problematic in that they threaten to tacitly erase the past and the present of Indigenous peoples. While the assertion that “[h]uman history is a history of *controlling* the natural environment” (210) may not be

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<sup>1</sup> Specifically, Parker and Poland refer to works such as Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *Young Goodman Brown* and Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (3, 4).

inherently false, in the context of Estok's larger argument it implies that these types of actions (developing basic tools, seeking shelter, etc.) are rooted in ecophobia across all cultures. In other words, any type of development to make human existence more comfortable is an ecophobic response—one that seeks to control nature's every whim. As Birgit Däwes points out, it is certainly true that Indigenous peoples "had substantially impacted and changed the eco-systems of their continent long before Europeans arrived" (50), but to imply that these impacts and changes were rooted in ecophobia would be to ignore that "[m]ost indigenous North American cultures emphasize the interrelatedness of all beings," (49) thus acting from a position of mutual benefit and sustainability rather than a position of dominance and fear. At the same time, the manner in which Estok describes nature, "the loathed and feared thing that can only result in tragedy if left in control" (210), omits the ecophobic treatment of Indigenous peoples by focusing only on nature as an *it* rather than a *who* despite the undeniable connection between the treatment of Indigenous peoples and their homelands by settler-colonial institutions. Countries such as the United States aimed not only to gain control of the "new" world's land but also implemented policies meant to "tame," eliminate, and ultimately erase Indigenous agency and presence throughout these lands. These two goals worked in tandem; the idea being that if their lands were taken away, Indigenous peoples could no longer practice their ways of life. Furthermore, slogans such as "Kill the Indian, Save the Man" implied not only that Indigenous peoples could not take care of themselves but also that they were less than human.<sup>2</sup>

What remains, or was intended to remain, is the Western *idea* of the "Indian" rather than the people themselves. In the context of settler-colonial societies such as the United States, the urgency to control nature therefore encompasses the urge to control Indigenous peoples.<sup>3</sup> When Estok discusses "queer ecocriticism," which "situates us theoretically to understand that the commodification of nature and of sexual minorities are similar, each depending on a large consumer base that seeks a vicarious experience, rather than the thing itself" (12), the necessity of expanding nature from a "what" to a "who" becomes apparent. Here, nature is implied to be a "what," whereas sexual minorities are a "who." And yet, the "vicarious experience" Estok cites is precisely what Euro-American and other Western audiences are hoping to find when they turn out in droves to view films like *The Last of the Mohicans*, *Pocahontas*, or *Avatar*. Däwes illuminates the role these films play in enabling non-Indigenous viewers to indulge in such vicarious experiences; viewers are presented with "the tenacious cliché of the noble eco-Indian: of people conserving their resources and

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<sup>2</sup> This slogan stems from the notorious Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. The words of its founder, Richard Henry Pratt, are often paraphrased as "Kill the Indian, Save the Man," although his exact words were "Kill the Indian in him, and save the man" (qtd. in Treuer 133). In *The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee*, David Treuer asserts Pratt "reasoned that if wild turkeys could be domesticated, then surely Indians could be civilized" (133).

<sup>3</sup> This is not an accusation that Indigenous history and viewpoints are deliberately omitted in Estok's text but should rather serve as an example of how pervasive these blind spots are. Estok does identify the presumption that "control of the natural environment" is "god-given [sic]" as primarily Western, however, he does not explore other relationships with nature in his essay (6).

values, whose identity is reduced to an *instinctual* practice of eco-spiritual harmony, which is coded as desirable but outdated” (49; emphasis added). It is ecophobia that leads viewers to seek out “eco-Indians”: characters who can be easily understood, briefly empathized with, and ultimately *controlled* within the safety of the US-American cultural narrative of the “vanishing American.”<sup>4</sup>

Unacknowledged ecophobia allows the compulsion to control the natural world to run rampant and to continue to affect relations between both Indigenous peoples and settler governments and institutions. In the twenty-first century, it is not uncommon for (the visible and “un-vanished”) tribes and settler governments to attempt to work together on issues of environmental stewardship. However, as Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saaig Nishnaabe) asserts, “Colonialism has always *extracted* the indigenous—*extraction* of indigenous knowledge, indigenous women, indigenous peoples” (qtd. in Klein n.pag.; emphases added). Lee Schweningen echoes these sentiments, pointing out that “[w]here the mainstream has been interested in Indigenous knowledge,<sup>5</sup> it has been primarily to *extract* specific knowledge that might be immediately helpful for particular Western enterprises” (219; emphasis added). The projects that emerge between Indigenous and non-Indigenous entities are thus often ones in which settler institutions seek to *possess* and *control* Indigenous knowledge rather than to learn from the peoples who have safeguarded this knowledge. As long as these ecophobic tendencies remain unacknowledged and unchallenged, true cooperation proves challenging.

In *Power*, readers are introduced to the Taiga, a fictional tribe whose numbers have diminished to roughly thirty but who refuse to “vanish” despite the decimation of their traditional homelands. They have refused to fully assimilate, leaving some characters such as the protagonist Omishto trapped between two worlds. Moreover, the Taiga have refused to allow their knowledge to be extracted. This article argues that *Power* uses the ecogothic mode to simultaneously draw attention to the ecological damage which continues to be perpetrated through settler-colonial attitudes and institutions and to the stereotypes through which Indigenous-authored texts are often read. The ecogothic thus serves as a filter that brings environmental atrocities past and present into focus without offering readers a clear path toward addressing these atrocities. Before turning to the novel itself, a brief examination of the scholarship surrounding *Power* will serve to establish a pattern of extractive reading. In much of this scholarship, Hogan is expected to provide guidance for the reader and/or to write characters that conform to “eco-Indian” stereotypes. Ultimately, I assert, she does neither, thus refusing to adhere to these extractive expectations.

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<sup>4</sup> This term was popularized by the 1925 western film *The Vanishing American*. The film was based on a novel written by Zane Grey, which bore the same title. Both the novel and the film underscore the settler-colonial narrative of the inevitable disappearance of Indigenous peoples and cultures on the North American continent.

<sup>5</sup> Schweningen defines Indigenous knowledge as “the knowledge that Indigenous peoples hold and practice worldwide, practices these peoples have in some cases held, developed, and practiced for millennia” (218).

The following section, “Extractive Readings of *Power*,” presents a brief overview of scholarship in which *Power* has been read in terms of its messages on environmental responsibility. In these texts, scholars often place stereotypical expectations on the novel’s Indigenous characters—expectations that reflect the pervasive stereotype of the “eco-Indian.” Thereafter, the implementation of the ecogothic and the role of ecophobia in *Power* are analyzed and contextualized. This textual analysis begins with the novel’s frontier, which serves to establish the complicity of settlers in the crisis in the novel (and, by extension, in the extratextual world). The focus then shifts from the ecophobic roots of the American Gothic frontier and the literary frontier that Hogan creates to Ama’s killing of a Florida panther. Ama never shares her precise motivation with anyone, including the novel’s protagonist and narrator, Omishto. This article reads her actions, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, as at least partially rooted in ecophobic thinking. The final analytical section, “Knowledge Disclosure, Courtroom Witnesses, and (Gothic) Silence,” focuses on the way in which Taiga testimony is imbued with “eco-Indian” stereotypes by members of the court and the way in which the Taiga choose to testify (or not). In the course of the novel, the ecogothic<sup>6</sup> is thus employed in three separate and unique circumstances as a means of resisting disclosure of knowledge on both intratextual and extratextual levels. Firstly, through Omishto’s experience of the natural world, which has been forever changed by the colonizers’ attempts to control it. Secondly, through Ama’s killing of a panther—for which there is no clear-cut “eco-Indian” motivation—an action that is arguably ecophobic. And thirdly, through the US legal system and its approach to obtaining and framing information provided by Indigenous witnesses.

### Extractive Readings of *Power*

Those familiar with Linda Hogan’s writing will hardly be surprised at her inclusion in a volume dedicated to questions of environmental responsibility. Three of Hogan’s novels, in particular *Mean Spirit* (1990), *Solar Storms* (1995), and *Power* (1998), are often analyzed in tandem due to their explicitly ecocritical nature. In addition to engaging with ecocriticism, Linda Hogan’s works have also toyed with generic expectations—*Mean Spirit*,<sup>7</sup> for example, “inhabits multiple genre spaces: detective fiction, historical fiction, as well as Native

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<sup>6</sup> As mentioned above, the term ecophobia predates the term ecogothic. In this article, ecophobia is seen as the motor (the compulsion to control all elements of the natural world) which propels ecogothic narratives (featuring frightening natural events, creatures, etc.) forward.

<sup>7</sup> It is interesting to note that Hogan and *Mean Spirit* have been criticized by Robert Allen Warrior (Osage) for an inauthentic and incomplete portrayal of the history of the Osage murders and Osage culture (Stoecklein 22). *Power*, published nearly a decade after *Mean Spirit*, centers on the fate and traditions of the Taiga, a fictional tribe located in what is currently Florida. Although falling outside the scope of this paper, Warrior’s response to *Mean Spirit* reflects questions of authorial responsibility that Indigenous authors face when writing about the Indigenous cultures to which they themselves do not belong. In a more recent example of such criticism, Rebecca Roanhorse (Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo) has been accused of appropriating Diné culture by the Diné Writers Collective (Jawort). Roanhorse’s *Sixth World* series follows Diné monster-hunter Maggie Hoskie through post-apocalyptic Dinétah (the former Navajo reservation). Both Warrior’s and the Diné Writers Collective’s critiques raise further questions about responsibility, representation, and knowledge disclosure in Indigenous fiction.

American fiction” (Stoecklein 22). Significantly, *Power* has, up to this point, been overlooked as a work of ecogothic literature. The question of responsibility, however, is a point of contention in the scholarly treatment of *Power*. Whereas the plot of *Mean Spirit* highlights semi-historical events in which Indigenous peoples were plotted against, disenfranchised, and murdered for their oil rights, and *Solar Storms* highlights Indigenous resistance to environmental destruction, *Power* is unmoored from specific historical events and ends on an ambiguous note with regards to the fate of its protagonist, Omishto.

At the beginning of the novel, Omishto finds herself positioned between two worlds—the Euro-American and the Taiga—but as the novel progresses, she begins to question her place in the Euro-American world and the compatibility of the two. During a hurricane, Omishto’s worlds are turned upside down after following Ama through the Florida swamps. These swamps are part of the homelands of the Taiga, the fictional tribe to which Omishto and Ama, fondly referred to as her aunt, belong. It is in the heart of the swamp that Omishto witnesses the killing of an endangered Florida panther at Ama’s hands. The remainder of the novel centers on Omishto’s attempts to understand and come to terms with Ama’s actions and the pressure the young protagonist faces from both worlds to tell her side of the story. Throughout the novel, these worlds are at odds, even before Omishto becomes a witness to the killing of a panther that both worlds will treat as a crime (at least initially). It is Ama’s belief in the Taiga stories that leads to the killing of the panther. According to a traditional Taiga story, the ceremonial killing of a panther would bring about renewal not only for the Taiga, but the entire ecosystem. However, Ama never explicitly explains her motivation, not even to Omishto, and after Ama kills the panther, she fails to follow cultural protocols regarding the ceremonial treatment of its body. This ultimately leads to her banishment from the Taiga and their home, Kili Swamp. Before her Taiga-led trial, Ama is acquitted by a Florida court despite neglecting to defend her actions and refusing to accept any kind of legal protection due to her status as a Taiga and the hunting rights this status provides. Although she is pronounced innocent by the state courts, the Taiga elders punish her actions by demanding she leave Kili Swamp. While scholars<sup>8</sup> have examined Ama’s role as both a self-sacrificing murderer (she is ultimately forced from the Taiga homelands and left without a home in either world) and a courtroom witness, surprisingly little attention has been given to the positioning of Omishto, the novel’s protagonist and “precocious but conflicted narrator” (Cooper 147).

Despite the fact that Omishto’s character has not received as much attention as Ama’s, revisiting contrasting interpretations of Omishto’s fate helps delineate what scholars have come to expect from Indigenous-authored texts. Much as the question of the value of Indigenous knowledges in the twenty-first century outside of the realm of literary criticism is fraught with extractive, reductive power dynamics, the reception of works such as Hogan’s is susceptible to operating with the same problematic lens. Non-Indigenous readers may thus be prone to search for lessons they can glean from works such as *Power*, thereby expecting Indigenous-authored texts to function as resources to be extracted. The presence of such a

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Cooper, Manning, Peters, and Schweninger.

lens becomes clear when comparing the vastly differing conclusions drawn by scholars. Jesse Peters views Omishto's decision to return to the swamp and the Taiga elders as "a sad *acceptance* of cultural and personal isolation" (123; emphasis in original). For Peters, having power entails "[f]inding the strength to question one's place within the world (even if questioning means redefining "tradition" or defying colonial authority)," and Omishto's retreat into the swamp signals surrender rather than resistance or resilience (124). An Omishto who resurfaces in order to carve out her own syncretic existence would be one of power. However, Omishto's very observations throughout the novel make clear that a lack of understanding between the two worlds negates any possibility of such an existence. In another approach to *Power's* conclusion, Carrie Bowen-Mercer asserts that "Hogan offers readers a creative revisioning of a fractured world. She presents a relived and relivable ancient myth that gives us a sense of being present at the re-creation of the world" (160). In Peters' estimation, then, Omishto has succumbed to the harsh realities of her (failed) syncretic existence and cannot come to terms with her liminal existence, whereas Bowen-Mercer views Ama and Omishto's journey as a successful one bringing about rebirth and renewal. Bowen-Mercer's Edenic vision is rooted in fantasy; as Peters argues, "no one can return to a romantic, idyllic world of harmony, at least not one that ignores the present" and "[a]t the end of the novel, the world still remains fractured" (123). In Bowen-Mercer's overly rosy, if not romanticized version of Omishto's fate, the world is presumed to be experiencing a form of rebirth, while Peters' conclusion suggests that in returning to the elders in Kili Swamp, Omishto has resigned herself to her fate. Both readings display certain presumptions about what Indigenous literatures are and what they (should) do: tell stories of resistance and resilience and offer a pathway towards renewal and reconciliation.

These issues, evoked here in the context of environmental responsibility and responses to changed and changing lands and places, inherently raise questions about reader expectation with regard to Indigenous literatures and the protagonists of Indigenous stories. As Vine Deloria Jr. (Standing Rock Sioux) explains in his seminal work, *God is Red*, "For many people the stoic, heroic, and noble Indian who had lived an idyllic existence prior to contact with whites seemed to hold the key to survival and promised to provide new meanings for American life" (51). The "idyllic existence" Deloria Jr. references here is itself an illusion (as he is well aware), a stubbornly resilient romanticized picture of Indigenous life prior to colonization. As shown in the previous paragraph, the idea that the "Indian" promises to reveal "the key to survival" is pervasive. This expectation can be pieced together from Peters' overarching argument that Omishto's retreat to the elders in the swamp is a negative decision. By arguing that "[t]he real hope, and thus the real power in the story, lies in Ama's worldview, one that embraces cultural syncretisms and sees identity as including all experiences, traditional and otherwise," (113) Peters is arguing for a worldview that consists of the "modern" world and the world of the Taiga. However, the Taiga side of this equation is not based on learned Taiga traditions according to what the reader is told about Ama's background: "she has no healing herbs or roots or songs" (Hogan 16). Ama's knowledge of Taiga traditions is partial, "[s]he lives in a natural way at the outside edges of our lives, and she 'keeps up with relations,' as she says, with nature and the spirit world" (17). Thus, the

worldview put forward by Ama is not syncretic in the way that Peters suggests; that is, it does not solely consist of elements of “the Taiga elders and the European American world” (112). Instead, Ama’s worldview is also built upon knowledge that she has acquired on her own, perhaps even *instinctually*—recalling the cliché of the “eco-Indian”—during the time she spent alone in the swamp as a young girl. If one argues that Ama’s worldview only consists of knowledge passed on by the Taiga elders and put forward by Western science, this either ignores the years she spent in the swamp as well as her largely solitary present, or it conflates the knowledge she gained during the time she spent with the elders. Such a conflation implies Taiga culture and the natural world are one and the same, thereby feeding into the stereotype of the “eco-Indian.” In deciding to return to the elders, Omishto will learn Taiga traditions, stories, and language, something Ama did not have the opportunity to do.

Omishto, “the One Who Watches” (Hogan 4), presents her two worlds through her own eyes. These eyes repeatedly observe the methods by which the “modern” world attempts to render Indigenous knowledges, traditions, and their presence invisible, valuing “modern” Western understandings of Indigenous peoples over the words and presences of the peoples themselves; these understandings reduce the Taiga to the vanishing “eco-Indian.” Omishto watches as Ama attempts to restore balance to the world through an act of violence that only leads to her own banishment; Ama’s (self-chosen) isolation from the Taiga in her moment of need and her act of self-sacrifice also feed into the “eco-Indian” stereotype. *Power*, as relayed by Omishto, is a story riddled with the doom and gloom of gothic fiction, specifically ecogothic fiction. In her implementation of the ecogothic mode, Hogan creates a narrative in which the natural world has become more dangerous (through more frequent extreme weather phenomena such as hurricanes and drought) to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous inhabitants. As I outline in “Panther Hunting,” this ecological reality leads Ama to act in ways that violate the Taiga teachings and which border on ecophobia; her fear clouds her judgment. Gary Anderson has suggested that “fear packed inside gothic forms can be unpacked, or neutralized, or bypassed altogether, in the interests of sharing, and centering on, Indigenous knowledge in an Indigenous context” (330). However, as *Power*’s narrative unfolds, it becomes clear that the foundations for this type of sharing and centering have not (yet) been established. Ama’s syncretic approach to living amongst the two worlds proves detrimental to herself and as the courtroom scene will demonstrate, the Euro-American world in *Power* is not prepared to listen to Indigenous testimony that is anything other than stereotypical. In the absence of the ability to share and “center on” Taiga knowledges, the ecogothic becomes a vehicle by which concerns regarding the extractive relationship between Indigenous and settler communities can be expressed, highlighting the lack of communication that exists between and within Omishto’s worlds. Moreover, the text itself refuses to be read for extractive purposes—it discloses no knowledge of how the Taiga will survive, although the tone surrounding Omishto’s return to Kili Swamp at the end of the novel certainly implies they will: “I dance and as the wind stirs in the trees, someone sings a song that says the world will go on living” (235). Instead of offering answers, advice, or



figures of responsibility to readers, Hogan calls them to a literary frontier, one where they are not safe and one which offers no comfort or solutions.

### ***Power's (Eco)Gothic Frontiers and Territories***

Although the term ecogothic is relatively new, its core tenet that “nature poses a problem of control, inciting human efforts at dominance” (Keetley and Sivils 3) is certainly central to a large swath of US-American fiction. A prime example is Charles Brockden Brown’s *Edgar Huntly* (1799), in which the protagonist, Huntly, also kills a panther that “sustains him until he has the strength to find his way out” of the cave he has wandered into (Lloyd-Smith 44), and thus provides the same “key to survival” that the “noble Indian” is also expected to provide, as Deloria Jr. asserts (51). Huntly’s encounter both with the panther and with “a group of sleeping Indians” that he also kills, place this issue of control at the center of American Gothic fiction from its earliest stages:<sup>9</sup> “at the heart of the American Gothic wilderness is the savage Indian, and the overdetermined compulsion of the settler to kill and to signal his triumph over the barbaric in a supposed distinction from the primitive” (Lloyd-Smith 44). Indigenous peoples are cast as people who, like (and as a part of) the natural world, must be dominated and controlled.

Despite these early ecophobic impulses in Brockden Brown’s novel, Alan Lloyd-Smith notes that “the *Gothic* possibilities of conflict with Native Americans were not greatly drawn on by other writers” (45; emphasis in original), which would seem to suggest that the “domination,” or the *belief* that Indigenous peoples had been “dominated” took root so rapidly that exploring the “doubling of [one’s] own nature with the savage” (44) failed to capture the US-American imagination of the nineteenth century. Instead, Indigenous peoples and the “territory” to which they have been relegated have become a conduit through which the non-Indigenous seek to reimagine themselves:

In the American imagination, the Indian still inhabits, and represents, Indian Territory. This territory is the West of unlimited potential for the Euramerican<sup>10</sup> imagination, where the past can be cast aside and the self reimaged in relation to a vast landscape [...]. Most importantly, however, it is a *safe space*, not the wilderness realm of psychic disintegration illuminated by Hawthorne but a region bounded by discourse, articulated and controlled. Like the Indian, the territory participates in a kind of “discourse of nature.” However, because its borders can be known and marked—because, after all, it was initially created to contain wild Indians—it is safe. Ultimately, it can be not only imaginatively reoccupied and appropriated, but cleansed of Indians. (Owens, *Mixedblood* 45; emphasis added)

<sup>9</sup> The panther is also often at the center of such passages, as Matthew Sivils points out. According to Sivils, Garcilaso de la Vega’s account of Hernando de Soto’s “attempted conquest of the area,” *The Florida of the Inca* contains “what is probably the first in a series of American Gothic panther-killing scenes that would echo down through Brown, Fenimore Cooper, William Gilmore Simms, Harriet Prescott Spofford, and Ambrose Bierce” (86, 87). Hogan’s choice of setting (Florida) and central conflict (the killing of a Florida panther) thus also clearly invoke generic features of early American Gothic narratives.

<sup>10</sup> Louis Owens uses the term “Euramerican” in the same sense that “Euro-American” has been used in this article.

Louis Owens (Cherokee Choctaw) juxtaposes this “territory” with the “frontier.”<sup>11</sup> Both terms, he explains, have been imagined and defined “from the stock Euramerican perspective,” with the territory signifying land and space which have been mapped out and assigned arbitrary “fixed boundaries” that “make it conform to a metanarrative” (44-45)—a metanarrative which erases Indigenous presence. This space stands in sharp contrast to the frontier. While the territory employs boundaries allowing for safe voyeurism, the literary frontier poses a threat, housing “the incomprehensible ‘other’” and potentially leading to “psychic disintegration” if entered (44). The frontier described by Owens correlates with the forest and caverns of *Edgar Huntly*—these mysterious, threatening spaces are to be entered at one’s own peril. Addressing literature specifically, Owens maintains that it is the duty of “writers and teachers [...] to make sure that our texts and our classrooms are not ‘safe’ spaces from which a reader or student may return unchanged or unthreatened,” despite the fact that these types of stories are “not what Euramerican readers want to see in Native American writing” (46). However, as the excerpts from both Owens and Smith demonstrate above, the frontier has largely been “tamed” into a recognizable territory in settler narratives. What narratives such as Hogan’s do then is answer Owens’ call to draw the reader into the threatening space of the frontier. This frontier is not the “untouched wilderness,” but rather the space in which the natural world and its inhabitants, including Omishto, grapple with the effects of settler colonialism.

*Power’s* more tangible frontier, set in “the great dismal swamp of Southern gothic lore” (Waegner 197), poses unsettling and unresolved questions about what a responsible (or respectful) relationship with the environment entails. The very cover of the 1998 W.W. Norton edition evokes an unsettling atmosphere: hanging in the midst of dark tree branches, a white dress sways in the wind. This unsettling mood is underscored by the description of the large tree Methuselah: “They call it that because it’s been there so long with its tangled dark roots hanging on five hundred years or so. They say it’s a tree the Spanish brought with them here and planted. It’s not from this continent. That’s why there’s only one. And no one can figure how it took hold in the shallow soil of this place” (Hogan 6). In this passage, Methuselah is not only presented as an utterly foreign body to the soil, but its strength and ability to endure in such an environment are called into question; its roots have penetrated the soil, extracting what it requires to survive and making no significant contribution to its new environment. The foreignness of the tree is reiterated several pages later, but beyond its foreignness, this passage imbues Methuselah with an element of violence: “The light outside is so strange, even though there’s a patch of sun on the roots of the old foreign tree called Methuselah. [...] I see the roots of Methuselah, gnarled like hands grasping mightily at something, like old, old hands, hanging on to the earth” (30). These old hands of the colonial era continue to influence Omishto’s late-twentieth-century existence. Indeed, Omishto’s descriptions of her surroundings in the first half of the novel are especially dark:

Last night, before I fell asleep in my boat, the earth was bleeding. The red light that began at the edge of earth moved upward until all the sky was red. Mama calls it

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<sup>11</sup> Both terms also appear in quotation marks in Owens’ *Mixedblood Messages*.

stormlight, and this morning as I sit back in the boat, it looks like she is right; a storm is coming in. I watch the clouds form. They are high above me, heavy and dark, and they are fast, traveling across the sky. (1)

Omishito herself is subjected to violence in her own home, as is her mother. In the opening passage of the novel, the blood-red sky is invoked alongside her mother's term for such a phenomenon, hinting at the violence to which she is exposed. But Omishito also associates this violence with the exploitative treatment of the environment: "The violent striping of the earth reminds Omishito of Herm, her abusive step-father, beating her naked body with his belt" (Cooper 147). The violence wrought upon Omishito and her surroundings dispels the notion that the "territory" is a place of safety and refuge and once again highlights that the ecophobic treatment of Indigenous peoples and their lands go hand in hand.

The traditional homelands of the Taiga have themselves changed beyond this single looming tree, however. In one passage, Omishito recounts the consequences of the recent drought:

The land and the trees have needed rain. It has been a drought. This is the year of wildfire in places that were swamp, the year Lake Okeechobee was opened and the water level down here rose so much it drowned all the fawns. The wardens had to kill all the starving deer that were standing up to their necks in water, and it broke my heart to see the little deer with their white undersides lying along the high roads in a line, counted out and numbered as if they were nothing more than rocks or coins. (Hogan 27)

The violence enacted upon the landscape is intended to control nature—the drought must be defeated and the only way to do so in the eyes of the government is to cause further destruction while simultaneously ignoring its own role in perpetuating it—pitting humans against an increasingly "difficult-to-control" natural world.

In sharp contrast to these dark passages stands Oni, the wind: "The wind is a living force. We Taiga call the wind Oni. It enters us all at birth and stays with us all through life. It connects us to every other creature" (28). However, even the wind and its strength become dangerous during a powerful hurricane, when "the sky is bruised and unnatural, and the wind is so strong the deer are flying, looks of terror on their faces." These are the same "hungry deer *they* have been shooting" (36; emphasis added). In one scene, the deer are shot by game wardens; in the next, they are thrown through the air by a hurricane, the latter arguably exacerbated by the effects of climate change. Although climate change itself is not referenced explicitly in these passages, changes to the climate (including droughts) are. Hogan underscores the violent force of the storm and its effects on the living beings of the swampy region; Omishito "can't even hear the slashing rain or the terrified screams of owls" (36). At the same time, nature, despite the warden's best efforts, continues to assert its agency. After all of the abuse this ecosystem has endured, it maintains "an undeniable energy and strength" (Cooper 150). The storm—in an overtly anti-colonial passage—brings about an end to Methuselah, the "foreign" tree whose roots are too shallow to withstand the high winds: "Methuselah falls and I hear nothing but only see that what has lasted this long is being taken down now as if it were nothing, as if it had never been anything that counted" (Hogan 38). Just before the large tree's fall, Omishito observes: "All nature is

against us. It falls down on us. It throws itself at us” (37). The wind takes on an uncanny persona, this entity—with which the Taiga identify life—has brought so much death and destruction: “The strong winds have blown water all across the land. [...] Fish, thrown out of water, have been able to swim out over land and there is an occasional, desperate flash of a white belly. Heaven has fallen” (46). The hurricane, strengthened by a changing climate, has become a danger to all living things in the area, complicating any notions of an “eco-Indian” who is so in harmony with nature as to escape such storms unscathed, physically or mentally.

It is in the midst of this destructive scene that Ama decides to seek Sisa, the panther whom she refers to as “grandmother” (49)—a decision that changes the course of both Omishto’s and Ama’s lives and further blurs the lines between truth and fact and believing and knowing, while simultaneously creating a boundary between humans and non-humans. As the next section will demonstrate, Ama’s decision to take the life of a panther in an attempt to save the Taiga indicates an individualistic, if not anthropocentric<sup>12</sup> approach to renewing the world—an approach bound to fail.

## Panther Hunting

In “‘Woman Chasing her God’: Ritual, Renewal, and Violence in Linda Hogan’s *Power*,” Lydia R. Cooper notes “the absence of an easily identifiable ‘bad-guy’” in the novel, thus “illustrating the novel’s profound argument that humans are not the comic-book villains of the environmental crisis, but that they are rather misguided, as pitiable as they are despicable” (151). Cooper’s search for a “bad guy” is limited to the misguided and pitiable nature of the novel’s *Euro-American* characters. However, this notion is complicated by *Power*’s pivotal moment in which Ama shoots and kills Sisa, the panther. It is not so much that Ama and Omishto identify “a ubiquitous failure to recognize and respect the ancient ‘rules’ of ecological balance and mutual dependency” in the “lapsed world” (ibid.), but that Hogan’s novel questions the axiomatic nature of Indigenous connections with the natural world. As mentioned in the introduction, Ama, though “she still swears by old-time beliefs, and believes in all the Taiga stories” (Hogan 13), does not have knowledge of “healing herbs or roots or songs” (16). In her liminal existence, Ama appears to have less than one foot in both worlds, at home in neither.

That Ama’s syncretic worldview is not where the true power of the story lies is on display during the panther hunt. Ama’s worldview is, in fact, not syncretic because she ignores Taiga protocols, she acts on her own authority, and she does not communicate with the elders after she kills the panther. Her actions are motivated by the stories she believes in. However, her belief in these stories is predicated upon their static nature, which is antithetical to many Indigenous religions and beliefs: “The structure of their religious traditions is taken directly

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<sup>12</sup> Lexico defines ‘anthropocentric’ as “[r]egarding humankind as the central or most important element of existence, especially as opposed to God or animals.” This definition reiterates a core pillar of ecophobia—the clear separation of human beings from nature, with human beings ideally in control of nature.

from the world around them, from their relationships with other forms of life. Context is therefore all-important for both practice and the understanding of reality” (Deloria Jr. 65). The specific story in question, about the “Panther Woman,” was told to Ama by Janie Soto, a Taiga elder; a story Ama, in turn, shares with Omishto (Hogan 110-11). Even Omishto’s introduction to the story draws attention to its flexible nature: “This is how I heard it” (110), emphasizing the *listener’s* role in storytelling and suggesting that the speaker does not have sole control of the meaning—there is more than one way of *hearing* “Panther Woman.” Before she recounts the tale, Omishto remarks that she believes “Ama got lost in this story” (ibid.). Whether Ama has lost herself in the story by taking it too literally and interjecting herself into the narrative action, or whether she is actually the woman in the traditional Taiga story who is described as having been “raised by wild animals because her human family had rejected her” (ibid.) remains unclear. In either case, Omishto believes she and Ama followed the panther through an opening “into that other world,” a world of “rivers on fire, animals dying of sickness, and foreign vines” into which “no one enters willingly” (ibid.). As evidenced by the changing climate and the suffering it has brought to Omishto’s homeland along with the intrusive roots of the Spanish tree, Methuselah, it would appear that Omishto and Ama were already in the “dying” world before the day of the storm. It is on that day that Omishto begins to recognize her changed surroundings as an ecogothic world, one where not only the climate has changed, but one in which she is taught to think in ecophobic terms, both implicitly and explicitly. After Ama’s arrest, Omishto returns to her own house and immediately laments having been “thrown back into the *world* too fast” (90; emphasis added): a world consisting of “the washing machine,” “the lights which are on even though it is light outside,” and “the gray linoleum tiles of the floor” (90-91). This “clean,” artificial world—the house in which Omishto grew up with her mother and her siblings—severs her family from the natural world.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the description of her mother’s house stands in sharp contrast to Omishto’s own appearance during the same passage: “I am dirty and disheveled and wearing Ama’s clothes because mine still hang in the tree. My arms are scratched, my nails are broken and filled with black dirt. All this in [my mother’s] clean little kitchen” (91). The juxtaposition of Omishto’s appearance, marked by her experiences in the swamp and her mother’s sterile kitchen, underscores Omishto’s growing discomfort and sense of alienation from her past and from her own family.<sup>14</sup> This discomfort follows her during her first day at school after the panther’s death: “I glance around, knowing I am not one of these people, either, not these people who are like vines grown over this land, *smothering* it” (106; emphasis added). The school and those who

<sup>13</sup> Omishto’s mother attempts to mask her own “natural” appearance and that of her surroundings, reflecting the tenets of ecophobia laid out by Estok: “She is wearing too much blush on her cheeks, but I see beneath it her skin, not quite smooth and very pale” (Hogan 117). Her excessive use of make-up may also reflect her desire to pass as white (116), but even her mother’s outdoor “plants” are placed under strict control. Instead of planting real flowers, she “plants” artificial ones (151).

<sup>14</sup> Although her mother is also Taiga, she “tries to pass for white” (Hogan 20), has little to no contact with other tribal members, and does not pass on any of her knowledge to Omishto. Omishto describes her mother as being “of a split mind” (20), but throughout the majority of the novel, she chooses and prefers to remain solely in the Euro-American world.

attend it are “smothering” (and learning to smother) the Taiga and their homelands. After this realization, Omishto parts ways with her schooling, deciding for the first time to leave an assignment unsubmitted and refusing to return to school the following day (112).

In contrast to her decision to distance herself from the Euro-American realm of her mother’s house and her schooling, Omishto struggles to come to terms with Ama’s actions. As witnessed and understood by Omishto, her actions were meant either to protect the Taiga, to usher in the rebirth of both the Taiga and the Florida panther, and/or to put the animal out of its misery. As Craig Womack (Creek) has argued, however, the relationship between the hunter and the hunted (in his specific example, a deer)

is ended when one party is dead. This is not to say that prayers and ceremonies are of no value for the person who has no choice but to kill. It *is* to say the deer will always get the worst part of the bargain no matter how carefully it is done, and any hunter who is experienced, and honest, knows that in spite of the most thoughtful efforts to minimize suffering it doesn’t always go well. (13; emphasis in original)

Womack appeals for the consideration of an animal’s actual well-being, rather than merely its symbolic importance in a given text and argues that this recalibration “could be a good direction in Native studies where the physical welfare of animals could be just as much a concern as their representations in Native literature or meanings in Native philosophy” (24). Although the precise rationale behind Ama’s killing of the panther ultimately remains a mystery, the possible motives for her actions privilege human feelings, human survival, and the human perspective over those of the non-human: killing the panther to protect the Taiga elders from the knowledge of its condition and the pain that knowledge might cause, killing the panther to facilitate spiritual rebirth and renewal (although this would, in theory, presume adherence to traditional practices which Ama has ignored), or killing the animal because it was already ill (and thus in part to assuage one’s own conscience), all work to benefit the human (in this case, the human/hunter) side of the equation. Furthermore, the notion that Ama might have wished to put the cat out of its misery is questioned through what Omishto witnesses: a cat fully aware of Ama and Omishto’s presence. Not only is the cat aware of its surroundings, but it is clearly also capable of surviving in them: “The cat knows she is there and I see it draw her forward [...] Before long, it is silent, and Ama sees the cat, once again in the shadows. [...] It is guarding the dead deer, half on it, claiming it” (63, 65). What Omishto witnesses suggests that Ama has internalized at least part of the Western ecophobic drive to control nature—murdering a panther to bring about renewal and reflecting “European philosophical and scientific traditions” that “remain heavily invested in an ethos of human exclusivity” (Justice 40).

*Power* highlights the danger of presuming Indigenous cultures, religions, and ceremonies to be static: “[t]he death of a panther is no longer acceptable nor does it provide renewal because the natural world has become too corrupted, too endangered” (Cooper 155). Cooper’s astute observation that “Hogan’s depictions of religious rituals are significant, in fact, precisely because she balances her critique of violent religious imagery with a deep respect for the vital role religion plays in *communal* renewal” (156; emphasis added)

dovetails with the arguments presented in this section. Ama's actions are not only based on a story now out-of-sync with her people's current situation, but she also acts alone in carrying them out; whether she is viewed as a scapegoat, a sacrifice, or a villain, her undertakings remain solitary. Hogan thus underscores that renewal must be a *communal* effort, one centered on kinship. In his 2018 monograph *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee) emphasizes the importance of kinship for Indigenous communities: "[K]inship makes peoples of us through responsibilities to one another; settler nationalism, focusing ever more on *individualism* in opposition to *community*, makes us lonely and isolated subjects of an ultimately unaccountable state authority" (Justice 43; emphases added). Ama becomes one of these "lonely and isolated subjects" after her actions in the swamp. She is banished by the tribal elders for failing to adhere to Taiga protocols. Her neglect of these protocols leads the elders to "believe she wanted *power*" (Hogan 174; emphasis added), thus placing her in the same camp as the ecophobic colonizers. From the moment Ama decides to kill Sisa, she begins to walk down a road of individualism and isolation, regardless of whether she wanted power for herself. Her actions are based on the presumption that stories cannot change and that human (Taiga, specifically) physical and emotional well-being is more important than that of the panther. Whether consciously or not, Ama's decisions during the storm indicate that her mind, at least to some extent, has been infiltrated by ecophobic ways of thinking.

### Knowledge Disclosure, Courtroom Witnesses, and (Gothic) Silences

In the courtroom, no such infiltration is necessary. As I outline in this section, the non-Indigenous trial participants are so entrenched in their ecophobic mindset—which leads them to view Ama as an "eco-Indian"—that there can be no true communication between them and the Taiga. Pascale McCullough Manning has noted that Ama's trial is loosely based on the trial of James E. Billie, a member of the Seminole tribe who was tried in 1987 for violating the Endangered Species Act by killing a Florida panther on the Seminole Indian reservation in 1983.<sup>15</sup> In contrast to Ama, Manning points out that Billie argued his innocence on the basis of his tribal status: "He claimed that the First Amendment right to freedom of religion granted the Native American absolute autonomy in hunting practices, where hunting specific animals was required for the fulfillment of religious ceremonies" (4). Manning's article focuses on the act of confession and the relationship between the "subject/confessor" and "the object of the statement, the listener" (1). *Power*, Manning argues, "stages a rupture whereby the connection cannot be made between confessor and listener and wherein the testimony of the authority is continually confounded and interrupted by the subjects whose testimonies are solicited." These "authorities" and

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<sup>15</sup> The trial was delayed through a series of legal disputes regarding the state of Florida's authority over the Big Cypress reservation for Seminole Indians. Ultimately, the Florida District Court of Appeals determined that the state did indeed have the power to bring charges against Billie. After the Supreme Court of Florida declined to review the District Court's decision in March 1987, the case finally proceeded at the federal district court level (Morin 169-70).

“subjects” are “anthropologist and Taiga Indian,” “lawyer and witness,” and “environmentalist and panther” (2). Ama’s abrupt confession “I killed it [...] I slayed it” (Hogan 135) comes after a slew of questions from the prosecutor attempting to cast doubt on her connections to Taiga traditions:

“Would you say you hold to traditional ways?”

For one second, she looks to the back of the room where the old people sit, listening. It’s a brief glance. Maybe no one else sees it.

Then she says, “Yes.”

“Even though you had a Dutch grandpa?”

“Yes sir.”

“Even though you don’t live with the traditional people?”

“Yes.”

But she lives close enough to go there now and then and no one knows what that means anymore, tradition. Some people think it means old-fashioned or superstitious. (134)

Rather than framing Ama’s courtroom statements (or lack thereof) as confessions, it is pertinent to return to a key term introduced by Manning above: testimony. In her monograph *The Testimonial Uncanny: Indigenous Knowledge, Storytelling, and Reparative Practices*, Julia Emberley explains that “testimonies appear to deliver direct accounts of events and, as such, are thought to be true and valuable, in and of themselves” (6). However, in Ama’s case, her own lawyer’s questions encourage her to disclose information that *he* has learned through speaking with an anthropologist, not a member of the Taiga tribe. Although, as Omishto remarks, the anthropologist’s assertion that the Taiga believe “in balance in the universe” is not entirely false, the question posed in the isolating context of the courtroom “sounds stupid and childlike, not at all what it really is” (Hogan 135). Ama’s lawyer attempts to paint her as an “eco-Indian” at one with nature who mistakenly shot the panther. When Ama refuses to follow his lead, reiterating that “I knew what it was and I killed it” (*ibid.*), he turns to claims regarding the Taiga worldview and paints Ama in the light of what Owens refers to as “Chief Doom literature”: “Indians who are romantic, unthreatening, and self-destructive. Indians who are enacting, in one guise or another, the process of vanishing” (*Mixedblood* 82). The romanticized, “eco-Indian” otherness that Ama’s lawyer attempts to attribute to her is intended to create a safe, controllable “territory” in the courtroom, one that would absolve the lawyers, jurors, and judge of their complicity in the current ecogothic reality facing both worlds, Taiga and settler. At the same time, this romantic imagery allows court members to distance themselves from their past: “I can see that if they convict her now they would feel the weight of their own sins through history, of their own prejudice, that they are racist toward someone who is nothing like them” (Hogan 137).

This “safety” proves to be illusionary. In the courtroom, where she becomes “their animal” (136), Ama embodies the uncanny as defined by Renée Bergland: “Quite literally, the uncanny is the unsettled, the not-yet-colonized, the unsuccessfully colonized, or the decolonized” (11). Prior to the day of the storm, Omishto repeatedly describes Ama as a person who exists between two worlds, who utilizes both “old” and “new” ways. Through



her testimony, however, she positions herself as the return of “what has been buried, and, just as important, what has been conquered” (ibid.). The unnerving effect of her testimony briefly transforms the courtroom into a frontier space, erasing the safety and power the non-Indigenous participants expect to experience. The prosecutor interrogates Ama about her ties to both worlds in an attempt to argue she was too far removed from the Taiga world to have held Taiga beliefs, but with each “Yes,” Ama refutes his insinuation, emphasizing her identity as a Taiga woman. With these brief responses, Ama forces the non-Indigenous members of the court to confront their own colonial complicity. The effects of this uncomfortable confrontation are on display the day after Ama’s testimony, when one of the lawyers returns to court with “sweat at his hairline” and looking exceptionally pale, having been unable to sleep the night before (Hogan 137). In this courtroom scene, not only does the prosecutor fail to portray Ama as a fully “integrated” member of the Euro-American world, but his physical response to her testimony also represents the unease members of the Euro-American world experience when confronted with their colonial past.

While Ama, on the one hand, might be viewed as “the silent other who inhabits the gap in the cultural narrative to which the discourses of law belong,” incomprehensible to the US-American legal system (Manning 8), her silence is also a form of protest. Regardless of the testimony she does or does not offer, her verdict has already been yielded in the minds of the jurors, who see her as a “noble eco-Indian” of the Taiga. They will find her innocent based on their own preconceived notions with or without hearing Ama’s side of the story. Omishto even suggests that “silence is a kind of truth” (Hogan 120). This observation resonates with the term “Gothic silence” as developed by Amy Gore in “Gothic Silence: S. Alice Callahan’s *Wynema*, the Battle of Little Bighorn, and the Indigenous Unspeakable”:

These narrative silences become especially attractive to Indigenous women writers who operate under the double bind of race and gender and who witnessed the spreading devastations of colonization during the nineteenth century. For them, strategic silence often became a way to gesture toward the unspeakable, a term often used within gothic literary criticism to describe historical trauma and its various means of cultural, linguistic, and generational breaks. (24-25)

Whereas Gore’s study concerns itself with Indigenous female writers of the nineteenth century, and thus with “strategic silence” on an extradiegetic level, Omishto implements silence on an intradiegetic level, refusing to answer questions posed in the courtroom, although her narration shares her responses to these questions with the reader. When asked about the panther, for example, Omishto provides far more detail for the reader:

“Did you see the cat?”

I saw it thin and dying. Hungry. Pale brown, gray on its face, the dark circle on its side. I can see it even now in front of my eyes. I nod at him. “Yes, but only for a moment. After it was killed.” (Hogan 123)

This additional information is in fact redundant since Omishto already described the panther’s body early in the morning following the storm. In repeating key information from the day of the storm only in her extradiegetic narration rather than her intradiegetic interactions, Omishto underscores her refusal to engage with a courtroom unable to

understand, appreciate, or listen to her testimony. “They believe what we say will give them something, a glimpse into another world, not of their concern, a world that is a crack in the container of their history” (136), she explains, once again highlighting the extractive nature of this relationship—she and the other Taiga witnesses are still the mysterious “other” of the frontier, but they are expected to provide information for the pleasure of the court. Omishto is not the only witness to omit information; when Ama’s lawyer asks the tribal chairman whether he or others believe that eating panther meat will give one power, he refuses to provide the answer the lawyer seeks, responding ““Well, anyone can believe anything”” (132). Omishto underscores the incomplete nature of the chairman’s statement: “He doesn’t say that the claws were once used for scratching the bodies of people in ceremonies” (ibid.). By refusing to disclose information about Taiga traditions, Omishto and the chairman engage in a form of protest; their silence raises questions about the US justice system and its (in)ability to *hear* Indigenous testimony.

In contrast to Omishto and the chairman, Taiga elder Janie Soto, with whom Ama lived for several years in Kili Swamp, discloses information about Taiga traditions in an attempt to acquit Ama. According to Soto, had Ama killed the panther, she would have followed Taiga protocols which would have required the presence of further tribal members. Soto’s disclosures are not “enough to condemn Ama, not enough to free her either,” but they are substantial enough to widen “the crack in that container, that jar of history,” leaving Omishto with the impression that her world is being divided irrevocably into two (143). Soto and Annie Hide are two Taiga elders who testify, each through a translator, and are also, notably, the only two Taiga witnesses to divulge information about “traditional” Taiga beliefs, raising further doubts about the salvation to be found in a syncretic existence. Ama and Omishto exist in a liminal space between the two worlds and choose to stay silent; they know the stories, myths, and stereotypes that pervade the world outside of Kili Swamp, and they know that their words will be misunderstood and misconstrued. Instead, they refuse to provide the testimony Ama’s lawyer desires, even though the words themselves may be nearly identical to what he wants to hear, implementing silence as a form of protest. Alison Hargreaves, in an account of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) protests in Canada, reminds readers that the goal of the protests is not inclusion but “to assert the incommensurability of Indigenous and Euro-Canadian<sup>16</sup> structures of justice and accountability, and to insist on the need for a different political relationship between Indigenous peoples and the colonial nation-state” (8). Thus, the testimony provided (or not provided) by Ama and Omishto serves as an indictment of the Western legal system, its treatment of Indigenous peoples and knowledges, and the persistent, omnipresent stereotypes which continue to hinder any form of constructive dialogue. Nevertheless, the “crack” in Western history is widened by the testimony Janie Soto and Annie Hide provide, suggesting that this kind of testimony is also crucial to moving beyond “eco-Indian” stereotypes. These two types of testimony work in tandem; one destabilizes while the other

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<sup>16</sup> Hargreaves’s study focuses solely on Indigenous literature and protests within Canada, however, the “incommensurability” of these two systems is also at the heart of Hogan’s courtroom scenes.

deconstructs. As Justice has noted, “Only rarely does new knowledge break down that existing structure. Yet the destabilization is significant, as it opens and empowers spaces of dissent that make possible the larger, more important transformations” (41). *Power’s* courtroom scene is the dawn of this kind of destabilization. The questions that remain at the end of the novel are just how wide and lasting of a “crack” the Taiga elders have made, whether settler-colonial institutions are ready to listen to the words passing through such “cracks,” and what can be done to lay the foundation for a dialogue between the world of the Taiga and the world of the Euro-Americans.

## Conclusion

The (eco)gothic preoccupations of Hogan’s novel are embedded in its very title, “the central topic thematized by the Gothic is inevitably *power*: who is allowed to do what based upon their subject position within a particular society at a specific moment in time” (Weinstock 2). In the ecogothic environment of *Power*, the Taiga do not—yet—have the ability to be *heard* in the court of law; Ama’s extremely sparse testimony is simultaneously viewed through the lens of tragic “Indians” or through the lens of threatening “savages,” both of which have their origins in romantic and gothic fiction, and both of which indicate that the process described by Owens here has come to fruition:

It is finally the signifier “Indian” that Euramerica seeks to subsume. Ultimately the “Indian” story has nothing at all to do with the actual people who are native to this continent. Only from such a perspective could Euramerica feel so utterly comfortable in reimagining Indians and speaking for Indians [...] And within such a perspective the multicultural reality of Native American identity has no place, for what David Murray calls a “discourse of Indianness”—the kind of essentializing necessary for the subsumption of Indian identity into the national metanarrative—can allow for no stress on the radical specificity of Native American tribal identities. There can be no such thing as Blackfoot literature, or Choctaw literature, or Pueblo literature, but only “Indian” literature. (*Mixedblood* 45)

The effect of the Taiga elders’ testimony is particularly telling in this context—the knowledge shared by Janie Soto and Annie Hide is specific to Taiga culture and stands in stark contrast to the essentializing described above. Owens’ own novels have been analyzed in the context of the ecogothic. In “Rethinking Wilderness: Louis Owens’s Wounded Landscapes and Eco-Gothic Specters,” Paul Whitehouse asserts that Owens “illuminates the Anglo-American concept of wilderness” by “peeling back layers of insulating romantic idealism and supposedly progressive wilderness policymaking to reveal a colonial mechanism that erases Indigenous presence in a landscape that has been occupied and managed for millennia” (55). In doing so, “Owens employs an eco-Gothic approach, characterized by wounded and transgressive landscapes, burdened with secrets and haunting absent-presences, ones that refuse generalization into an exclusionary settler colonial narrative,” creating “a layered, syncretic space, with overlapping stories and unfamiliar specters that remind us of the need to push beyond constraining ideologies and indigenize readings of nature” (55-56). In *Power*,

the “syncretic space” occupied by Ama proves to be highly unstable ground which results in an act of solitary self-sacrifice.

The “truth” behind Ama’s actions remains elusive and ambiguous; however, the disquieting effect they have on Omishto leads to the protagonist’s decision to reconnect with the Taiga elders. Peters interprets Omishto’s decision to join the elders rather than following in Ama’s footsteps as a failure to learn from Ama’s example: “Ama is willing to be cast out so that Omishto, with her new strength and knowledge, may take her place and start the process of healing and balancing the world. [...] Sadly, Omishto does not take the lesson and use it” (Peters 121). Peters’ interpretation of Omishto’s decision overlooks the likelihood that following in Ama’s footsteps would ultimately lead to Omishto’s own demise and banishment. Omishto is *expected* to “take her place” and begin “balancing the world” (*ibid.*), but this cannot be a solitary endeavor. Indeed, Ama’s attempt to renew the world and protect the Taiga by acting alone led to her banishment from the tribe and the end of her friendship with Omishto.

Unlike Owens’ ecogothic, the version employed by Hogan indicates “the need to push beyond constraining ideologies” (Whitehouse 55-56), but refrains from offering advice on how this may be done. *Power* is not a novel from which knowledge is to be extracted. It is a novel that places non-Indigenous readers in the position of what Emberley has termed the “accidental witness,” a state which “occurs when the listener or reader pursues the truth of a traumatic event and, unexpectedly, finds her- or himself pursued by something else, a type of haunting” (109). In order to pursue the “truth” behind the ecogothic world in which Ama and Omishto find themselves, the reader must first learn to *listen*—beyond the bounds of the novel.

Omishto, in the novel’s final chapter, “What I Have Left,” indicates that there is hope for the future:

In the old days it was said that the shining fish would come up from the water just to partake of our faces as we washed. The wind played a song in the reeds just to draw us near. The whole earth loved the human people. Now it pulls away from us and hides.

In the old days when we were beautiful and agile, we asked the animals to lay down their lives for us and in turn we offered them our kinship, our respect, our words in the next world over from here, our kind treatment.

What people believe, falsely, is that all this can no longer be so. (229)

This hope, however, wavers in the realm of the “territory,” and Omishto recedes into the frontier where she “will be their other side, the shadow they cast, invisible, dark dangerous,” but she “will no longer be dissolved salt” (232). Rather than dissolving into the water of the “modern” world, Omishto will return to Kili Swamp to learn from the elders. Her final line indicates, however, that this is not the end: “I dance and as the wind stirs in the trees, someone sings the song that says *the world will go on living*” (235; emphasis added). It is not “our” world, or “their” world, or even “this” world to which Omishto refers in these final lines, but to the world as a whole. In *Power*’s closing lines, the loss of nature is therefore not embraced, but even in this final passage, Omishto offers no clear plan of action to reverse

the ecogothic present. There is no immediately applicable knowledge to be extracted from her observations. Instead, Omishto begins to imagine a world that is *otherwise*. A world that is not divided into two halves, Taiga and settler, but a world that has been restored and renewed. How exactly this restoration and renewal can be accomplished, however, is not something she conveys to the reader. Thus, at the end of the novel, Omishto once again refuses to disclose information, as she did during Ama's trial. Just as she did not trust the US justice system to hear her words without filtering them through the predetermined lens of the "eco-Indian" stereotype or through ecophobic compulsions to use her knowledge in order to control and exploit nature, she does not trust the reader.

It would be naïve, at best, to ignore the similarities between the ecogothic realities of *Power* and the climate crisis facing the world. In August 2020, in the midst of catastrophic wildfires spanning the US West coast, news outlets such as National Public Radio (NPR) ran stories about "traditional burning practices" once commonly conducted by local tribes and subsequently banned by US authorities. The article mentions "new partnerships" being formed between the area tribes and the government; however, these "partnerships" are arguably in danger of becoming extractive and exploitative, as Professor Beth Rose Middleton Manning explains: "I think it's really important that we don't think about traditional burning as: what information can we learn from native people and then exclude people and move on with non-natives managing the land. [...] But that native people are at the forefront and leading" (qtd. in Sommer). In contrast to the syncretic existence led by Ama, syncretic structures may be possible beyond the level of the individual in "our" world, external to *Power*, but are only explored after everything else has failed. *Power* places the responsibility with the non-Indigenous population to begin to learn how to listen while there is still time, and it urges Indigenous peoples to remember that they and their traditions are not, nor have they ever been, static. Perhaps most importantly, *Power* reminds readers that Indigenous peoples' knowledge is not something that can be controlled, that power lies solely with the people(s).

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