

Clashing Views towards the Environment in  
Linda Hogan's Novel *Mean Spirit* (1990)

أراء متناقضة تجاه البيئة في رواية "روح غير رحيمة" للروائية  
ليندا هوجن

**Submitted by**

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### Abstract

This study examines an ecological issue in Linda Hogan's novel, *Mean Spirit* (1990). It focuses on what ecocriticism is and what it aims. Moreover, it centers on Linda Hogan, one of the prominent eco- novelists. It also centers on the cultural differences that greatly affected the Whites' vision and behavior towards the indigenous people and their environment as reflected in Linda Hogan's novel entitled *Mean Spirit*. It also discusses pollution of the Indian environment with oil and aspects of oppression which the indigenous people were exposed in the 1920s after discovering oil wells in their lands. It sheds light on the real roots of ecological and social oppression and indicates how to heal.

### المستخلص

ظهر منهج النقد البيئي كرد فعل للكوارث البيئية المتزايدة اليوم حيث يفترض أن الأدب يمكن أن يُسهم في حل العديد من المشاكل البيئية؛ من خلال رفع الوعي البيئي لدى القراء، والتأكيد على أنه لا يمكن للإنسان إلحاق الضرر بالبيئة دون دفع الثمن؛ لذا فمن الضروري أن يعيش الإنسان في انسجام ووثام مع بيئته. كما أستطاع النقاد مناقشة بعض المشكلات البيئية؛ والتي يُعتقد بأنها نتاج التفاعل بين ثقافة الإنسان وبيئته؛ ومن ثم يركز النقاد البيئيين على الولايات المتحدة لما بها من ثقافات متعددة؛ حيث يعتقدون أن ثقافة الهنود أفضل بكثير من ثقافة الأوربيين، لأنهم عاشوا في انسجام مع بيئتهم، في حين كان الأوربيين منعزلين عنها؛ لذا كانت مهمتهم الأساسية هو تغيير سلوكيات الأوربيين ليس فقط اتجاه البيئة، ولكن أيضا اتجاه الهنود الذين اضطهدوا، بمعنى أدق أن هدفهم هو "تحقيق العدالة البيئية والاجتماعية" لجميع البشر.

يناقش البحث رواية "روح غير رحيمة" (١٩٩٠)؛ والتي تصف فيها هوجن تلوث البيئة الهندية بالزيت بعد اكتشافه في أراضيهم، كما يلقي الضوء على معاناة الهنود على يد الأوربيين، الذين قاموا بقتلهم وتعذيبهم؛ للاستيلاء على أراضيهم، وكذلك تسليط الضوء على الاختلافات الثقافية بينهما تجاه البيئة؛ والتي انعكست في رؤيتهم وسلوكياتهم تجاهها، مع توضيح الجذور الحقيقية للمشكلة وطريقة علاجها، ومن ثم تعد هذه الرواية بمثابة مقارنة بين ثقافتين مختلفتين في كيفية تعاملهما مع البيئة.

## Introduction

Eco-criticism is a closely related to environmentalism. It emerges as a response to these growing problems and as an attempt to pay critics' attention to the fact that nature "is an oppressed and silent class, in need of spokespersons" (Buell, *Imagination* 20). Studying ecology and literature enables humans to find the solutions for the current ecological crises. The main goal of eco-criticism is to rethink the impact of culture on nature because "the present ecological crisis is a bi-product of human culture" (Mishra 169). Consequently, eco-critics desire to indicate how culture affects nature and aim at "understanding nature and culture as interwoven rather than as separate sides of a dualistic construct" (Wallace 4).

Consequently, Sueellen Campbell affirms that nature writers often suppose that "aboriginal cultures are simply better than Western Culture. For example, the Natives lived in perfect harmony with their surroundings. But Europeans have always destroyed theirs" (127). They recognized how nature was exploited badly at the hands of the Whites because the Indians were so oppressed and dominated. Making humans change their social behavior is the main goal which eco-critics wish to fulfill. This goal is related to 'environmental justice. Julie Sze confirms that movement of the environmental justice is related to "issues of environmental racism" where it focuses on "people, especially racialized communities and urban spaces" (163) and makes them "at the center of what constitutes environment and nature". So, eco-critics want to achieve social and environmental justice with the aim of securing for all the peoples, and that they deal with the ecological disasters that face the communities or the peoples who aren't politically free. Currently, the environmental crises stimulated eco-critics to follow the Native Americans' behavior towards their environment and their vision of it. Some ecological literary critics considered that the Natives were the true patrons of nature. Contrarily, they condemned "western civilization for its oppression of nature" (McDowell 384).

Most writings about Native Americans were written by non-Indians who protested against their cultural values, and deformed their image, depicting them as "promiscuous, childlike, primitive or backward" (Krasteva 56). But these false stereotypes disappeared after the Native American Renaissance in the 1970s and the emergence of the American Indian writers like Joy Harjo, and Linda Hogan (1947- ), one of the ecological novelists whose writings especially focus on the Native communities. In her novels, she shows how this environment affects and is affected by the human beings who live in it.

The motivation for writing *Mean Spirit* goes to Hogan's interest in preserving environment and its protection. Another reason is her desire to "use the power of words to heal the injured world" (*Woman* 21), and to correct the deformed history of her people. She wants to change the distorted images which depict the Natives as naïve and primitive. The final reason for writing is that Hogan strongly wants to pay the other people's attention to the way which Native Americans observe their environment, and to show their deep connection with it.

This research centers on the collision course in which the Indian and White communities are involved, and which led to degradation of the Indian environment and the bloody massacres among the Natives. In *Mean Spirit*, Hogan focuses on the cultural collision between the Natives and the Whites who attempted to impose their cultural values on the Indians and their environment, as a main part in their culture. To Hogan, the actual roots of this cultural clash are mainly derived from the different religious beliefs of both of the Native and White peoples. Culturally and religiously, the Natives and Euro-Americans are utterly different. This difference strongly influenced their visions of all the things surrounding them and reflected in their actions. In other words, Hogan pays attention to the course of collision in which the Natives and the Whites are involved, and which consists of four sequential levels: behavior, vision, culture and religion.

*Mean Spirit* (1990) is Hogan's first novel and was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1991. In *Mean Spirit*, Hogan depicts real events in the history of the Osage Indians in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, specifically in 1922, during the oil boom era. The events of *Mean Spirit* are set in Watona, an Indian town in Oklahoma. *Mean Spirit* is divided into two parts; the first part is entitled "Oklahoma in 1922" and "spring in 1923" is the title of the second one. This means that the first part is considered the prelude to the events of the second. While the first part casts light on infringements of the Whites against the Osages and their natural world after discovering oil in their lands, the second part shows the real reasons standing behind these violations and the Natives' reaction to them.

*Mean Spirit* centers on two Indian families, the Blankets and the Grayclouds, in addition to John Hale, who represents one of the mean spirits, and Michael Horse, the narrator of the novel. The Blankets belong to the Hill Indians known as the peaceful group. The Hill Indians were completely isolated from the changing world and their survival depended on returning to the simple way of life. So, they lived in the Hills above the town of Watona. Those that lived in Watona are mixed- blood Indians as in

the case of Grayclouds. They tried to imitate the Whites in their way of life. They used clothing washers, automobiles and electric lights, but they were conservative to the tribal traditions. In this regard, Janet St. Clair illustrates that the town Indians are “clearly spiritually and morally inferior to the reclusive Hill people, but the source of their corruption has been their association with Whites” (88).

In *Mean Spirit*, the pivotal character is Michael Horse whose role in the novel is to record the history of the Osages. Michael Horse is water diviner and interpreter of dreams whose predictions were known to be reliable. He is the last person on Indian Territory who lives in a tepee. He has also what the Indians call a sixth sense. For example, Ruth Tate, twin sister of Moses Graycloud, visited Horse and told him about her dream that fiery stars fell to earth and “when they landed, everything burned” (39). Horse interpreted her dream that the land around them is being destroyed. Of his predictions was also the relocation of the Indians from their lands.

Horse is the witness to the ecological destruction of Watona and all the events there. Seeing the environmental degradation caused by oil wells and the violent crimes of the Euro Americans towards them and their environment led him to take a decision to compose his book. In Horse's book, he writes about his people and their great history because of his belief, as he said, that the Whites “don't believe anything is true unless they see it in writing” (361).

Hogan's goal of creating the character of Horse is to record the history of the Osages and all events in Indian Territory. In his diary, Horse sheds light on the four levels of collision- behavior, vision, culture and religion- in which the Native Americans and the Whites are involved, taking into consideration that the relationship among these levels is causal. Thus, *Mean Spirit* is narrated through Horse's book and Hogan depends on such book in order to create her novel and tell its incidents. Andrea Musher indicates that [w]ith his book, Horse translates between two worlds; he preserves a record of the destruction of Indian people and Indian ways and creates a legacy that can reconstruct Indian identity in the future. He knows that he has a responsibility to keep his Indian heritage alive. (29)

The first collision which Horse emphasizes in his journal is on “the behavioral level”. In this collision, Horse focuses on two main points. The first point is the ecological infringements of the Whites as well as the strong ties which link the Native Americans with their environment. The second one concentrates on oppression from which the Natives suffered at the hands of the colonial powers.

The first point on which Horse focuses in his book is the Whites' behavior towards the Indian environment. Hogan casts light on these manners which deformed the environmental surroundings with oil. The influence of oil wells on land, water, air, climate, beaches and buildings is noticeable and the scenes of oil pollution are many and various. Accurately, Hogan describes Watona as a town completely polluted with oil or as called "the waste place" (M.S 274).

David Kemp states that oil pollution is the release of materials and components resulting from oil to all elements of the environment, either living or non- living ones (*Exploring* 291), and clarifies that oil is one of the serious ecological pollutants. Oil spills have devastating influences because oil consists of harmful chemicals which negatively affect land, water, air, buildings and man as well as all living beings (33). Oil is formed beneath the earth's surface, but its extraction is accompanied by serious threats to the environment.

The effect of oil pollution on the natural landscape of Watona is apparent. From the onset, the novel opens with a dramatic scene which indicates the eco-disaster occurring in Watona. Ecological oppression appears in turning the scene from so pretty place to another one ugly. The way to this town was described as "a marvelous greenwood forest" but it changed into "a forest of burned trees" (4). This horrible transformation isn't shocking after stating the reason that the oil fields aren't far from there. Not only the entrance of the town but the inside roads are also described as "dirt". The town was an extension of black and destroyed land. When walking through the roads, there were "piles of garbage" and "oil drums littering the land." (M.S 277)

Hogan shows some activities which the Whites did, and which left behind drastic influences on the Indian lands. For example, their usage of heavy equipment made land rolling and wrapped. The roaring fires and noisy explosions at oil fields also melted the hard earth "until it was nothing but golden flux on the ground" (M.S 186). All these crimes committed by the Whites pushed Hogan to say that it's more than a race war. They are waging a war with earth. Our forests and cornfields are burned by them. But, I say to you, our tears reach God. He knows what's coming round, so may God speak to the greedy hearts and move them (14).

Kemp illustrates that "[soil] pollution can often be dealt with relatively easily by... the remediation of the site", but in the water environment the way of healing is more complicated because "oil can have serious, long-term effects on vegetation, fish, wildlife" (201). Oil leakage and formation of

an oily layer over the surface of water leads to death of these plants and marine beings. As a result, water becomes undrinkable. In *Mean Spirit*, the ecological conditions in Watona became degraded due to oil seepage. Horse mentions in his book that the waterways were so polluted and the rivers seemed “dark” and “muddy” and what makes matters worse and more dangerous is the formation of “an oily film on the surface of the water” (312). This is the reason why water was undrinkable and the Osages were “in danger”. So, their only wish was that “no more oil had seeped out”.

The impact of processes of oil drill on air can't be ignored. Perfectly, many scenes are depicted by Hogan in *Mean Spirit*. For example, she says that there was “a pile of gray smoking embers” and “a stench in the air” (77). The Osages' belief that “the sky is on fire” (299) explains to what extent air is polluted with oil. “The sky was filled with the explosions and the smell of gunpowder. There were flashes of red, then of gold. The sky was illuminated, and then it was filled with trails of smoke”. Hogan also refers to an important point that air pollution seriously affected the Natives' lives, affirming that the Indians themselves were completely aware of this danger. The weather was “unhealthy and poor, since the clerks were so sickly looking ...as if it were the only revenge they had for the wrongs that had been done to them” (59). To the Osages; this matter was so touching and then, they discussed this problem with the government. Additionally, air pollution led to climate change because of the emission of the poisonous gases with enormous amount such as carbon dioxide and methane, two main components of global warming. Unusually, the temperatures recorded the highest degree ever in the summer (43). The climate “was hot as an oven out there” (46) where the heat waves rose up visibly from the hills. So, most of the people preferred to stay at home not to suffer from “the bad weather and the harsh heat, spraying cold water on their skin, and chewing ice...rather than going to the religious ceremonies.” (99)

The hostile behavior of the Whites which led to pollution of the Indian environment with oil is in complete contrast with the Osages'. In his diary, Horse emphasizes the intimate relationship between the Natives and their natural world. The Osage characters are described as being so sensitive to the environment that their preference to sleep amidst nature rather than their homes is a common phenomenon among them where a good number of them “moved their beds outdoors” (3). The Osages also treated land as a living being and consequently, when their discovery of oil, some Osages tried to cover the land and run away in order not to “be around the broken earth's black blood and its pain” (229). Moreover, the land and its owner can feel one another. After the death of Grace, one of the Native characters who are unfairly treated, “water left from her land forever and the trees dried”

(53). In this vein, Benay Blend views that *Mean Spirit* mirrors Hogan's ability to "transcend the boundaries... between humans and their environment" (78).

The real reason behind the brutal manners of the Whites against the natural world of the Indians is a removal of an important part from their culture. The Natives are considered a part of the environment and the real keepers of it because of their total dependence on it. So, they lived in harmony with the rest of nature. In *Mean Spirit*, Hogan mentions that the natural world "was a faith of survival, of desire for life. It was water for the thirsty, food for the hungry. It was survival". (220) Therefore, the ecological degradation represents a threat for physical survival of these people. To the Osages, destruction of their lands is equal to their inevitable death. However, to fade the soil means nothing for the Whites, except getting too much money.

The hostile deeds of the Whites against the environment moved to the Natives: not only the Indian environment but the Native Americans are also persecuted. Thence, Horse pays close attention to another important point on his journal: he handles oppression from which the Osages suffered at the hands of the colonial powers. Oppression is defined as "the exercise of tyranny by a ruling group" (Young 40). The term of oppression can be applied to the situation of the Osages. The Whites committed a series of the brutal crimes against the Natives such as enacting a group of the unjust laws for stealing their lands, committing crimes of killing against them, and making much profit of them. The Osages were "prone to mismanaging" (*M.S* 61) and "cheated, but they still had life, and until only recently, even that was not guaranteed under the American laws, so they remained trapped, silent and wary" (63).

Eventually, the suffering of the Osage Indians begins with the Dawes Act (1887) into which they were forced. In spite of the Osages' refusal to this law and their insistence on tribal ownership since they were known as the richest tribe among the Indians, the American government enacted it. Hogan refers to this legislation on the first pages of *Mean Spirit*, saying that in the early 1900s each Indian had been given their choice of any parcel of land...Those pieces of land were called allotments. They consist of 160 acres a person to farm, sell, or use in any way they desired. The act...seemed generous at first glance so only a very few people realized how much they were being tricked. (8)



The Dawes Act is considered one of the crucial laws in the history of exploitation of the Osages. Jerry Mander states that this act was introduced as “a liberal reform” that benefits the Natives and makes them “civilized” by adopting modern economical systems such as the individual property ownership, but, in fact, its main purpose was to break the communal- tribal ownership of land and its replacement for individual property ownership. Thus, the consequences of this law were serious because tremendous spaces of the Indian lands, about sixty percent, moved from the Indians to white ownership. So, Hogan depicted this law as a trick; though it offered allotments to the Indians, it made available for the Whites to dominate the Osages' lands “since numerous tracts of unclaimed land became open property for white settlers, homesteaders, and ranchers”.

After discovering oil in their lands, the Osages' suffering extremely increased and they became in real danger. *Mean Spirit* traces the Osages' struggle for survival despite social greed and values of the Whites. Due to oil wells, the avid whites intended to financially profit even if the matter necessitates murdering the Osages in order to grab their oily wealth. A case in point was Grace, an Osage woman, whose selection was disastrous for her. Despite her choice of a “barren” and useless land which none else wanted, black oil moved beneath her plot and then, her land turned into a “Baron land for the oil moguls”(8). In effect, Grace represents “the salvation of the Hill Indians”. The fact that the dam “would not go in until all the dark wealth was removed from inside the land” (10) means “the sacrifice of Grace” (9). Accordingly, she was murdered in front of her daughter, Nola, where the killers poured a bottle of whiskey on her body and put a gun in her hand in order to trick the Natives that she committed suicide instead of deliberately killing her. However, no one believed this incident and thought that the real reason behind her death is the Whites' greed for her plot that “was worth so much in oil...the smell of the blue-black oil that seeped out of the earth had smelled like death to her”(29).

Alix Casteel confirms that the Whites have a belief that “the Indians held no title or right to the land” (50) and this idea pushed them to follow “the policy of dispossession and removal”. Consequently, the white oilmen attempted spread of violence and murder among the Natives for their compulsion to leave their lands. In *Mean Spirit*, Hogan affirms this idea mentioning that “[e]very day there were new violent acts reported in the newspaper” (39) and most victims were Indians. Undoubtedly, the reason was known, “There's oil, lots of it, and all belonging to Indians” (52). So, the Indians found themselves forced to face one of the two embittered

choices: “land theft” or “murdering”. Consequently, all the Indians preferred to relocate away from their oil rich lands in order not to be murdered. Commenting on this incident, Belle says: “Indian people wanted, with their hearts, nothing more than to be left alone and in peace. They wanted it so much that they turned their minds away from the truth and looked in the other direction” (40).

Another collision on which Horse sheds light in his book is on the level of “vision”. In this collision, Horse declares that the real reason behind these contrasting manners between the Natives and the Whites is that both of them have “a different way of viewing things” (117). In this respect, Karsten Fitz confirms that “*Mean Spirit* suggests that Native and White peoples live in the same world but see it with different eyes and different worldviews” (6). A case in point is the animals.

In his book, Horse throws light on the difference between the Whites and the Natives in their treatment of the animals. Belle's vision of the animals is drastically different from the Whites' as represented in the character of John Hale, a white rancher and oilman. Belle doesn't like the way which they treat the animals. Seeing a truck filled with dead eagles makes Belle extremely furious. Horse depicts this incident in his book: “What met her eyes was a truck filled with eagle carcasses. She stared at the dead, sacred eagles. They looked like a tribe of small, gone people, murdered and taken away in the back of a truck” (*M.S* 110).

The Euro Americans' vision is totally different from the Natives'. The eagles are considered a natural resource to be invested to the Whites. So, Hale sponsored an eagle hunt to be sold as souvenirs. “The eagles have no individual significance; they are units in a vast pool just pool just like barrels of oil: the eastern eagle hunters look at the dead eagles and see them just birds” (Casteel 52). Contrarily, the hunters' look of the eagles as “just birds“ makes Belle more confused because, to her, the lives of these animals are as important and equal as their lives. Therefore, the hunters didn't recognize the crime they commit. As for them, hunting these animals is an investment while it is a crime to Belle.

In *Mean spirit*, Hogan proves that the way which the Whites violently kill the animals, regarded as “worthless creatures“, is the same way they view the Natives. Aspects of oppression to which the Natives are exposed go back to the Whites' vision. The Indians aren't viewed as equal as humans. The scene in which the Natives defend the bats in the Sorrow Cave against the Whites' desire to shoot these animals is meaningful. The Euro Americans' belief that these bats are the cause of spreading disease is

contrary to Belle, a Native woman, who feels pain as she thinks that these animals are mammals like the Indians. So, Belle uses the pistol for defending the bats, saying: "Around here violence solves everything" (278). When seeing the bats during their struggle for survival in the Sorrow Cave, Belle comments: "The place was alive with their fear". Belle's words mentioned above connect between what occurs to the bats in the Cave and what the Indians suffer from. In other words, to the Euro Americans, the Native Americans are as equal as the bats and are viewed as the animals, not as humans. Thus, both the Natives and the animals face the same fate. Both of them are dominated and killed "when necessary to serve the interests of their superiors, the white people. Both the bats and the Indians seem impotent and doomed in the face of hostility, greed, and corruption reigning all around them" (Musher 25).

Casteel states that "the Euro Americans in Hogan's *Mean Spirit* have a low regard for any kind of natural resource, reducing both the land and the Native Americans to exploitable commodities" (50). This degraded vision of the environment and the Natives is clear. The land was drilled, the fields are burned, the animals are killed and the town of Watona is polluted with oil. In addition, the Osages are shot where "Oklahoma seemed a dark burial ground if there ever was one, outlaw country through and through" (M.S127). The law is used by the Whites for serving their purposes as "it is theirs" (127). For example, in the scene of court, one of the witnesses named Mardy Green testifies that the motive behind murder of the oil-rich Indians is no more than "clearing the land for your farm, or hunting the food you eat" (327). The Osages are like the land to be cleared or the animals to be hunt.

The third collision to which Horse exposes in his book is the cultural differences between the Native and the White communities. When Horse writes down in his book that "it was a fatal ignorance we had of our place; we didn't know the ends to which the others would go to destroy us. We didn't know how much they were moved by the presence of money" (M.S 341), he refers to a specific meaning. Horse's words tick the effect of western culture on both the Indian environment and the Native Americans. In fact, materialism of the Euro-Americans is totally contrary to spiritualism of the Indians.

As an ecological novelist, Hogan sheds light on the impact of western culture on both the environment and the Indians. Generally, the cultural attitudes considerably affect humans' vision of the things. Materialism makes the Whites see all the things, including man, as materials supposed to

be exploited well while the spiritual values push the Natives view everything in nature as a sacred object. Consequently, the Natives glorify the natural world. The belief of glorification of nature motivates them to form strong ties with all its parts. Contrarily, as for the whites, money is considered “a sacred thing and living force” (M.S 293). For getting more and more money, they commit many of the violations against the Indians and their environment. In this regard, Donald Fixico affirms that the Osages lived in conflict between their spiritual culture and materialism of the Euro-Americans and it was a must for them to face this clash of the two- opposed cultures (28).

In *Mean Spirit*, the tension between materialism and spiritualism is clear. The Natives and Whites have two opposed sets of the cultural values which make them see one another in a different way. To the Natives, the Whites live in “a shadowy white world” (353); however, the Whites view the Indians as “shadow people, living invisibly on the fringes of their material world” (81) and this enabled them to control over their oil resources. Indeed, the cultural values of the Native Americans are dismissed by the Whites because they do not aim at profit. So, the Whites attempted to remove completely their culture. In this vein, Casteel states that according to the politics of consumption, most of the Indians prove to the Euro Americans that they do not know how to properly consume money. The Osages cannot prove that they have the right to retain their money. They find new ways to use their new wealth that seems nonsensical to the Euro Americans. (56) For example, Grace is buying a piano without having a talent for music. Hence, she “moved the piano outside to a chicken coop where it sat neglected” (M.S 9). Thus, the Osages are judged primitive, childlike and incompetent and are placed under the authority of guardians who would control their money. Besides, the oil company owners resented having to pay money to them for using their lands as they “cannot retain their oil money because they are as “natural” resources, the oil money” (57). Casteel also declares that the Osages aren’t provided with training in handling of their oil money as the federal government aimed at making the Osages ignorant “in order to easily steal from them” (60). On payment day, one of the white clerks says to another: “Hell, some of them buy three cars. We don’t even have that kind of money and we’re Americans” (M.S 61).

The novel brings a pivotal stage: it focuses on the effect of the cultural attitudes on man's vision and behavior. Noticeably, the impact of spiritualism is mirrored in the Osages' vision and behavior towards their environment. The Osage Indians are so attached to all the living beings in nature. Their spiritual values make them see blood seep from the earth,

speak with the rivers and defend the animals. Besides, their strong connection to land pushes them to listen to the moan of the broken land, and also sing to it for relieving its pains, a “song of a deeper life, the beating of earth's pulse” (*M.S* 72). So, Horse writes in his book: “Life resides in all things, even the motionless stones. We are part of everything in our world, part of the roundness and cycles of life. The world does not belong to us. We belong to the world. And all life is sacred” (362).

The character of Belle Graycloud embodies the spiritual attitude in *Mean Spirit*. Belle is depicted as her flimsy sense of nature. To her, destruction of the earth was so painful that her bad dreams began coinciding with land drill and what makes her reach the climax of fear is her discovery of oil in her plot. Thus, she keeps silence not to destroy her field. Additionally, her strength is derived from her connection with land. The only place where she takes as a shelter to regain her power at times of her weakness is the cellar filled with trees and plants. Consequently, she “hated the money-hungry world and how her land involved her in it, and she hated without limit the man named Hale” (242).

Materialism affects not only the Natives but also their environment. The materialistic culture harmfully influences the Indian environment with its living and non-living elements. Not only does the land become “ravaged and covered with scars” (341) as a result of extracting the black gold but water and air are also polluted with oil. Besides, all the roads, landscapes and passages in Watona are horribly contaminated. In addition, the fields are burned, the trees are cut, and a significant number of the animals and birds are hunt to an extent that some species become endangered. Even the Native Americans are shot. No place seems clean and “untouched by the destroyers” (277), except Belle's field.

John Hale embodies the pure materialistic character in *Mean Spirit*. He is depicted as a “smooth on the outside but covered a frame of knife-sharp bones” (247). The simile of Hale as a knife is meaningful; he cuts and removes everything in front of him for money. He had lived among the Indians who knew and trusted him. To him, the Indians were “a good investment” (54). At first, he worked as a cattleman and hired the Indians to help him farm the land he'd leased from them. After that, he became an oilman after discovering oil beneath their lands. So, Hale is considered to be one of the mean spirits. Commenting on this point, Casteel illustrates: “A mean spirit is not only an inferior and deficient spirit; it is a small one in every way” (56). Hale's lust for wealth and his desire to make a great amount of oil money pushed him to be “always ready with a quick offer

and fast cash” (54) for paying the Indians' debts off. As a result, he made life insurance policies for those who owed him money and suddenly, “the insured died under suspicious circumstances” (52). In effect, he was ready to control, steal, kill and destroy everything so as to own the land and dominate its resources. Though Belle took all her precautions not to tell anyone about her oil-rich land, Hale could know this secret. So, he made a decision to kill her for dominating her oil rich land.

The religious collision in which Native Americans and the Whites get involved, and to which Horse refers in his book is the last. Hogan believes that the ecological thought is much rooted in the religious tenets which people adopt because the religious beliefs highly affected the relationship of man with the natural world and deeply ingrained the dogma of materialism and spiritualism. Hogan thinks religion is the main reason for current ecological crises. To her, spiritualism made “the Native American place himself or herself within this system as a participant” (Casteel 50), while Christianity led the Euro American to “place himself or herself outside and above this system as an owner and interpreter. The Indians understand not only that they and the land are connected, as evidenced by their suffering similar wounds, but also that they both suffer these violations through the common motive of profit.” (50)

Hogan clarifies the impact of Christianity on the relationship of man with the natural world. “Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion” (White 9) as it created separation between humans and their environment. According to the Christian traditions, God created nature for serving man's purposes. Therefore, Christianity not only isolated man from his environment but it also made it possible for him to fiercely conquer nature (5). In *Mean Spirit*, the Church is depicted as an institution which detaches man from his environment because the Whites are more related to “the golden world of heaven when their days on earth are ended” (261). In this context, Donelle N. Dreese indicates that “Hogan strives to break down the human/nature dichotomy and heal the alienation between humans and the natural world that has led to environmental degradation. She maintains that at the core of this alienation are Western religion and philosophies.”(9)

Hogan heals the environmental deterioration of Watona in a religious context. She employs a natural phenomenon such as tornadoes so as to remove all the Christian values which alienate man from his environment. Tornado Nola “destroyed the Catholic Church, but it left the Baptist church untouched” (*M.S* 161). So, this act of nature is significant; it's a revenge of God on the church which made the Euro Americans isolated from nature and a reference to the way of the reform. This tornado was interpreted by

most people in Watona that “it was God they attend the Baptist church” and therefore, a good number of them, including the saints and priests, converted into paganism at once. Additionally, it led Saint Father Dunne to take a decision to move the church from its location “into the woods”, above Watona where the Hill Indians live, because it's the only place “with no scratches or damages” (162). The goal of moving the church is to make the Whites more close to nature and shed light on the only place where there is peace, purity and justice. After that, the saint stayed in the forests where he recognized that “the life spirit lived in hogs and chickens” (238) even the animals have souls. This change in Father Dunne's life was visible to the Natives who said: “it was the year when the priest went sane” (189).

To make a sudden shift in man's relationship with the environment is one of Hogan's goals. As depicted in *Mean Spirit*, after the tornado and relocation of the Catholic Church into the woods, Saint Father Dunne recognized some drawback in Christianity, for example, the principle of the equality of all the creatures. Thus, Saint Father Dunne changed his mind from the idea of man's limitless rule into that of the equality among all the creatures. He also wanted to announce this discovery to all the Osages in his sermon where he said: “The real words of God were in the bush” (188) and that all the animals are “our sisters” (262). He announced this fact to the Osage Indians, convincing that it is a new discovery, but the Osages' response to his words wasn't expectable; they were silent after these words and waited, saying: “Yes, so what new thing did you learn?” In effect, the Hill Indians are so connected with the land, the animals and the plants and form strong ties with them because they consider themselves a part of all living creatures; however, this fact is a new thing to the Whites.

Noticeably, the sharp critique of Christianity which Hogan presents in *Mean Spirit* appears in the dialogue between Horse and Saint Father Dunne. When knowing Horse's intention to rewrite the Bible, the saint is irritated and interrupt Horse saying that “You can't do that” (273) because it is the word of God. However, Horse is unconvinced and says: “Well it has men's names in it. Like the Gospel of John, for instance, why do not the Gospel of Horse?” Then, he affirms that the real reason for rewriting the Bible is that “[it] is full of mistakes” and that he would correct them. The mistake which Horse wants to correct in the Bible is the idea of inequality of all the creatures. When Horse asks Father Dunne: “where does it say that all living things are equal?” the priest is speechless and answers: “It doesn't say that”. Hence, Horse talks about this missing principle in the holy book which asserts that “man has domination over all the creatures of the earth”. So,

Horse responds, "Well, that's where it needs to be fixed" (274) for being "part of the trouble". This dialogue also illustrates the difference between values of the Natives and those of the Whites. Indeed, the idea of equality of all living beings missing in the holy book is deeply ingrained in the old Indian traditional ways. In his book, Horse indicates that all the Osages are aware of this principle while the Whites aren't so. Therefore, in his book, Horse writes:

Pray to the earth. Restore yourself and voice. Remark your spirit, so that it is in harmony with the rest of nature and the universe. Keep peace with all your sisters and brothers. Humans whose minds are healthy desire such peace and justice...This is the core of all religion. It is the creator's history, the creator who spoke to a white man as clearly as he spoke to [us]...The creator said this and we abide by it. (362)

Indeed, the idea of inequality of all creatures makes the Whites see the Osages less inferior to them and the environment as a material supposed to be exploited as much as possible. So, all the violent actions against the Natives and their natural world push Horse to find solutions for the suffering of his people. Horse's goal is to change the behavior of the Euro Americans towards the Natives and their natural world. For making this change, he needs to turn their vision about the Osages from "inferiority" into "equality" and about the environment from "a commodity" into "a sacred object". However, this transformation will not happen unless there is a drastic shift in their materialistic cultural attitudes and its replacement for spiritualism which springs from the belief in the equality of all the living creatures. When Horse states in his book that "[humans] whose minds are healthy desire such peace and justice", he means that the Whites have sick minds which don't confess justice among people and hence, their spirits are "mean" and don't appeal peace. This is the core of all religions, but it is missing in Christianity.

The Natives' desire to be left alone in peace made them look to the other direction that is the returning to the Hills. The Osages "began to understand why the town people fought among themselves" (M.S 340). Therefore, they left Watona and went living in the Hills. This end fulfills Horse's prediction as written in his book: "The people will go out of their land. They, like the land, are wounded and hurt" (362)

In conclusion, *Mean Spirit* mirrors to what extent the Natives and their environment were oppressed and stayed on the borders. Not only the Native



Americans but the environment also suffered from the scars of oil wells for making a huge profit. Marginalization of the Osage Indians and their environment comes back to the four hierarchal levels of the clash between the Natives and the Whites, behavior, vision, culture, and religion, which negatively affected the Natives and their environment. The inimical actions against the Native Americans and their nature came in harmony with their low vision of both of them which is derived from their materialistic culture and their Christian beliefs. In *Mean Spirit*, the Natives are depicted as oppressed victims and helpless people who could do nothing when seeing the explosions and fires broken out in their lands or spreading the murdering crimes committed against them.

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