

FROM JENSEN TO MANIKI: ANGEL'S JOURNEY IN *SOLAR STORMS*

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ABSTRACT: *Solar Storms* follows Angel Jensen, a Native American girl who was taken from her family as a child. At seventeen, Angel returns to Adam's Rib in an attempt to understand who she is and whether she can belong there. The novel deals with the subjects of trauma, self-discovery and healing. Thus, this work analyzes the process and journey through which Angel starts to connect with the people and nature around her, progressively understanding and embracing her identity as a Native American woman. Since the women in her family are essential to her healing process, this article focuses on how each of them participates in and helps shape Angel's story, and on how their relationships are informed by Native American culture.

Keywords: Native American Literature. Trauma. Healing. Identity.

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DE JENSEN A MANIKI: A JORNADA DE ANGEL EM *SOLAR STORMS*

RESUMO: *Solar Storms* conta a história de Angel Jensen, uma garota nativo-americana que foi tirada de sua família quando criança. Aos dezessete, Angel retorna a Adam's Rib em uma tentativa de entender quem é e se pertence àquele lugar. O romance aborda temáticas relativas a trauma, autodescoberta e cura. Portanto, este trabalho analisa o processo e a jornada através dos quais Angel conecta-se com as pessoas e a natureza ao seu redor, gradativamente compreendendo e abraçando sua identidade de nativo-americana. Como as mulheres em sua família são fundamentais em seu processo de cura, o presente artigo foca em como cada uma delas participa e ajuda a moldar a história de Angel e em como seus relacionamentos são marcados pela cultura nativo-americana.

Palavras-chave: Literatura nativo-americana. Trauma. Cura. Identidade.

Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms* (1994) tells the story of Angela Jensen, a Native American girl who was separated from her family and land when she was a child, and spent her life going from foster home to foster home. Angel— as she is often called—does not remember ever being loved, and suffers from feelings of loneliness and worthlessness. At the age of seventeen, determined to uncover her whole story and understand the scars which she bears on her face and whose origin she cannot remember, she establishes contact through a letter with her great-grandmother, Agnes Iron, hoping that learning the truth will help her heal. Angel then moves to Adam's Rib in order to meet her family and try to understand who she is and if she can ever belong somewhere.

The novel deals with the subjects of trauma, self-discovery, and healing. It shows how Angel, initially broken and afraid of not having a purpose in the world, slowly starts to connect with the people and nature around her, progressively understanding and embracing her identity as a Native American woman. Many aspects of the Native American culture are essential to the healing process that Angel goes through. Some of them are related to understanding the variety of bonds that exist in the world: those between humans and land, those of humans and plants, and those of humans and other animals as well. Angel starts respecting the natural world around her more and more, and the world starts communicating with her more and more in return.

Some other aspects of her healing process are connected to Angel comprehending her story as not just her own, but as one that is intertwined with those of other Native Americans, of her antecessors, and of her family. Through storytelling, the girl learns a lot about the people and the world around her. She takes her lessons from the entire community that surrounds her, as they show her both positive and negative examples and behavior. Therefore, she is able to observe them all and judge whether what they are doing is something that she wants for herself or not. She is helped, influenced, and taught by many characters. Among such characters, there is the strong presence of women. Angela's family in the community of Adam's Ribs consists of Bush, her foster grandmother, Agnes, her blood great-grandmother, and Dora-Rouge, Agnes's mother. Each of these women teaches Angel a lot of valuable lessons and makes her feel loved. They help in her healing process and are also helped by her in return. Therefore, this work aims to analyze and discuss how each of these women participates in and helps shape Angel's journey. Methodological procedures include three steps. First, a short overview of trauma theory is presented. Then, there is a brief discussion of interconnections, trauma and healing in Native American culture, since it is very important to consider the particulars of the Native American experience to understand the trauma and the healing presented in the novel. Finally, the women in the story are examined and discussed in their connection to Angel's journey and to her healing process.

TRAUMA THEORY AND HEALING: SOME KEY CONCEPTS

In the 1990s, the field of trauma theory started undergoing an expansion that continues to this day. One of the most important scholars to write in the period is Cathy Caruth, who contributed to the discussions with books such as *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995) and *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996). The scholar presents the most general definition of trauma as “an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled, repetitive appearance of hallucination and other intrusive phenomena” (CARUTH, 1996, p. 11). Thus, as professor and scholar Irene Visser observes in the article “Decolonizing Trauma Theory: Retrospect and Prospects” (2015), we can conclude that the subject of study in trauma theory is more related to the aftermath than to the event itself. As Visser (2016) explains, trauma is connected to the recurrence or repetition of the traumatic event through flashbacks, nightmares, and other symptoms that fall under the definition of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). According to psychiatrist van der Kolk

(2000), the threat and horror caused by traumatic events is so intense that they may affect people's biological threat perception, their ideas of themselves, and their capacity to deal with events.

Caruth (1996) also notes that during the first half of the twentieth century, trauma tended to be associated to soldiers who had witnessed massive and sudden death. Nevertheless, physicians and psychiatrists began to reshape their ideas and understanding of physical and mental experiences due to the rising number of perplexing war experiences and other catastrophic responses observed throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. Thus, the responses to a variety of experiences such as work accidents, child abuse and rape began to be understood in terms of the effects of PTSD. Caruth (1995) explains that the pathology of PTSD cannot be defined by either the event itself or in terms of a distortion of such event. The scholar states that "the pathology consists rather solely in the *structure of its experience* or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it" (CARUTH, 1995, p. 4).

Caruth's proposition of the pathology of trauma as an event that is not assimilated as it first occurs is also present in her analysis of Sigmund Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). In this particular work, Freud (1961) discusses certain compulsive repetitions which cannot be linked to the pleasure principle, as they originate from situations that include no possibility of pleasure and that can never have brought any sense of satisfaction to the people experiencing them. These extremely painful or catastrophic events have not produced pleasure in the past and continue not to do so in the present. They do not take the shape of dreams or memories. Instead, they keep haunting the survivors in the form of fresh experiences, repeated under pressure of a compulsion. As an example of these repetitions, Freud uses the story of Tancred and Clorinda in Tasso's romantic epic *Gerusalemme Liberata* (1581). In the tale, the hero Tancred unknowingly kills his beloved while she is disguised in the armor of an enemy. Later, while striking a tree with his sword in grief, Tancred hears Clorinda's voice complaining that he has hurt her once again, as her soul is now imprisoned in that tree. In Freud's (1961) understanding, the story of the couple illustrates the hypothesis that the human mind may have a compulsion to repeat that overrides the pleasure principle.

As Caruth analyzes the third chapter of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and the tale of Tancred and Clorinda, she concludes that the story works as representative of how a traumatic experience repeats itself, literal and exact, against any will of the survivor. The scholar also calls attention to the voice that comes out of the tree as it is struck. Caruth (1996) notices that it is only as Tancred hurts Clorinda again and hears her cry coming from the wound in the

tree that the hero is urged to acknowledge—for the very first time—what he has done. Therefore, it is Clorinda’s voice that bears witness to the past that Tancred has unknowingly repeated, witnessing a truth that Tancred himself cannot fully know. This observation leads the scholar to think of trauma as a wound that

Is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor. Just as Tancred does not hear the voice of Clorinda until the second wounding, so trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on. (CARUTH, 1996, p. 4)

Therefore, we can understand that Caruth sees trauma as an overwhelming experience which cannot be fully assimilated at the moment when it happens, and that may later return in its exact and literal form to possess and haunt the survivor.

Nevertheless, there are some scholars who argue for the expansion of the definitions of trauma that surfaced in the 1990s. In *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds* (2013), scholar and professor Stef Craps presents trauma theory as “an area of cultural investigation that emerged in the early 1990s as a product of the so-called ethical turn affecting the humanities” (CRAPS, 2013, p. 1). In the scholar’s assessment, the founding texts of the area have failed to live up to their premise of contributing to the establishment of new forms of community and cross-cultural solidarity due to the fact that

They marginalize or ignore traumatic experiences of non-Western or minority cultures, they tend to take for granted the universal validity of definitions of trauma and recovery that have developed out of the history of Western modernity, they often favour or even prescribe a modernist aesthetic or fragmentation and aporia as uniquely suited to the task of bearing witness to trauma, and they generally disregard the connections between metropolitan and non-Western or minority traumas. As a result of all of this, rather than promoting cross-cultural solidarity, trauma theory risks assisting in the perpetuation of the very beliefs, practices, and structures that maintain existing injustices and inequalities. (CRAPS, 2013, p. 2)

Considering these issues, Craps (2013) argues that trauma theory can and should be redirected, reshaped and resituated in order to foster attunement to suffering which has been previously ignored. The scholar argues that the

traditional event-based model of trauma can be insufficient to appropriately and accurately address and portray the experiences of certain groups. To Craps (2013), the basic concepts that were first presented by trauma theory scholars are not adequate to explain or convey the traumatic impact of racism and other forms of ongoing oppression. He argues that racism, for example, is historically specific, but it is also different from historical trauma because it cannot be linked to a particular event with a before and an after, since it continues to cause damage in the present. Therefore, the concept of insidious trauma, explained by Laura Brown (1995) as “traumatogenic effects left by oppression that are not necessarily overtly violent or threatening to bodily well-being at the given moment but that do violence to the soul and spirit” (p. 107), becomes very interesting. As Craps (2013) explains, the reoccurrence of cumulative micro-aggressions can insidiously result in traumatizations. This means that, when added together, repeated racist or sexist episodes are capable of amounting to an intense traumatic impact. The scholar also argues that understanding trauma as an exclusively individual phenomenon may distract attention and focus away from the wider social situation:

In collectivist societies individualistic approaches may be at odds with the local culture. Moreover, by narrowly focusing on the level of the individual psyche, one tends to leave unquestioned the conditions that enabled the traumatic abuse, such as political oppression, racism, or economic domination. Problems that are essentially political, social, or economic are medicalized, and the people affected by them are pathologized as victims without agency, sufferers from an illness that can be cured through psychological counseling. The failure to situate these problems in their larger historical context can thus lead to psychological recovery being privileged over the transformation of a wounding political, social, or economic system. Insofar as it negates the need for taking collective action towards systemic change, the hegemonic trauma discourse can be seen to serve as a political palliative to the socially disempowered. (CRAPS, 2013, p. 28)

Craps (2013) also states that movements whose aim is to expand the scope of our comprehension of trauma are necessary and valid. He observes how PTSD used to be largely focused on the experiences of war veterans, but has expanded throughout the years to include survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence through the advocacy of people who are concerned with those issues. Thus, the recognition of racist-incident-trauma as a legitimate, valid traumatic experience can and must be pushed for. As Craps (2013) notes, this expansion in no way erases or threatens the legitimacy of victims of other types of trauma.

Visser (2016) is another scholar who highlights the importance of responding to trauma with considerate and respectful recognition of historical, national, spiritual and ethnic diversification. When summarizing the understanding and approaches of postcolonial studies to the trauma subject today, the scholar writes that

Trauma is recognized as a very complex phenomenon. It is not only understood as acute, individual, and event-based, but also as collective and chronic; trauma can weaken individuals and communities, but it can also lead to a stronger sense of identity and a renewed social cohesion. Postcolonial literary studies reflect and reconstruct this full complexity of trauma in its specific cultural, political, and historical contexts. (VISSER, 2016, p. 20)

Furthermore, Visser (2015) observes that postcolonial trauma narratives do not negate the profound, lasting impact of trauma, but they also focus and portray resilience and growth as possibilities in the aftermath of traumatic wounding. According to the scholar, narrativization is capable of empowering individuals and communities, proving to be crucial to their cultural survival. To her, oral storytelling is capable of enabling a healing process, which allows access, acceptance and insight into various modes of redressing colonial wounds. Visser (2016) believes that a decolonized reading of trauma calls for “a recognition of the centrality of oral modes of narrative and their ritual function in indigenous communities” (p. 16).

Considering these observations, the following analysis of Angel’s journey in *Solar Storms* takes into consideration the specific cultural and historical context of the characters in the novel. In order to do that, perspectives and texts written by Native American scholars are presented and intertwined with the analysis of the book.

INTERCONNECTIONS, TRAUMA, AND HEALING IN NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURE

Angela’s story is one of self-discovery, but not in the same sense as those of the white Western tradition. In Native American culture, one needs to understand the story of family and tribe, through generations and generations, to understand one’s own self. As Laguna Pueblo writer Leslie Marmon Silko (1981) explains, family stories are a very important part of one’s identity:

You will hear stories of importance to the family [...], stories about the time a maternal uncle got the biggest deer that was ever seen and brought back from the mountains. And so one's sense of who the family is, and who you are, will then extend from that – 'I am from the family of my uncle who brought in this wonderful deer, and it was a wonderful hunt' – so you have this sort of building or sense of identity. (SILKO, 1981, p. 58)

This explanation shows us that Angel could not completely understand who she was by learning exclusively about herself and her seventeen-year-old story. Instead, it was necessary for her to expand this knowledge to the stories and experiences of her family and tribe. As observed by Acoma Pueblo writer Simon J. Ortiz (2006), "cultural consciousness as Indigenous people is the bottom line" (p. 11). Another Native writer and critic who highlights the importance of perceiving oneself in connection to others in Indigenous culture is Greg Sarris (2000), who explains how he came to see himself as part of a shared community through an anecdote:

I didn't answer her. I didn't have to. I got her point. The herbs, her songs, all aspects of her doctoring ceremony were sacred, not just objects to be talked about, separate from Mabel's whole life. They were a part of her and, as a result, a part of me too. Like the girls from Sulfur Bank, and the story I just heard. They were not things separate from my own life. I was part of them just as they were a part of me, and in ways I might not fully understand. I couldn't treat them any lighter or different from the way I treated my own life. They *were* my life. The story, the girls, Mabel. An occurrence at Sulfur Bank lived on, found itself on Grand Avenue in Santa Rosa, made itself anew in the place there, in the lives of all of us, whether we knew it or not. I knew it. (SARRIS, 2000, p. 303)

It is also crucial to mention that it is not enough that Angel learns the story of her family and people. In order to fully comprehend herself, she needs to understand how one is connected not only to the people around them, but also to the land, plants, and other animals—the natural world. When discussing the works of Dolores Subia Bigfoot and Sadie Willmon-Haque, Colorado State University professor Irene Sue Vernon (2012) highlights the emphasis that they place on the need of a sense of connection and balance between mind, body, spirit, and the natural environment for Natives to be healthy.

In relation to this necessity of being balanced with the world in order to be balanced with one's self, literary critic, professor and writer Paula Gunn Allen (1976) states that

breath is life, and the intermingling of breaths is the purpose of good living. This is in essence the great principle on which all productive living must rest, for relationships among all the beings of the universe must be fulfilled; in this way each individual life may also be fulfilled. (ALLEN, 1976, p. 145-146)

In the beginning of the novel, Angel does not know that she needs to feel and comprehend all of those connections in order to understand her story. She expects straightforward answers: “I wanted an unbroken line between me and the past. I wanted not to be fragments and pieces left behind by fur traders, soldiers, priests and schools” (HOGAN, 1997, p. 77). However, all that she gets is pieces of her story, given to her a little by little, which angers and frustrates her. She is not, as in the first weeks of her arrival, ready to see everything as an intertwined web.

Angel’s need to know and understand herself and her story comes from all of the traumatic experiences faced and whose marks she has carried with her throughout her life. An evidence of the violence that she encountered at a very young age is the scars that she bears on her face, which she despises and feels ashamed of during the first pages of the novel:

And me, [...] a rootless teenager in a jeans jacket and tight pants, a curtain of dark red hair falling straight down over the right side of my face. Like a waterfall, I imagined, and I hoped it covered the scars I believed would heal, maybe even vanish, if only I could remember where they’d come from. Scars had shaped my life. I was marked and I knew the marks had something to do with my mother, who was said to be still in the north. While I never knew how I got the scars, I knew they were the reason I’d been taken from my mother so many years before. (HOGAN, 1997, p. 25)

In this passage, we can see how the girl hopes to get her answers and, through them, learn who she is and heal. We also notice how big the impact of the scars is on Angel. Not only do they serve as a reminder of an unassimilated traumatic event that sent the girl to the foster system, but they also largely contribute to the self-loathing feelings that Angel harbors toward herself. Since she has spent most of her childhood and teenage years going from foster home to foster home, she feels that she might have never been loved. At least, she does not remember ever feeling cherished, and considers herself ugly and unworthy. Nonetheless, she searches for a love that she can never seem to find, and invests on physical contact that may resemble human affection in order to try to fulfill a little of the emptiness and misery that she feels:

My ugliness, as I called it, had ruled my life. My need for love had been so great I would offer myself to any boy or man who would take me. This was, according to women who judged me, my major sin. There was really no love in it, but I believed any kind of touch was a kind of love. Any human hand. Any chest to lean my head against. It would heal me, I thought. It would mend my heart. It would show my face back to me, unscarred. Or that love would be blind and ignore my face. But the truth remained that I was wounded and cut and no one could, or would, tell me how it happened and no man or boy offered what I needed. (HOGAN, 1997, p. 54-55)

Angel's desperate search for love and healing is ultimately what takes her to the Adam's Rib community. After running away from foster homes, robbing some of the families she had stayed with, hurting herself, and getting no sense of real intimacy from lying with men, she considers the place where she was born as her last hope, her last chance of finding meaning in life:

I'd told myself before arriving, before constructing and inhabiting that new room, that whatever happened, whatever truth I uncovered, I would not run this time, not from these people. I would try to salvage what I could find inside me. As young as I was, I felt I had already worn out all the possibilities in my life. Now this woman, these people, were all I had left. They were blood kin. I had searched with religious fervor to find Agnes Iron, thinking she would help me, would be my salvation, that she would know me and remember all that had fallen away from my own mind, all that had been kept secret by the county workers, that had been contained in their lost records: my story, my life. (HOGAN, 1997, p. 27)

As mentioned before, the healing does not come fast, and nor does it concern Angel exclusively. By spending time with the Adam's Rib community and getting to know the people who live there, the girl comes to understand that her dislocation from her family has affected not only her, but also the people who lived in the community and who loved her deeply. According to Vernon (2012), the removal of a young child from her family conveys the idea of "a shocking individual experience while also expressing the collective trauma and suffering of Native people" (p. 34).

Vernon (2012) also discusses the concept of "soul wound" (p. 35), an extreme wound that reaches far into one's soul, causing health problems that might be both physical and mental, and that will affect generations to come. When talking about Native Americans, the soul wound is connected to the entire

colonial experience, which caused Indians to go through processes such as loss of land, annihilation of tribes, removal of children from their families, persecution, etc. Therefore, Angel is not an isolated victim, but one of the many victims of intergenerational trauma, “the idea that if trauma among a population is not addressed, the consequences can continue into subsequent generations, becoming more severe with each passing” (VERNON, 2012, p. 35).

While Angel needs to be reunited with the Adam’s Rib community in order to heal, the people there also need her in order to recover from the traumatic event of losing a child (Angel) that they have undergone as a group: “given Native philosophies of interconnectedness, obligations and responsibilities between people, animals, land, water and air, an individual suffering will have far-reaching consequences” (VERNON, 2012, p. 36). When the little girl is abused and taken from the community, it certainly wounds her deeply. However, also wounded are those left behind: Bush, who loved her so much, and Agnes and Dora-Rouge, her blood kinship. Additionally, the pain felt by the women hurts all of those in the community, since they are interconnected through culture and history. Therefore, Angel’s search for wholeness and healing affects not only her, but her entire community and especially the women in her family.

It is precisely from the women mentioned that Angel learns a lot about the power of storytelling, about the interconnectedness between everything in the world, and about Indigenous views and culture. They embark on a journey to the north together, each with a different goal: Angel is looking for her mother Hanna, Bush wants to help stop the building of dams that will harm rivers and land and destroy Indian homes, Dora-Rouge wants to die in the place where she grew up, and Agnes has to accompany her mother. In that journey, the four women connect immensely with each other and with all nature around them. Together, they grow closer to the time when people, animals and lands had a special bond between them:

The four of us became like one animal. We heard inside each other in a tribal way. I understood this at once and was at ease 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. (HOGAN, 1997, p. 177)

As we can see, the four women are extremely important to each other and essential in one another’s processes of healing. Therefore, the next session will explore Angel’s relationship with Agnes, Dora-Rouge and Bush.

ANGEL AND THE WOMEN IN HER LIFE

Angel and Agnes

Agnes is the first person with whom a grown-up Angel establishes contact through a letter, which she sends upon finding the older woman's name in a court record. Agnes is the one that sends Angel the money that she needs in order to travel, and the seventeen-year-old is aware of how that amount must be pretty much everything that Agnes has been able to save up to that point.

When the girl first sees her great-grandmother in person, she knows it is her by the way that her heart feels in her chest, having recognized its own blood. Upon being reunited, Agnes clearly feels touched and emotional, while Angel acts awkwardly and a little afraid:

I wanted to turn back but she held out a cool, moist hand to me, then changed her mind and took me in both her fur-covered arms and held me, rocking me a little like the boat. She smelled like the dollar bills she'd mailed. I pattered her back, wanting the embrace to end. She held me away from her to get a good look at me and I heard songbirds in trees. I didn't meet her eyes, but I saw her smile. She took a handkerchief out of her sleeve and wiped her eyes, then bent over and lifted both my bags. (HOGAN, 1997, p. 23-24)

With the passing of the days, however, Angel starts warming up to her great-grandmother. Agnes treats her well and tells her stories about her childhood, such as how she used to love plants and listening to trees. The girl appreciates that, since it was the first time that anyone told her something about the period when she was a child. Another example of how attached Angel becomes to the older woman is the moment when she, a girl who never cried, sobs helplessly while being held and comforted by Agnes. It is the first time that Angel lets someone see how affected she is by the scars on her face, and the first time that she lets someone get so close to her and see her in that state of vulnerability. It is undeniably the strengthening of a bond.

Just as Agnes helps Angel, the same can be said in the way of reciprocity. The arrival of the seventeen-year-old demands a rearranging of beds, which ends up making Agnes and John Husk share one. It is a step forward in their relationship, which was probably prompted not only by the objective aspect of bed rearrangement, but also by the feeling of lightness and happiness brought by Angela's return. Such improvement is noticed happily by the narrator, who tells us that "already my presence there was doing some good, I thought" (HOGAN, 1997, p. 36).

Agnes might be the first and strongest example that Angel gets of the connection between humans and other animals. The older woman is always wearing a bear fur coat, and she sings and dances to a song that she hears inside the coat. With that, Angel comes to see it as something alive. One day, Dora-Rouge tells Angel the story of Agnes and the bear: the animal had been captured by a Frenchman, and Agnes—then a young girl—had become fascinated by it. The two connected, respected and understood each other. Eventually, to put it out of its misery, Agnes killed it and took its fur. Dora-Rouge perceives how strong the connection is between the bear and Agnes, even to the present day. They are not separated beings, but intertwined existences: “I see those eyes [the bear’s] and that large paw brushing Agnes’ back and I hear her sing and I get a feeling, just a feeling, Agnes is becoming something. Maybe the bear. Maybe she knows her way back to something” (HOGAN, 1997, p. 48). This bond helps Angel understand the Native culture of interconnectedness between everything that is alive a little better. The bear is not—or at least did not use to be—a separate thing from the human: all beings can communicate to each other, if they know how to listen and talk.

By the time of Agnes’s death, Angel has become really attached to her great-grandmother. She cries profusely when the older woman dies, and she is the one who Agnes had confided in about her wish of being eaten by wolves and birds. Following the death of the older woman, Angel adopts Iron as her last name, in an exhibition of pride and in a tribute to her great-grandmother.

Angel and Dora-Rouge

Dora-Rouge is a very old, kind and wise woman, adored by the community of Adam’s Ribs. She is probably the relative towards whom Angela nurtures the sweetest feelings. She is also the one to whom the girl warms up to the fastest, which scares her: “Her eyes were joyous, dark and radiantly clear. When she turned her face toward me, I felt her light. When she laughed, both the house and I opened up a little. It frightened me to feel that way, as if now that I found her I’d have something to lose” (HOGAN, 1997, p. 31).

A very wise being, Dora-Rouge affirms that she had always known that Angel would return to them. She is also the one who prepares sleeping potions for the girl, and one of the most active storytellers Angel meets. Dora-Rouge tells the girl about the old times and the old songs, about her people and her land, about the other women’s stories, about the animals. She possesses great knowledge, and storytelling has great importance in Native American culture.

Storytelling is indeed believed to expand one's horizon and help one understand the situation that they might be going through, what to make of it, and how to face it. According to Kiowa writer Navarre Scott Momaday (2001),

Storytelling is imaginative and creative in nature. It is an act by which man strives to realize his capacity for wonder, meaning and delight. It is also a process in which man invests and preserves himself in the context of ideas. Man tells stories in order to understand his experience, whatever it may be. The possibilities of storytelling are precisely those of understanding the human experience. (MOMADAY, 2001, p. 88)

One of the ways through which storytelling helps understand the human experience and gives us new perspectives and resources to deal with problems is by making us realize that we are neither the first nor the only ones to experience such challenges. We are part of a community, and we can draw inspiration and strength by learning about the way that others have dealt with their own struggles:

[...] The power of storytelling, an intimate and powerful means to continue the social vision in aggrieved communities. In daily life and in community gatherings, stories overcome alienation and grief, because they are imagination and memory. They bring the ancestors and help us “remember” things we never knew consciously. (HILL, 2001, p. 32, emphasis in the original)

Hence, storytelling promotes healing because it helps people realize that they are not alone. In Native American culture, the stories remind individuals of their shared identity, of how others have been through the same experiences and can understand them:

The stories are always bringing us together, keeping this whole together, keeping this family together, keeping this clan together. “Don't go away, don't isolate yourself, but come here, because we have all had these kinds of experiences” – this is what people are saying to you when they tell you these other stories. (SILKO, 1981, p. 59, emphasis in the original)

Dora-Rouge takes on the role of a storyteller of the most diversified tales, and helps Angel comprehend and connect to the stories and traditions of her people. Through the narratives of Dora-Rouge, the girl becomes aware of her identity and connections to the women and to the world around her:

Dora-Rouge, I think now, was a root and we were like a tree family, aspens or birch, connected to one another underground, the older trees feeding the young, sending off shoots, growing. I watched and listened. It was an old world in which I began to bloom. Their stories called me home, but this home was not at all what I'd expected. (HOGAN, 1997, p. 48)

Dora-Rouge teaches Angel much about life and the world, and also becomes a great source of inspiration for the young girl. Angel compares her to a god, and deeply admires her strength in the resistance to the construction of the dams.

A little while after the protests against the building of the dams and Angel's and Bush's return home, they receive Dora-Rouge's invitation to her death. Angela attends it, and when she tells the older woman that she is there, that she went to her death, Dora-Rouge replies "Yes, you are, Maniki, a true human being" (HOGAN, 1997, p. 347). Maniki was the title of addressing given to Angel by Miss Nett, a very wise, very old woman from the north. It meant "girl turned into human being" (HOGAN, 1997, p. 295). By Dora-Rouge's line mentioned above, we can see how the old woman is recognizing Angel as someone good, honorable and whole. She is a true human being, and being told so by someone whom she admires as deeply as Dora-Rouge probably means a lot to Angel.

Angel is next to Dora-Rouge when the older woman dies, and she sings to the old woman her own song, the animal-calling song, just like Dora-Rouge had taught her. The older woman is responsible for much of the knowledge that Angel acquires throughout the novel, and the girl truly dedicates herself to learning and comprehending the lessons of such a beloved mentor.

Angel and Bush

Bush is Angel's foster grandmother, and she was the one who had looked after the girl when she was a little child. Angela is told that Bush had loved her deeply, but she does not get along well with the woman in the beginning of the novel. When she goes to Fur Island to live with her, she finds her grandmother to be brooding, silent and unreachable. Angel does not feel the same warmth that she had felt with Agnes and Dora-Rouge in *Adam's Ribs*, and she constantly considers leaving Fur Island. However, every time her mind is about to be made up, Bush divulges pieces of Hanna's story, which keeps an eager Angel there. The girl needs to know her and her mother's stories, so she remains with Bush. The older woman tells Angel tales about her mother that help her piece fragments of her life together, and she grows to understand how there is no linearity or simplicity to understand it all. She starts realizing that

comprehending herself requires effort to interpret events, connect them and attribute meaning to them: “Bush’s spare words were creation itself. I had been empty space, and now I was finding a language, a story, to shape myself by. I had been alone and now there were others (...) I was partaking of sacred meals and being put back together” (HOGAN, 1997, p. 95).

Eventually, Angel comes to understand how much interconnectedness matters, and to admire Bush and her ways. Her grandmother nurtures immense respect for the animals and the land, and is in return loved by them. Her stories about the land, the people and the animals allow the girl to understand a little more of the bonds between humans and the natural world.

Bush teaches Angela a lot of practical skills, too. With the older woman, the girl learns how to fish, how to properly respect the animals, how to travel through water, etc. Angel comes to see Bush as an extremely resourceful person: “If the world came to an end, I wanted to be with Bush. She could make do with anything. ‘What a good idea,’ I said. I appreciated her” (HOGAN, 1997, p. 171).

Bush becomes someone greatly admired by Angel, and she has a lot of qualities that the girl wishes to develop for herself. She is strong, resilient, just, compassionate, and she will fight for what she believes in without using violence, as demonstrated in the protests against the dams. Bush becomes the closest to a mother and Angel cares about her deeply. Their relationship resembles that of a mother and a daughter even in the sense that the one with whom Angel would bicker the most is Bush. It was to her that she declared that she refused to sleep in any more cots. Her affection is also demonstrated when she becomes jealous because she believes that Bush is involved with a man in the north and will not go home with her. Angel is afraid of losing Bush, because the bond between them has once again grown to be a deep, important one, much like it was when she was a little girl.

When Angel was separated from her family, Bush organized a mourning feast. That was how deeply hurt she was because of the loss of the child. The feast was both a healing ceremony and a ritual for Angel’s return. When the two are reunited and reestablish their bond, it is not only Angel who heals, but Bush too. The older woman, who had lived mostly isolated from others since Angel was taken, reintegrates with the community. By the end of the novel, she lives with Angel, and the love that they feel for each other is clear to the reader.

FINALLY, MANIKI

The healing process that Angel goes through is a slow, rich, extensive one, which is influenced by land, storytelling, some men, and many women. One more of the latter is her mother Hanna: when Angel is able to understand how

complex the life of the woman was, the girl is able to forgive her and hope that her mother is able to find peace after her death:

She hurt me because I was part of her and she hated herself. I think of her last name, Wing, as if she could fly, weightless as a bird catching a current of air. Or, like the wolverine on the rock paintings, perhaps her wings were invisible until they were wet, and then they opened, full and strong. I hoped she lived in a place where she could open those wings with a love she'd never known in her life. (HOGAN, 1997, p. 345)

The different last names or titles that Angel chooses or receives throughout the novel reflect the healing process that she goes through. At the beginning, she is Angel Jensen, a broken girl in a desperate search for answers, love and comprehension of her own story. When she feels connected to the women in her family and wishes to honor her late beloved great-grandmother, she calls herself Angel Iron, a proud Indian girl who shares a true, strong bond with the women in her family. In the moment when the girl is able to understand, not blame, forgive, and wish the best for her mother, she adopts the name Angel Wing. She is part of the intergenerational trauma from which Native Americans suffer, she understands and recognizes her mother's pain, and she believes she can be strong enough to achieve healing. In the north, she receives the title of Maniki—a girl turned into a human being. She is now someone who has successfully achieved healing, someone who has been retribalized, who understands the interconnectedness and the bonds between people and the natural world. She has come full cycle.

With the caring and through the shared experiences and stories of the women around her, Angel is able to heal. She has learned resilience and hope: "it is not that the ways are lost from us but that we are lost from them. But the ways are patient and await our return" (HOGAN, 1997, p. 346). Angel now understands her story, which is intertwined with the story of her people and their land, and she finally feels like she belongs and that she has a purpose, the same as theirs: fighting, resisting, helping others heal. She no longer sees her scars as reminders that she has been hurt; she has learned from Bush to see them as proof that people can heal. While in the beginning of the book she referred to herself as ugly, by the very end of the novel the girl tells Bush that "something wonderful lives inside me" (HOGAN, 1997, p. 351).

Angel has healed with the help of many, and she is now prepared to help others heal, too. The final message of the novel is related to how all of us can find meaning and beauty in who we are, and is an extremely important one: "something beautiful lives inside us. You will see. Just believe it. You will see" (HOGAN, 1997, p. 351).

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