

Manifestations of Tribalography in Indigenous American Literature: LeAnne Howe and Beyond

by

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Abstract:

LeAnne Howe has contributed to interpretations of American Indian storytelling by coining the term “tribalography” as the stories that bring us together, American Indian and non-Native peoples, through the past, present and future. She broadened the term by introducing embodied tribalography, incorporating the land, body, language, and mind. Howe’s creative works display her theories but can also be applied outside of her work. After looking at Howe’s work as a model for tribalographic texts, *The Grass Dancer* will be explored as an example of tribalography, and *The Indolent Boys* by N. Scott Momaday will be explored as an example of embodied tribalography.

Manifestations of Tribalography in Indigenous American Literature: LeAnne Howe and Beyond

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Chapter One: Manifestations of Tribalography in Indigenous American Literature

LeAnne Howe's Theory of Tribalography

LeAnne Howe is an enrolled citizen of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. She is also an American Indian scholar, author, and teacher. She is the founder of Wagon Burner Theatre Troop, has lectured in Romania, The United Kingdom, Japan, and was the Fulbright Distinguished Scholar in Jordan. Currently, she holds the position of Eidson Distinguished Professor in American Literatures at the University of Georgia. She is the author of *Shell Shaker* (2001), *Evidence of Red: Poems and Prose* (2005), *Miko Kings* (2007), *Choctalking on Other Realities* (2013), and most recently, *Savage Conversations* (2019). She has won numerous awards, including the 2015 Distinguished Achievement Award from the Western Literature Association and the Lifetime Achievement Award by the Native Writers' Circle of the Americas.

Howe has embraced her identity as both a Choctaw and as an American authoring books that weave the two identities together and face the colonial oppression of Native American tribes. She uses her theory of tribalography to bring together the past and the present, the living and the dead. In her essay "The Story of America: A Tribalography" she introduces her concept and its validity: "America is a tribal creation story, a tribalography" (Howe 13). According to Howe's concept,

tribalography comes from the Native propensity for bringing things together, for making consensus, and for symbiotically connecting one thing to another...Native stories no matter what form they take (novel, poem, drama, memoir, film, history) seem to pull all the elements together of the storyteller's tribe, meaning the people, the land, multiple characters and all

their manifestations and revelations and connect these to the past, present and future milieu (present and future milieu means a world that includes non-Indians). (Howe, “Story of America ” 31)

Howe explains that the founding fathers used tribal stories as inspiration for uniting colonies and forming the early stages of America: “European Founding Fathers heard the stories of the Haudenosaunee unified six individual tribes into an Indian confederacy, [and] they created a document, the US constitution that united immigrant Europeans into a symbiotic union called America” (Howe, “Story of America” 24). The unification of the tribes took place during a time of great tyranny, and the nations were suffering. Degenawidah was a leader who realized this tyranny needed to end. Since Degenawidah had a stutter he sought out an orator to speak for him and found Ayonwatha, a great warrior. Ayonwatha was suffering under the tyranny and mourning the deaths of his wife and children. Together the two offered peace through a confederacy of the warring northern tribes. He divvied up the power between the sexes and the nations (Howe, “Story of America” 25-26). It is this story that influenced the Founding Fathers to form a confederacy. This is supported by historian Robert W. Venables, who states “The Haudenosaunee influenced both directly and indirectly the generation of the Founding Fathers and their various efforts to achieve unity (Venables 1992: 68)” (Howe, “Story of America” 26).

Howe also uses Lynn Margulis’s theory of Symbiogenesis to explain her methodology. Margulis’s theory that states independent organisms merging together are of great importance to evolutionary change (Howe, “Story of America” 19). A Native story was the foundation of America, a story of unification and peace. This means that America is a tribalography as it was founded on Native ideals, ones that were created by the Haudenosaunee and kept in place

amongst them for “over a hundred years” (Howe, “Story of America” 26). The Native people and Founding fathers merged stories. The influence that led to the colonists’ unification is also present in her work, as Howe explores her theory of tribalogy through creative works in addition to scholarly work.

Dean Rader, a fellow scholar and author, called Howe’s theory of tribalogy “the most significant theory of American Indigenous writing to emerge in the last 20 years— maybe ever. . . It helps bridge the gaps between the most significant approaches to American Indian studies –nationalism, sovereignty, issues of land and place, history, and culture” (Howe *Choctalking* vii). He also used a tribalogical view in chapter three of his book *Engaged Resistance: American Indian Art, Literature, and Film from Alcatraz to the NMAI* to look at “post-Renaissance” American Indian novels.

Rader is not alone in his praise. Joseph Bauerkemper was a guest editor for a special edition of *Studies in American Indian Literatures* (SAIL) where tribalogy was cited as a methodological, pedagogical, and theoretical approach to Native works, particularly in academia. He cites “the function of tribalogy: to transform, inspire, inform and create” (Bauerkemper 10). Romero’s article “Expanding Tribal Identities and Sovereignty through LeAnne Howe’s ‘Tribalogy’” agrees with Rader’s evaluation of tribalogy in relation to sovereignty, finding that “through its focus on international alliances and identities, tribalogy upholds Native sovereignty while resisting national separatism” (Romero 21). Romero maintains that Howe’s references to relationships and connections to other nations (i.e. the connections she makes to Jordan in *Evidence of Red*, relationships with Europeans and other tribal nations in *Shell Shaker*, and the relationship with African Americans in *Miko Kings*) display the “importance of Choctaws expanding their identity through cross-cultured interactions but

acknowledges the necessity of using this knowledge to expand Choctaw sovereignty” by returning the knowledge and connections to the tribal collective. Romero focuses on the importance of “bringing together and making consensus” (Howe, “Story of America” 42). Romero highlights the race relations in *Miko Kings* through the Hampton Normal School, and Hope’s rejection of dehumanizing language (Romero 19). When Hope is punished for running away from the school, Howe rewrites history by having Hope assert his masculinity, and do it using his Native language: “I am a man and I am strong. You are stupid and pitiful” (Howe, *Miko Kings* 62).

Hans Bak explains Howe’s focus on the Haudenosaunee story in his chapter “Seeking Balance through History and Community: The Presence of the Past in LeAnne Howe's *Shell Shaker*.” Her emphasis was not necessarily the influence of the Native Confederacy on the colonists coming together but how “the Haudenosaunee’s story of their union created an image so powerful in the minds of colonists that they believed if ‘savages’ could unite they ought to be able to do the same thing” (Howe, “Story of America” 30). Bak also highlights the culture Howe brings to the forefront that is necessary to understand the decolonization that is taking place through tribalography; the matrilineal heritage of the Choctaws is also highlighted through Shakbatina and her descendants. In *Shell Shaker* Shakbatina is a shell shaker from a line of shell shakers who are the peace keepers for the Choctaws. She brings women back to the center of the narrative.

Jodi Byrd cites tribalography’s ability to “read through and beyond the colonial rumors that have been layered onto the indigenous and reconfigure the stories colonizers like to tell about themselves and their place in the world” (Byrd 62). She also sees it as a methodology for relationships and theory for Indigenous agency and sovereignty in the modern world. Carter

Meland eyes it as the ability to “embrace the notion that multiple truths and unseen dimensions shape the world and our experience of the world” (Meland 37). He pairs science and Native thinking as Howe does in her “The Story of America: A Tribalography” with symbiogenesis. Doerfler approaches tribalography as a methodology and points out the ability of tribalography to “rise above disciplinary barriers and acknowledges the power that stories carry; encourage[ing] scholars to make connections and form relationships, which, in turn, encourages a culture of ethical standards and reciprocal obligations” (Doerfler, 67-68). My goal is to apply LeAnne Howe’s theory of tribalography, and its development into embodied tribalography to Howe’s works, and then use it as a lens for Native American works that already exists outside of her work, and prior to it. Howe discovered something that was already present and overlooked in Native Literature and used her definition of tribalography to explain it and her stories to manifest it.

Shell Shaker: A Tribalographic Model

LeAnne Howe’s first novel *Shell Shaker* is a prime example of tribalography, as it works to bring elements together, defining the “Native propensity for bringing things together, making consensus, and symbiotically connecting one thing to another” (Howe, “Story of America” 42). *Shell Shaker* unites the late twentieth century Choctaw Billy women with their ancestors from 1738, who in past and present attempt to keep the peace and fight for the good of their people. Howe achieves this by recounting myth through history repeating itself in the present.

Howe puts Choctaw history and traditions in the foreground. There are many ceremonies taking place in *Shell Shaker*. Grandmother of Birds dances for days singing to the spirits. She sings to the Autumn Equinox when it is time for her to fly away, transforming her and her sisters into birds. There are also twelve days of ceremony, the drinking of black drink, and the smoking

of the pipe. There are seven grandmothers and Shakbatina wears seven bracelets, honoring her clan's past. The reader is plunged into tradition at the outset of the novel. Howe also included how the tribe came together to decide as a whole if Shakbatina could sacrifice herself for daughter. It is a way Howe is returning the voice of the tribe to all. There is the ritual execution of Shakbatina, painted for war, singing the warrior song, but dressed in white for peace and laying down her life for her daughter and peace among the tribes. *Shell Shaker* starts with the story of Tuscalusa attempting to trick De Soto and defeat him (Knight 2). Howe incorporated this history establishing the matrilineal line and putting a notorious warrior and peacemaker together as the ancestors Shakbatina will honor. Howe also uses the true story of Red Shoes, a famous Choctaw chief who tried to use the British and French to his and his people's advantage (Adair), to complete her time loop connection to Redford McAlester. To complete the sisters who must defeat Red Shoes in the past as well as Red in the future, Howe uses an origin history of the Three Sisters to preserve the land and people they call home. The three sisters must work together, symbiogenesis, to support each other and grow to be the keepers of the garden. Liu supports this idea with her essay "Toward Tribalography: Rewriting the Three Sister's Story in *Shell Shaker*." The sisters, Corn, Beans and Squash, maintain the garden that benefits the Indigenous people and the settlers (Liu). Liu also cites the sisters as quarreling before their mother makes them dependent upon one another. The direct interpretation of this is the death of Shakbatina, dividing her spirit and possessions among her children. They must come together to defeat Red Shoes; Haya, who thwarted her sister's attempt to poison Red Shoes will need to rely on Anoleta, like Bean relies on Corn in the native history, to know what the people need. As corn is the leader in the garden, Anoleta is the leader of her sisters and her people. Neshoba completes the sisters as Squash. She guards Anoleta's daughter Bili much like the squash scout from the

history. This story is repeated in the future setting with Auda: “Auda is in the twentieth century, and Anoleta the eighteenth; both Choctaw daughters are mated or married to the chief of the tribe who, in their respective centuries is betraying the Choctaw people” (Liu 203). Neshoba, who is partnered with a French priest, is the future Adair, who falls in love with an Alibamu Conchatys lawyer. As her role as the squash in the three sisters makes her the scout and guardian, so she is in Howe’s work. She is the guardian of her niece, and of the tribe’s connection with the French, a lifeline needed in the war with Red Shoes. In the future, her relationship with the Alibamu Conchatys lawyer, Gore, is helping watch over and defend her family from the legal challenges that Red and the defensive actions of Shakbatina have caused for the Billy women. It also helps when it is time to move the body of Red to the traditional homelands and bury him at the mother mound.

The Green Corn ceremony, though still practiced today, is also included as a tie to the past but one that is important because it has lasted through colonization to the present. The bone picking ceremony is a crucial turning point in the story. Bone picking is something that has faded from mainstream culture for the tribe. Shakbatina also breaks Choctaw tradition and comes to her family to have her husband perform her ceremony. This is mentioned as her own misinterpretation of the signs by her husband, as she is not strong enough in spirit to help her family during the war. The ceremony must happen for Shakbatina to move on and be reborn to the spirit world, but all things have their pace, and she rushes hers.

The first plot element Howe illustrates for readers in *Shell Shaker* is tribal conflict and resolution with the tribes coming together to solve a disagreement, in this case a crime. Shakbatina then narrates her own death during a ritual where she sacrifices herself for her people and her daughter to bring peace and ensure her daughter’s future as a leader. Much like the

Haudenosaunee, Howe is showing how Native tribes have a propensity to bring things together, in this case, even in turmoil. Shakbatina is the head of the *Inholata* clan, the peace keepers of the Choctaws. Even though Shakbatina wants war, she participates in the diplomacy between the tribes, offering herself as a sacrifice in order to make peace. To appease the Red Fox clan for the death Anoleta is accused of, she offers to die in her daughter's place. The time shifts and a vision of the past is taking place in the present as Shakbatina reaches out to Auda, her descendant. Shakbatina is bent on protecting her tribe from the *Osano* (bloodsucker) that is Red Shoes in her time 1738, and Red McAlester over two hundred and fifty years later in 1991. Howe is highlighting the past and present connection through Shakbatina. She is the story teller recounting the histories the present through oral tradition, so she herself (Shakbatina) is a form of tribalography. Through the tribalographic lens, Howe roots the story in the past through the story of her Grandmother and Tuscalusa. She progresses through the present with Shakbatina, her brother Nitakechi, and her three daughters. The future is seen through Auda, her mother and sisters Adair, and Tema.

The movement through time in *Shell Shaker* illuminates how all time periods and generations are headed by women. This technique allows for the rewriting of time and the reinforcement of the matrilineal line. Liu shares this sentiment as she states that "Both of these firstborn daughters are destined to be the head of the maternal clan, rather than the chief of the assimilated and male-run tribe. Maybe running a tribe means more involvement in politics, whereas [sic] heading a clan deals as well as [sic] speaks more intimately with and to tradition. What continues and sustains either a clan or tribe is not politics but storied traditions" (Liu 203). A loss of identity was a result of the colonization of the settlers, going hand in hand with American hegemony. It should be said though, that Howe maintains that the matrilineal lines are

something that were not lost. Therefore, she writes to reaffirm the matrilineal line. *Shell Shaker* follows a line of women, who is led by a woman, and the head of the clan is always a woman. When knowledge is sought by Delores to bury the dead, she goes to the Billy matriarch, Nowatima, “the great-great-granddaughter of Chunkashbili, Heart Wounder, and she was the granddaughter of Shakbatina” (Howe, *Shell Shaker* 147). Delores sees her as the keeper of the histories. The Billy women also possess the items Shakbatina had with her on her burial alter for her bone picking ceremony. The library of the Billy family home holds Shakbatina’s burden baskets, turtle shells, and her porcupine sash, all passed down through the women to the next generation. Isaac even carries the stone that Grandmother of Birds swallowed holding Tuscalusa’s spirit, though it is passed to Hoppy. In an interview with Kirstin Squint, Howe cites her own family, community and stories as evidence of the continuation of the matrilineal line:

There isn’t an organization...or community group at home that isn’t run or managed by women. You want something done, go to the women. I see that as a continuance of something very old. Who is at the head of my family? I am. I am the oldest girl. This remains true today as it was in the past.

Certainly it was true with my aunts until they all passed . . . think we still are people who have maintained our culture as we change to meet the new centuries sprawling before us. (Squint “Choctawan” 220)

Howe moves this matrilineal continuation to the Mississippi band of Choctaws as well. When the time comes to bury Red McAlester at Nanih Waiyah, it is “the other Chahta women of the Southeast [that] join hands and sing” with Dolores to complete the ceremony (Howe, *Shell Shaker* 197).

The story of how the Choctaw *Inholata* or peacemakers came to be opens the novel, with Howe connecting Shakbatina to the line of Tuscalusa. Howe incorporates even the small details like the “large fly-flap made of feathers” he wore while leading De Soto to the ambush (Biedma and Worth 14) in her story. Shakbatina’s grandmother wove that *Kasmo* for her husband Tuscalusa of feathers and her hair to represent her spirit while he went to trap the invader (Howe *Shell Shaker* 3). The death of Tuscalusa and his men leaves the women alone and explains how they come to lead the tribe. It also explains how Choctaws became peacemakers, shell shakers, and as Shakbatina says “our savior and creator” (Howe, *Shell Shaker* 6). It is Grandmother’s dance that enables the women to escape the *Osano*, De Soto. Starting on the Autumn Equinox she dances for four days, mesmerizing the fire spirit as she paints the ground around the fire red with blood from the turtle shells she strapped to her ankles. The Autumn Equinox granted her what she wished for her people she need only sing his song when she needed his help (Howe, *Shell Shaker* 2). This song allowed the women to grow wings and escape De Soto. The blood sacrifice allowed the escape and founding of the peaceful towns after war, making them the peace keepers, the shell shakers.

Howe is writing a story that is working to decolonize Native American culture and history. Blood, especially as a sacrifice makes several appearances, from the past into the present and eventually into the future. In fact, the word blood is mentioned fifty three times. In the past Grandmother makes a blood sacrifice to *Miko Luak*, fire spirit and *Itilauichi*, the Autumnal Equinox painting the ground with her blood for four days. Grandmother also vomits blood as Tuscalusa dies and his spirit is ripped from her gut. As time moves to the present, Shakbatina uses vermilion to paint her face after watching “a warrior making ceremony to his enemy” (Howe, *Shell Shaker* 6). He puts his enemy’s head on a stick and paints his face red, and

proceeds to dance and sing (Howe, *Shell Shaker* 6). Shakbatina wants to join the warrior so she steals vermilion from Grandmother and after being caught with her face red and knife in hand, her grandmother stops speaking to her. Red, meant for warriors is only worn to kill, and should not be on a peacemaker. Her name, meaning a short tailed wild cat hints at her inability to stay peaceful, and she is more likely to carry on bravely as Tuscalusa, as she too has a town bearing her name in 1772 Mississippi, rather than Alabama (Riley 425). However, Howe cites the meaning of Shakbatina as “survivor” (Howe, *Shell Shaker* 147). Howe expresses Shakbatina’s embodiment of her name clearly in her ability to stand up for her people and protect them through the centuries. The next time Shakbatina wears the vermilion paint, it is intentional. She will get the approval of the tribe to act as a blood sacrifice in place of her daughter Anoleta, and show “my people that we must fight to survive” (Howe, *Shell Shaker* 15). So she wears a white dress of peace and a vermilion face of war. She will sing the warrior song, and blood will gurgle from her mouth as blood and bone are strewn around her as she is executed. Howe ties this present event to the past as Shakbatina is descended from and honoring both “grandmother of birds and Tuscalusa” (Howe, *Shell Shaker* 15). It is also made clear that Shakbatina is sacrificing herself in order to prevent the bloodshed of an intertribal war brewing at the hands of Red Shoes. In the future Auda will come to consciousness on the floor of Red’s office, coved in blood. She made herself up for war, wearing a red dress with scarlet blush and “gobs” of red lipstick (Howe, *Shell Shaker* 27). It is presumed she killed the Choctaw chief for being Osano and spattered his blood and bone through the office. This is an intentional choice by Howe, bringing all the women into the war and giving them power on their terms. There are striking similarities in the gore left behind after Shakbatina is executed, and after Red McAlester is shot. There are blood, brains, and bits of bone splattered about. These deaths are also a return and attempt at renewal.

Shakbatina has parts of her skull, blood, and brains smashed and strewn at the ceremony, and in the future Redford suffers the same fate at her hands. Shakbatina's sacrifice was designed to stop the wars against the Chickasaws, which the English colonizers had plotted. McAlester's death is designed to stop the "war" that was brewing due to his corruption with the Irish Republican Army and the U.S. government. Shakbatina was sacrificed in ceremony and received the traditional bone picking ceremony to avoid tribes being turned against each other for the settlers' war. Redford McAlester is buried with a powerful ceremony to put the *Osano* spirit to rest. Susan Billy, Shakbatina's future counterpart, also attempts to sacrifice herself by falsely confessing to shooting McAlester.

The violence in the blood sacrifice of Shakbatina is a return to culture, tradition and history. The violence displayed is a way of undoing what the *Inkilish okla* introduced to the tribes, like that of De Soto chopping off the heads and hands of the Mabilians, as souvenirs (Howe 3). Though the tribe had access to guns, at the end of the peace negotiations Shakbatina was sacrificed by traditional methods, in the completion of a ceremony to turn white, meaning to bring peace (Howe, *Shell Shaker* 7). It may be seen as a violent death through the imagery brought to the scene, but Shakbatina's death was the outcome of a ritual, where she met with her tribe and with the Red Fox clan and negotiated for a period of time culminating in her willing sacrifice for her tribe and her daughter. The violence that is displayed is largely a view at what happened after the colonial settlers came. The war depicted in the novel is the most violent scene there is, showing the murder of men, women, and children alike, with Red Shoes giving a narration of his kills. Yet it is also made clear that the war was the outcome of the settlers playing the tribes against each other, as well as the corruption of Red Shoes, in the service of the *Inkilish okla*. Howe puts violence in the novel as a connection to the past and decolonization. It

is not the violence that colonial history provides, but rather her own Choctaw versions of the violence that took place. The war and conflict depicted in *Shell Shaker* that has been rewritten through a Choctaw lens allows Howe to control the violence by modifying events and altering history.

Culture is reinforced through the ceremonies through the book. The most powerful of these is the ritual and ceremonies surrounding Shakbatina and the *Osano*, Red McAlester. Shakbatina has a traditional *Inholahta* preparation ritual as well as the bone picking ceremony after she dies. Her brother prepares her body through a ritual to let the animal world know a woman of the people was coming” (Howe, *Shell Shaker* 106). She is laid out traditionally and left for the birds and sun. Yet, she has modified her own ceremony by having her bones picked before the six months are up. In order to have her spirit strong enough to help the people in the coming war, she reaches out to her husband and brother. Koi Chitto picks her bones three months early so she may protect the people.

The burial of Red McAlester is arguably the most important ceremony in the novel. His spirit, the corrupted Red Shoes, returned and followed the same path of corruption turning him to *Osano*. His inner monologue (174) and through the actions of Anoleta and Haya (188) demonstrate that his death can be credited to the Billi women of the past. His death is at the cost of their own lives as Haya and Anoleta are shot to death before him, making it possible that they all died together. Auda and her mother Susan obscure the death of Redford McAlester since they both claim responsibility in addition to Shakbatina. Auda is accused of the murder of Red McAlester, but she says "I tried to do what the spirit wanted” (Howe, *Shell Shaker* 28). Her mother then confesses to the crime to take her daughter’s place, like Shakbatina did for Anoleta. At the end of *Shell Shaker* Shakbatina seems to take credit for the death of Red with her brief

monologue stating that “Auda did hold the gun in her hands, gently, as if it were inlaid with jewels. It was then that I slipped my hands in front of her hands, and together we struck a pose. The day was hers, all hers, but it was my day, too” (Howe, *Shell Shaker* 222). The actions of Red Shoes have led the death of Shakbatina and her need to call for war, by painting her face with vermilion “Dressed in white with my face painted red, I have split myself in two. My message to my people is that we must fight to survive” (Howe, *Shell Shaker* 15).

As the death of Red Shoes remains mysterious so does the information on where Red Shoes was buried. The burial of Redford McAlester is clear. As the *Imataha Chitto* of the tribe, Dolores has a vision. Dolores is making dinner rolls when a voice calls out to her to listen. She learns that the spirit of the Osano must be placated and protected in death with all it wanted in life. If the voice is not enough, the land also turns her dough to the mud of Nanih Waiya (Howe, *Shell Shaker* 157-159). Nanih Waiya is the Choctaw mother mound. It is where the tribe sprang from the earth. As the Billy women discuss the vision in what seems to be disbelief the mud rises and pours over the bowl to cover the table. At some point it is moved to the floor where it continues to ‘percolate’ and spread across the floor and needs to be moved outside. (Howe, *Shell Shaker* 164). Red needs to be buried, not only in the mud of Nanih Waiya, but also with the money, that which he was so desperate for in life. The lives of others were sacrificed in order to make sure Red’s spirit would stay sated in the mother mound with his greed.

Shakbatina, as well as the spirit of the tribe manifested in the stone of Tuscalusa and Grandmother of Birds, of the Choctaw tribe calls for peace and rest. The ceremony that will lay Red McAlester in the ancestral lands will take more than the Billy family because it is also a healing ceremony. Under a tribalographic lens the ceremony is one of renewal and return. Isaac declares Dolores “*Imataha Chitto*, the prophesied leader who will reunite our two tribes” (Howe,

Shell Shaker 169). Howe has brought the novel full circle with the healing ceremony through Red McAlester's funeral. The ceremony with the Chahta women mirrors the ceremony of Grandmother of Birds and her sisters that starts the novel. Delores knows the healing ceremony requires the interdependence of community for there to be tribal healing (Squint, *LeAnne Howe* 72). The funeral therefore causes a coming together of the Oklahoma Choctaws young and old, Billy clan and not. There is also the unification of the two Choctaw tribes that were split by American Indian removal being made whole, uniting the past, present, and future. The *Osano* spirit has returned to the mother mound, and the tribes are renewing their bond.

Howe stresses unification with tribalogy that is relevant in her work. She seeks to reunite people with their tribe's histories, and traditions. In Hollrah's article "Decolonizing the Choctaws," Hollrah explained that Howe connects the historical family of Shakbatina with the contemporary family in *Shell Shaker* (Hollrah, "Decolonizing" 77). In *Shell Shaker*, decolonization and unification stand out the most, as well as a strong sense of home and the land. Howe is rewriting history, deep into the past of the Choctaw tribes. *Shell Shaker* brings the dead and the living, and unites Natives and non-Natives, through the connections with the colonists, and the Irish Republican Army. Howe transcends space and time through Shakbatina, and her guidance of future generations. Howe also brings Choctaw history to the present. She seeks to help form a reconnection with what was lost and allow it to be seen again.

Chapter Two: Embodied Tribalography in *Miko Kings*

LeAnne Howe's theory of tribalography has gained enough traction in the confines of American Indian Studies that the 2014 summer issue of the journal *Studies in American Indian Literatures* was devoted to the topic of exploring and continuing to develop her ideas. According to Joseph Bauerkemper, the editor of the issue, Howe grows the tribalographic framework as she "expands and repurposes tribalography as an interpretive theory relevant for the radical reconsideration of linguistic, historical, anthropological, and archeological records" (Bauerkemper 9) creating a theory of embodied tribalography. In her essay "Embodied Tribalography: The First Installment" Howe explains that embodied tribalography is how the land is embodied by the people and the people are embodied by the land. In "Embodied Tribalography: Mound Building, Native Ballgames, and Native Endurance in the Southeast," she shares 'Evening Hymn 93' that goes "*Issa halali haatoko iksa illok isha shkii*, because you are holding on to me, I am not dead yet." She describes this as a type of call and response, similar to other hymns. The land is calling to the tribes, and they are not dead yet. There is an embodied relationship between them, a cycle. Embodiment has a focus on meaning making and return.

As Howe explains to Kirstin Squint in the interview "Choctawan Aesthetics," "The Choctaws took handfuls of earth from the land around the Nanih Waiya, our mother mound in Mississippi as they began their journey on the Trail of Tears. When we brought our earth, when we brought our people, the names came with us" (Squint, "Choctawan 223). Gibson expounds on this: "Nanih Waiya was the sacred mound of the Choctaw Indians, a tribe who lived in the hills between the Mississippi and Mobile rivers in the southern United States" (317). Nanih Waiya is a mound of earth built by Natives and the source of the Choctaw origin story. This allowed them to maintain some small sort of contact with their land. Gibson also explains that it took tribe

roughly thirty-five months to create Nanih Waiya, an important fact as it means that they lived on the land as they worked to create (Gibson 317), and this makes for a deeper connection. According to Howe, the land is calling to them. Howe's essay, "Embodied Tribalography: Mound Building, Native Ballgames, and Native Endurance in the Southeast" explains the story of how the land taught the Natives to play base and ball. The animals and birds were playing a game of ball, and the bat and/or squirrel wanted to play too. The eagle, leader of the bird team, finally relented and let them join even though they were small, but he gave them wings first. The smallest players then became the most valuable players as they carried the bird team to victory after the birds were exhausted from playing for days (Howe, "Embodied Tribalography: Mound Building" 78). As a result, Natives play more than one type of ball game, a practice that continues to this day.

The games Southeastern Indigenous peoples would play were important aspects of their diplomacy. The ball games were meant to bring together and to unify. Natives would even return to their mound sites for celebrations on peace keeping. The story explains how to make fictive kin, a type of diplomacy, people and things different from the self (Howe, "Embodied Tribalography: Mound Building" 79-80). To illustrate this connection, Howe explains that *fani mingo/minko* is an outsider who supports the adoptive tribe in times of stress, or during ball games. (Howe 80). Howe also notes that there is an embodiment in the game and dance (movements) that reach back to the land. Games and dances are played and move in a counterclockwise motion. Howe argues that this is modeled after the movement of the winds and acts of nature such as hurricanes and tornadoes (Howe, "Embodied Tribalography: Mound Building" 84). In *Miko Kings*, Ezol Day explains the same thing to Lena, "A stomp dance and a baseball game mimic natural phenomena, such as tornado winds, that are counter-clockwise"

(Howe *Miko Kings* 43). Howe also holds the idea of the mounds built by the Natives embodying the stories of the tribes. The most prominent example is her theory of the Bird Mound at Poverty Point. Howe has theorized that the bird is a red tailed hawk, rather than a thunderbird theorized by some. The mound, suspected by Howe, is a manifestation of the lifecycle of the hawk. Archeologists suspect the mound was built in no more than three months' time-the amount of time needed to create a red-tailed hawk (Howe, "Embodied Tribalography: Mound Building" 82). Howe also suggests that the site could be a signal to return, marking important celestial events (83).

Perhaps the most important element of embodiment that Howe discusses is that of base and ball and of the *iti fabassa*. The *iti fabassa* is a pole or pole man that brings the upper world (sky), middle world (ground/Earth), and the lower world. This usually takes place through stories, games, or dances. When Natives play ball games the *iti fabassa* is represented by the pitcher, who engages upper and middle worlds with an underhand pitch. The players move counterclockwise across the field, an embodiment of the winds, always returning home. The bases themselves representing North, South, East, and West (Howe, "Embodied Tribalography: Mound Building" 84). Howe says the land taught the Natives to play ball (Howe, "Embodied Tribalography: Mound Building" 77), so when they play they are embodying the land. This particular embodiment is the basis of Howe's novel, *Miko Kings*.

Miko Kings: An Indian Baseball Story is set in Ada, Oklahoma, with time moving fluidly between 1969 and 1907, much like the time flux in *Shell Shaker*. The story focuses on an Indian baseball team, a sport the Southeastern Indigenous peoples had been playing before Indian removal. The story is focused on Hope Little Leader, a Choctaw pitcher for the Miko Kings. It also employs Ezol Day, a spirit, as narrator that allows the story to take place in the past,

discussing the Hampton Normal School for Blacks and Indians, allotment, and interracial relationships between blacks and Indians. Lena, a Choctaw living in Jordan, hears a call to return home. Hope throws a championship game for money so he can keep Justina, his Dusky Long-Gone Girl, safe and happy. In turn he has his hands chopped off by his teammates and Ezol has fled before the game is finished. Lena has visits from Ezol Day, recreating the past, the story of the Miko Kings, and discovers her heritage with the possibility of what it should have been. The novel ends returning things to the proper place. The game is not thrown, so the events that follow are assumed to be avoided.

Howe opens the book with Lena in Jordan, suffering grief and feeling lost. During the regular call for prayer, Lena hears instead a voice calling her home; “Instead of “Allahu Akbar,” I heard ‘the time has come to return home’...“Even though I put ten thousand miles between me and Oklahoma the land of my ancestors had tracked me down and was speaking” (Howe *Miko Kings* 20). Lena hears the land of her ancestors calling her home, and so she returns. This is an interpretation of Evening Hymn 93 which is woven through the novel. Howe notes that the hymn comes from the chapter “Times and Seasons,” so it crosses time and the land to reach Lena. The words to the hymn are repeated four times, there are four seasons, four directions and four bases in ballgames. Howe also notes that it is not known who the caller or responder is but the tie to the Christian hymn books leads her to the conclusion of the land and mounds the Choctaws revered. This could also explain why Lena hears the call of the land during the regular call for prayer. The land has called because Lena has not forgotten it, a call and response. Lena’s return home sparks a series of returns throughout the novel, all through the embodied tribalography and the continued calling for return.

When Ezol Day, Lena's ancestor, appears before her in spirit form, Ezol begins to explain baseball pitchers as *iti fabassa*, and the idea of base and ball as a diplomatic convention used by the Choctaws. Even as the Miko Kings lose a game, Wild Buck insists they shake hands: "We aren't just a baseball team-we represent the Choctaw Nation, and whether we win or lose we are the diplomats of our people" (Howe "Embodied Tribalography: Mound Building" 94). Howe notes in her interview with Squint that "Baseball is a diplomacy game and is, especially at its roots, exemplary of intertribal diplomacy" (Squint, *Choctawan* 222). Ezol, much like Shakbatina, is the spirit that connects the past and the present through time and space. She herself is *iti fabassa* by connecting the lower and middle worlds. One could argue she even connects the upper world as well, since through her the story of the Miko Kings baseball team is rewritten, changing the ending. Lena responds to the call of the land by returning home; she returns to her ancestral home. The house and the land hold the memory of her matrilineal heritage. It is through this connection that Ezol is able to visit Lena. In the process of having the home remodeled she finds an envelope in the wall that contains old news clippings, some photos, and the journal of Ezol Day. The discovery of this envelope prompts her research into the photograph and the Miko Kings baseball team, and the nightly visits from Ezol Day. It is another way the land is calling to her and returning the past to her. Lena is the embodiment of her ancestors and this process occurs through her return home and renovation of both her ancestral home and the story of the Miko Kings.

As Ezol and elder Hope tell the story of the Miko Kings, and that of Hope Little Leader, we see more embodiment in the form of baseball. When Hope goes to pitch he does the "up-down" like his uncle. Wild Buck explains to him that it is a power, like the wind (Howe *Miko Kings* 94). Blip tells Hope that he has *tikba* (power) from the players in the stars and that he

needs to remember to use his power wisely (a foreshadowing of what was to come) (Howe *Miko Kings* 54). This is in line with the embodiment of the land that Howe discussed in her essay (Howe, “Embodied Tribalography: Mound Building” 77) expressing water and wind flow. The elder Hope explains to his nurse that the ball field in Ada was blessed by an *Alikchi*, a healer, by going “around and around in circles about nineteen times until he had prayed the ground clean, and then he laid out the baseball field according to the four directions. A square within a circle” (Howe “Embodied Tribalography: Mound Building” 98). The field is a ceremonial space, a square within a circle as a renewal, or return, just as the circle of the four seasons. Howe also expresses that the younger players are energized by the moves of an older ball player. Through the up-down stance Hope and his uncle share we are seeing the continuance of the embodiment through movement.

In *Miko Kings* the players are playing the game as a type of ceremony, and embodiment of the land. In turn baseball fuels The Four Mothers Society as all the proceeds from the games go to fight the allotment—to the society. Another important element in the book is the incorporation of The Four Mothers Society. In *Miko Kings*, Howe states that it has twenty-four thousand Choctaws, Creeks, Chickasaws and Cherokees as members” (Howe, *Miko Kings* 116). According to Squint, though it “was not strictly a women’s organization, its name reflects the reverence of women’s political and cultural strength by southeastern Indian nations” (Squint, *LeAnne Howe at the LeAnne Howe* 57). The Four Mothers Society was organized around 1895 and...the goal was not only to resist allotments, but to also maintain the traditional ceremonies of the tribes and the important role that women had always played in tribal affairs” (“Three Forks History: Four Mothers Resisted Allotment”). This is integral to maintaining the matrilineal line. Howe is making it clear that the matrilineal line has never been lost and even in Oklahoma

Indian Territory the women are maintaining their positions in the tribe and as the head of the families. The female characters are central to the families in the novel and to the story as a whole. Justina, a well-known activist weighs her life against her mothers and grandmothers, a tie to the matriarchal lineage. It is Ezol, a woman and the oldest, who is manipulating time and healing the past. Ezol is an ancestral spirit that leads Lena on the path of finding her family history. Lena, the head and last of the family, is the one who researches her family and uncovers the truth of her family and the Miko Kings; the women were and are the keepers of the family line. Ezol also tells Lena “Choctaws and Chickasaws are renowned for their ability to rebuild... We seemed to manifest nature itself, as recreators” (Howe, *Miko Kings* 34). Ezol, being *iti fabassa*, explained to Lena that all things have happened-past, present and future (Howe, *Miko Kings* 35). Ezol explains to Lena that life is a connection to everything (Howe, *Miko Kings* 39) with the help of the Choctaw language, just as Howe explains that “everything is everything” in “The Story of America.” The eye tree drawing from the journal is Ezol’s interpretation of how she sees time and space. Time is a large tree and each space (past, present, future-or other world as Ezol tries to explain to Lena) has an eye, and Ezol can reach through time and space with her access to the eye tree. At the end of the novel Ezol explains to Lena why she felt so abandoned, “Because when your mother died you had no real ancestors to turn to. Cora had a grief she couldn’t bury, and you had no one else on your mother’s side to take care of you” (Howe, *Miko Kings* 221). Lena was so alone and abandoned because her line, the matrilineal, female line of her mother’s side had died out until only she was left. Ezol’s journal, a compilation of genres, is a history of Ada and Adans at the time and can be considered a tribalographic text. Hollrah calls Ezol’s Journal, “a concrete example of tribalogy in its compilation of diary entries, letters, drawings, biblical scriptures, and clippings from the *Ada Weekly News*” (Hollrah, “The Lord and

Center” 44). But Ezol’s journal is but one part of the novel. It is the tribalographic connection that allows the unification with Lena, a tribalographic connection that turns to embodiment and to allow Lena to see her embodiment, unknowingly. As Lena realizes who her grandmother really is, she becomes the embodiment of the story Ezol was telling. Ezol tells Lena that the story is *Nukfokechi* “bringing forth knowledge [to] inspire(s) us to make the eventful leap that one thing leads to another” (Howe, *Miko Kings* 32). This comes to pass when we reach the end of the novel and Ezol states “Lena, I may not be your blood grandmother but I should have been. And I have always been with you in spirit. That is the true story I came to tell” (Howe *Miko Kings* 221). Lena started off with questions about the Miko Kings baseball team but came to learn so much more. “Lena is the catalyst when she is called home. The land calls her home. It is time to come home. The land situates the story, and in some ways, Lena is recovering the story of the Miko Kings baseball team and she also helps turn back time” (Davis 89-87). Lena connected information and events through tidbits of information given by Ezol and the journal. She learned about time and space, movement, baseball as embodiment (Ezol explains to her about point and nature), Choctaw life in the early 1900’s, and her heritage. She clung to the journal and her meetings with Ezol, another interpretation of the hymn, “because you are holding on to me I am not dead yet.” This embodiment will continue as the stories, sports, ceremonies, and dances are passed down through the family lines.

Hope is in a relationship with an African American woman that he meets at the boarding school he is forced to attend. Justina Maurepas, or Dusky Long-Gone Girl is a teacher at the Hampton Normal School for Blacks and Indians. In this way Howe is again bringing things together in consensus. Howe makes it clear: “relationships with blacks in the eighteenth century were just as commonplace as they are today...love affairs are between blacks and Indians are no

different than those between whites and Indians...I wanted to show that blacks and Indians are in the same space (Squint, "Choctawan" 222). Romero also notes the "focus on interracial families and friendships is rooted in tribalogy" (17), calling on the Native propensity for bringing together. This is also the case at Hampton. Hampton was an acquired plantation "Little Scotland" that was established to educate freedmen after the Civil War. Natives were brought in 1878 (Hampton University) and continued to be traumatized on the former plantation through inhumane punishments for running away or practicing Native religions. Hope is confined underground for trying to run away. Howe draws on these connections to show similarities, but also keeps the experiences apart because she keeps the focus on the characters and not on the politics of the time. Romero points out that Howe "describes Hope's fantasies in the prison about marrying his Creole teacher" (Romero 18). Hope and Justina are also marginalized peoples from southeastern lands who have been displaced from their lands. They have a connection to each other and to the southeast, and that continues to call to them. Justina answers the call of the land and returns to Louisiana, and Hope has attempted to flee school and also returns, answering the land. In this way both Hope and Justina embody the lands from which they come.

Hope Little Leader is also a manifestation of tribalogy. He is present in the past and the present, and when he is in the present he is telling stories of the past. For him time is fluid and he moves through it easily. It is why he can move through time and change the story of the Miko Kings baseball team at the end of the novel. Once Lena becomes the embodiment of the story Ezol tells, Hope is freed to change the story, because through this last female matriarch he now has access to history and time. Hope then exists at multiple times and manipulates time to rewrite history. Howe explains how this is possible in her interview with Squint stating "remember[ing] their own stories so that they might be more of the past back into existence"

because “through the chain of stories we are able to grow stronger” (Squint, “Choctawan” 218). Hope, much like Ezol, holds a tribalographic connection through his stories. Hope’s name is a variation of *Hopaii* or “prophet,” and through the novel he tells a lot of stories. His nurse John Lennon asks him “You’ve told so many stories. How would I know the truth?” (Howe *Miko Kings* 59). Hope uses his stories to remain connected to the land and his stories allow him repair what he broke when Lena discovers her heritage.

In Howe’s essay “Embodied Tribalography: The First Installment,” she stated that the characters in *Miko Kings* “embodied the world and land of the story, but their physical movements emplotted the land with triumph, tragedy, renewal, and return” (Howe *Choctalking* 174). *Miko Kings* is a novel that moves across space and time and its characters embody that land and their histories. In Lena, ancestral knowledge is renewed, and this enables Hope Little Leader to return to baseball to alter time, but also to return to the land

Chapter Three: Tribalography Beyond Howe

Connecting Tribalographic Theories in Susan Power's *The Grass Dancer*

LeAnne Howe's theory of tribalography can be applied to more than just her own work. Established Native authors have been making such temporal and spiritual connections before Howe identified it through her theory. Dakota author Susan Power is one such author. Power is an enrolled member of the Standing Rock Sioux, author of *The Grass Dancer* which won the PEN/Hemingway award, *Roofwalker*, and *Sacred Wilderness*. She also held the 2015-16 Loft McKnight Fellowship and the Native Arts & Cultures Fellowship for 2016–17 (Kratzert and Richey 11). In fact, in Howe's article "The Story of America: A Tribalography," she specifically mentions Susan Power and her novel *The Grass Dancer*:

Power steeps her readers in the connections between Dakota ancestors and the present-day culture. She tells Dakota stories...time travels counterclockwise, and there are multiple narrators giving their versions of events. This creates a multigenerational story that touches all the characters in the book...the reader is taken backward in time until the final scenes of the book complete the beginning. (Howe *Choctalking* 34)

Power's *The Grass Dancer* weaves the stories of two families together, winding from the present to the past (counterclockwise), and back to the present. This is similar to the way Howe employs counterclockwise motions on the ballfield where the game is played counterclockwise like the wind, as connection to the land in *Miko Kings*. Power starts *The Grass Dancer* with the Wind Soldier family, Harley and his dead father Calvin and his brother Duane. She then works in his various generational ancestors. Power includes ancestors who lived during the white American settler colonialism across the Great Plains and its impact on native culture, Red Dress and Ghost

Horse, as spirits as well as alive in their generational story. Power's characters move outside of time and space, following Howe's model, particularly in the case of Red Dress who consults with descendants. The story is rooted in the culture and heritage of each generation and shows how the ancestors are still connected to the people though they have moved on from the physical world. It is a war story, just not in the traditional sense, because the main characters are fighting for something through the novel.

The book takes its title from a traditional dance of disputed origin, and in order to understand the novel, it is important to understand what grass dancers and dancing are. There are pow wows in the book that teach readers that there are two kinds of grass dancing: "There's the grass dancer who prepares the field for a pow wow the old-time way, turning the grass over with his feet to flatten it down. Then there's the spiritual dancer, who wants to learn grass secrets by imitating it, moving his body with the wind" (Power 25). According to Adrian Primeaux, a Sioux grass dancer, the dance came about through a child who could not walk. His grandfather told him to fast, pray, and sing for four days, which he did on a patch of sweet grass. On the fourth day a deer came to him in a storm, and he told him he was seeking guidance, and the deer agreed to share some songs with him. One story was about buffalo who endure storms because they know there will always be an end. When the boy returned and began to share the songs and sing to his people, he slowly gained mobility in his legs as the songs were healing songs (Zimny). This is the opposite of what anthropologist James Howard, and his informant, a Northern Ponca in South Dakota claim. In his "Notes on the Grass Dance" he claims the traditional grass dance is a dance of a warrior, and it was traded for horses by the Ponca/Omaha to the Dakota. It was maintained as a war society and was something for men, something to be learned and earned (Howard 82-83). Pumpkin, a grass dancer, is a girl of Menominee heritage

with red gold hair, not a man who has earned war accomplishments. She knows her soul and shares it with Harley. This allows Harley to quest for his missing soul (Wright 40). Howard's "Notes on the Grass Dance" point out how the dance has grown and changed over time which he contributes to "the general breakdown of the older Dakota culture and war patterns" but also how things have remained (Howard 83). New steps have been incorporated that were not used before that focus on agriculture. The regalia has also changed, as he notes that the "leaders of the society wore a peculiar feathered ornament called the 'crow belt' which symbolized a battlefield. The various insignia of the society were said to be a protection against arrows and bullets" (Howard 83). The Crow belt has largely been dropped from costume as he cites only in the "Lower Brule and Pine Ridge reservations of South Dakota the article is still a regular part of the dance costume, although its ritual significance has been largely lost" (Howard 83). Though the Crow belt is lost, the regalia still keeps the dancer "connected to the cosmos through the alert headpiece feather, to the earth through his moccasins, and to the flora through his regalia and movements, the grass dancer also connects with his people" ("Origins of the Grass Dance"). The dance connects people to the earth and ancestors and with the oral traditions. The song and dance also connect to the spirit world where the regalia worn ties to the upper world, plants, and middle world. All of this history is directly reflected in Power's novel, but the true origin story does not matter as she infuses her story with both versions as they are connected and united in their meaning. This follows Howe's theory of tribalography through symbiogenesis, everything is everything" (Howe, Choctalking 20).

In Power's novel, the grass dancer ceremony is present in all generations, much like *Shell Shaker*, and is key to the characters' identity. In the start of the novel Pumpkin travels the powwow circuit dancing the grass dance. She breaks the male-dominated tradition and wears orange

and yellow yarns that match her complexion and wins the first place prize. Pumpkin does not dance for the prize, and she returns it. Pumpkin is dancing for her identity. As a Native American who is going to Stanford University, she is worried about having to abandon her Native worldview.

I know I will have to put aside one world view – perhaps only temporarily – to take up another. From what I have learned so far I know that the two are not complementary but rather incompatible, and melodramatic as it may sound, I sometimes feel I am risking my soul by leaving the Indian community (Power 24).

Pumpkin is fighting to retain her soul and her Native identity or spirit. It is an internal war, but also one she fights with society. For Pumpkin, going off to college to live and learn among white students is a parallel to the Indian boarding schools that claimed much of the culture lost to Native tribes, where students were not even allowed to speak their language and Native dances were outlawed. According to Luther Standing Bear, one of the first Sioux to attend Carlisle Indian School,

One day when we came to school there was a lot of writing on one of the blackboards. We did not know what it meant, but our interpreter came into the room and said, 'Do you see all these marks on the blackboard? Well, each word is a white man's name. They are going to give each one of you one of these names by which you will hereafter be known.' None of the names were read or explained to us, so of course we did not know the sound or meaning of any of them (Standing Bear 137).

He also explains that none of the boys wanted their hair cut, and he thought, “after having had my hair cut, a new thought came into my head. I felt that I was no more Indian, but would be an imitation of a white man” (Standing Bear 141). Pumpkin already feels as though her curiosity and love of books has pushed her out of her culture, until she “stands outside of it” (Power 16). If she has to abandon her worldview in addition to standing outside of her culture, she feels as though she will be completely untethered from her Native heritage. This is comparable to Hope’s experience in *Miko Kings*. Much of N. Scott Momaday’s play, *The Indolent Boys*, discussed later in this chapter, also highlights the separation and loss of culture through the frozen boys, but also John Pai and his struggle with being split between his white education and his native identity.

Pumpkin is dancing to learn the grass secrets, as she “trying to become something else...stepping outside of [her]self” as a grass dancer (Power 34.) She seeks to plant her roots firmly in her Native self, while the rest of her evolves, much like the steps of the dance, without losing herself. When Pumpkin dies, the reader is left wondering if Charlene’s witch grandmother is to blame. Herod and Harley go to the crash site and see that Pumpkin has become a true grass dancer, as the crash is “surrounded by a wide swath of flattened prairie grass,” and Herod claims, “Those kids. Those four Menominees. Now they’re the true kind of grass dancers. Now they really know how to prepare the way” (Power 53). Charlene is dreaming that it was her grandmother Ana (Mercury) Thunder who caused the accident on her behalf. She sees Pumpkin in her dreams, and though Pumpkin hesitates, she releases tiny black birds from her mouth. When Charlene is finally free of her grandmother she sees Pumpkin again, dancing in the street, and able to keep up with the bus Charlene is riding. Charlene allows the birds to fly into her mouth and she can finally hear Pumpkin’s message to her: “It wasn’t your fault...These things

happen. There was nothing you could do” (Power 310). Pumpkin danced the way for Charlene to accept she was not at fault for, or responsible for Mercury.

Another example of ceremony in *The Grass Dancer* is the evolution of Harley Wind Soldier, and the soul sharing that passes between him and Pumpkin. Harley Wind Soldier starts as a ceremonial dancer, carrying the Sioux flag at the opening and closing ceremonies for the pow wow. He is lost and feels hollow and soulless thinking his mother offered his soul to his brother at his funeral: “she located his own spirit membrane, caught her fingernail under its edge and peeled it away from her unborn child. It looked like cellophane and crinkled when she pinched it into a small wafer...And so Lydia fed her sleeping son his brother’s soul, forced it between stitched lips” (Power 41-42). Since Lydia also gave her “killing voice” to her dead family members, Harley has lived in silence alone, always empty, drawing a large black hole on his chest to symbolize this since he was in elementary school. When he meets Pumpkin at the pow wow, and they decide to spend time together. Harley can explain how he feels, without explaining, and Pumpkin gives Harley some of her soul. “I am your friend now. I have plenty of soul to spare. I am rubbing it into you now. Can you tell?” (Power 45). When Pumpkin dies in a car wreck after leaving the pow wow Harley sinks deeper into his emptiness and changes his dance regalia to the colors that Pumpkin used for her grass dance at powwows. His loss and emptiness become even more apparent to those around him as “the dark silence that had blossomed inside him as a small child had both expanded and compressed, become a leaden weight branching everywhere, even to his fingers” (Power 319). It was this darkness that put him on the path to healing. Herod Small War, a Yuwipi man, a spiritual person who interprets messages from the spirit world, directs Harley to the vision pit to find peace and direction in his life. Herod keeps to the old ways of the Sioux people in belief and in ceremony. As such he

instructs Harley to enter the pit naked, but like his father before him, he maintains clothes between him and the dirt. He is closer to tradition wearing only a pair of shorts, where his father refused to strip and stayed fully clothed. During his vision he sees his family, his grandmother Margaret Many Wounds, his father Calvin, his brother Duane, and his ancestor Ghost Horse.

In his vision ceremony, Harley seeks the medicine hole, much like he had when he was younger with Herod, his friend Frank and Archie Iron Necklace. Though he was not successful in his youth, he is in his vision. Before the vision pit ceremony, Harley notes that he can look at a field and see all that there was before the present, ghosts of the past. Harley can see the past in the present, and the dead among the living, an example of LeAnne Howe's theory of tribalography. "He was so hypnotized by the images his mind conjured that he didn't recognize the one firm gift he possessed: his imagination" (Power 318). Harley watched Margaret Many Wounds transcend space and time at her death, and she is the first person he meets in after he exits the medicine hole. She died as Harley stayed at her bedside and danced on the moon while Harley watched her on television "*look at the crooked tracks I make like a snake*, she thought. *Takoja*, she called with her spirit, *look at me, look at the magic, there is still magic in the world*" (Power 121). In his vision he calls to her, "I saw you! When I was little I saw you on the television—I mean the moon. You were beautiful Unci, and dancing" (Power 328). This is meant to reinforce the power of Harley's connection to his ancestors, and ability to see beyond the present that he has overlooked throughout the novel. When he meets his father and his brother Duane, it is a brief meeting of acceptance and claiming because he needs to find his own answers. He meets Ghost Horse, who wants him to know that "warriors are not what you think" (Power 330). When Margaret Many Wounds pushes him back to the vision pit, he meets Red Dress. She is tied to the people and unable to move on. She is also present in multiple times and

spaces. Her spirit is waiting for him at the edge of the vision pit when he wakes on the fourth and final day. She has watched him dance and wants to help him understand his grass dance and why he is not able to master it. Red Dress explains,

This is not a pleasant thing, but then, you aren't a child. A long time ago, when we vanquished our enemies in battle we would hold a victory dance and flaunt the trophies of war—the long hair of our adversaries. So when you move through those old steps, remember that you are dancing a rebellion and that the pretty fringes are hiding blood and flesh and captured hair. (Power 331)

Harley is not capable of rendering a successful grass dance as hard as he tries. Red Dress reminds him that there is more to the dance than he knows. He will need to engage his imagination, remember his regalia is captured scalps and not the yarn which Red Dress calls “a replacement for a replacement” (Power 331). Harley needs to imagine his people and ancestors, the warriors, like Ghost Horse, who are capturing much more than the darkness he brings to the dance from within.

Charlene Thunder also sees Red Dress, who is her ancestor. Charlene has medicine but does not know how to use it or control it, as Mercury is a bad example. Charlene seems to chafe under Mercury's thumb. She does not compete for anything for fear of what her Mercury will do to the others who compete against her. Charlene knows that Mercury has manipulated the competitions she has been in to make her the winner. This is why she thinks she may be responsible for Pumpkin's death, as Pumpkin is in her dreams dancing on her chest and releasing black birds from her mouth; Mercury may have caused the accident because Pumpkin got too close to Harley. Charlene is also aware of the shadow that Mercury casts on her, with her reputation. People keep their distance from both. Mercury is a witch who uses her medicine for

her self-interest, and it is wearing on her body. Charlene does not know who she is outside of Mercury because she has always been in her shadow. She is fighting for her identity but does not know it until she makes a grave mistake. When Charlene sees that Harley will now wear the grass dancing regalia, and in Pumpkin's colors to honor her, she decides to make use of her own medicine. She bakes chocolate cakes that contain her eyelashes and distributes them to six boys who take the cakes and unknowingly consume her medicine. Charlene feels guilt when they trust her, "but it was too late now. There was no giving back their naïve faith, no calling off the medicine Charlene sensed rushing through her veins" (Power 295). This guilt is followed by regret as she feels she is falling in Mercury's shadow, until she finally realizes that "in doubting the success of her venture, Charlene realized she'd overplayed her hand" (Power 298). The puppets she thought she controlled had turned on her and became hands and bodies as she was raped by all six boys until daylight. When Charlene awakes, Red Dress—great aunt to Mercury—is waiting for her, "You have misused the medicine because you have a bad example. If you are selfish with it, someday it will be selfish with you. We do not own the power, we aren't supposed to direct it ourselves" (Power 299). This incident stays with Charlene, who asks to be moved to another classroom to avoid the boys. The move to her new classroom provides her with a clipping of her mother and father in a newspaper and spurs her to climb out of Mercury's influence. She knows that Mercury is holding on to her and keeping her to herself, and after her own experiment with the powerful medicine in her, she knows that she wants and needs to get out. She enlists the help of her guidance counselor to call her parents. Her mother warns her not to return home, "That woman will figure you out and own you again" (Power 307). As Charlene escapes the power of Mercury, she can feel her influence waning and getting smaller and smaller. Once Charlene's spirit is free of Mercury, Pumpkin returns, dancing down

the street keeping pace with the bus Charlene is taking to her parents' home. This time when Pumpkin opened her mouth to speak the birds that flew out did not die but flew into Charlene's mouth. Charlene's soul has finally been returned to her via her vision of Pumpkin who tells her she was not responsible for her death. The birds came from Pumpkin, but the voice "came from her own throat, she couldn't tell if it was Pumpkin who forgave her, or Charlene forgiving herself" (Power 310).

Red Dress, a helper ancestor spirit, much like the *alikchi* figures of Shakbatina in *Shell Shaker* and Ezol Day in *Miko Kings*, was incorporated into the story line of Harley and Charlene. Red Dress is a character who weaves both the ancestral lines together, visiting her descendants and those of Ghost Horse. It is possible that Red Dress is a manifestation of the White Buffalo Woman. The buffalo woman is said to have appeared to two hunters who were looking for food. One hunter, overcome with lust, approached her with ill intent. As he reached her she surrounded them both with clouds and when they dispersed she was standing alone, and where the hunter had been was a pile of bones writhing with snakes. She told the other hunter to return to his people and prepare for her visit. When she arrives she changes from buffalo to a woman in front of the people, and explains that she is there, sent by the Great Spirit. She gifts them with the pipe that is still sacred to this day, and the seven rituals that unite them. The pipe brings together, the sun and sky, all animals on four legs, the stem of the pipe represented plants, the feather represented the eagle and all birds, and the smoke was the breath of the Great Spirit, Wakan Tanka. Though she leaves after four days, she promises that she will stay with them and watch over them (Utley p. 1-2; Hmlinen p. 200).

Red Dress is left on a hide as a baby and two snakes come and shared her place in the sun to keep her company. They allowed her to grab them and did not strike, while her mother

hovered, worried. “‘That one charms the snakes,’ people have whispered all my life, but they have it wrong. The snakes charmed me” (Power 241). Since then she has worn rattlers in her hair. When Red Dress dreams of Fort Laramie, it is decided that she will go. After she arrives she works for the priest, transcribing documents and taking dictation. After she has been at the fort for a few months her sister stones, found while praying at the top of Angry Butte disappear from the place they were hidden in the ground, and Red Dress finds them in her pocket. There has just been a staging of *Macbeth* at the fort, and widowed woman at the fort, Fanny, tells her “everyone is half mad with love, or maybe lust” (Power 265). After the play Red Dress stands by the river near her lodge, when she is approached by one of the men from the play, and he is holding the sister stones. At this, she takes the stones and winds her hair around his button and tells him what to do. He hangs himself from a tree, thanks to her medicine. Again, a man from the play who had lusted after her approaches her at the river, though this time she can see he wants to fight back but can’t. She takes the stones and he hangs himself from a tree. The third man is Royal Burke who lusted after Red Dress as they skated on the ice. He comes to her and gives her the stones before she asks, and even asks for her hair before she can wind it on his person. The next night, Red Dress is shot to death in her tent, by the Reverend Pyke, who suspects her hand in the deaths of the men. Though after her death Red Dress follows Pyke, who carries the stones in his pocket, and watches as he struggles with himself as he commits suicide with his revolver, at the hand of Red Dress’s medicine. Red Dress is carried back to her home by her brother, and in death marries Ghost Horse. In *Shell Shaker*, Shakbatina is also close with her brother who provides for her death. Shakbatina, much like Red Dress is cared for by her husband, Koi Chitto, who does her bone picking ceremony after her death. In *The Grass Dancer*, Ghost Horse makes Red Dress’s scaffold, but he is lost without her and though he completes the

ceremony to release her spirit, he holds on to it, trapping her on the earth, even after he himself dies in battle, she is trapped. Red Dress explains, “I am hitched to the living, still moved by their concerns. My spirit never abandons the Dakota people, though sometimes all it can do is watch” (Power 281).

Like Howe’s creative works, Power also writes about conflicts between Indigenous peoples and whites. Margaret Many Wounds lay on her deathbed telling her grandson that her dying wish is to get her grandmother’s dress out of the museum and return it to the family so it can be worn and passed down, “but this use does not fit white notions of what is appropriate: the dress has become a dead museum piece, not a living part of culture, so now no one can use it” (Winters). It is also apparent when Crystal, daughter of Ana (Mercury) plays Little Richard records to the shock of Jeannette, who treats her like an experiment she must study and document. Jeannette also does not take Mercury as the witch she is despite warnings from Herod because she does not truly believe. Herod holds tradition and will not let a woman in to his sweat lodge, and he will not let a menstruating woman join a *Yuwipi* ceremony. As the book continues to Red Dress it displays the direct effects of colonialism. While Red Dress has learned English through Father La Frambois, he has not managed to convert her tribe to Christianity, and they hold on to their culture, dressing and caring for themselves as they have always done and not relying on what the settlers’ trade. As Red Dress travels to Fort Laramie she first passes through a village dubbed “Squaw Town,” that held people who “were our cousins, a different band of the same tribe,” who have already lost so much of who they are, they think that Red Dress and her brother are the ghosts of their ancestors (Power 251). They are poor and hungry. The chief has silver snuff boxes strapped to his shirt, but his moccasins are worn thin and shedding their bead work. Children are barefoot and dirty the women do not braid their hair but leave it to tangle in

the wind. This plays into the “religion” conflict. Non-native critics have struggled with how to discuss the representations of Sioux spirituality in the novel with Wright calling it ‘Tribal Magic’ and Roland calling it ‘Magical Realism:’ “Power, then, uses the dual character of magical realism - the harmonious intertwinement of the natural and supernatural categories of reality as a means of resistance to internal colonization” (Roland 68). These views come from the inability, as Pumpkin would say to accept another worldview, if only temporary, and press it to fit in a white framework they can understand. As Holford explains about her students, “there is a dismissal of the spiritual, supernatural, and magical in the story led the second student to differentiate her own beliefs from the supposedly unrealistic worldview on which the novel is based because of course such things are not believable” (Holford 7). Schweningen notes that “such co-opting runs the risk of ultimately devaluing the unique nature of a particular mode of fiction” (Schweningen 51). This is of course, in addition to the grass dance which is a display of how the Sioux have weathered the storm that is colonialism. There may have been a loss, but it was not of identity. The dance may have changed, but it is intact, just like the Sioux people.

Rather than calling Power’s novel “magically real,” LeAnne Howe’s theory of tribalography is a much more appropriate lens. Native beliefs and histories are clear and acceptable, when viewed through a tribalographic lens. It is not magic that creates the ability to move through time and space, nor the ability to combine past with present and living with the dead. It is a native propensity to bring things together because everything is everything (Howe, *Choctalking* 20). Crystal tells Jeanette, “You are not asleep, and this isn’t a story” (Power 185). To further reiterate the validity of the story, after cursing Jeanette Mercury sates, “I am not a fairy tale” (Power 187).

The tribalogy in *The Grass Dancer* can be taken one step further as embodied tribalogy if we look at Herod Small War. Archie Iron Necklace has a dream and seeks the council of Herod, as he is the *Yuwipi* man of the tribe. Herod performs a ceremony to ask the spirits what the dream means: “He [Archie] tied my hands and feet with rope, covered my head with a star quilt and bound it to my body using leather thongs” (Power 84-85). The spirits of the ancestors come, release him from his bindings and show him Archie’s dream. It is actually a moment from history, in 1877 after the Sioux war and the battle with Custer. The spirits show him four young Native men who are actually his grandson Frank Pipe, Harley Wind Soldier, Archie Iron Necklace and himself. They think they are alone in a field riding their horses when they realize they are being surrounded by soldiers who open fire upon them. According to Herod, “The earth pitied those four young warriors [and] split[ing] its skin at our feet. The medicine hole gaped open” (Power 86). The men then crawled through the tunnel to safety. When Herod takes them all on a quest to find the medicine hole, he is forced to wait out a storm in the abandoned house of his former lover. Her ghost appears to him, and points to the land. There, Herod sees four warriors and asks them if he will ever find the medicine hole: “The spirit warriors smiled, and one of them raised his hand, palm outward; it flashed like a mirror. *You are the medicine hole*, he said” (Power 96).

This chapter displays the theory of tribalogy through the ceremony, the spirits of the ancestors that come to Herod, as well as the past and present, living and dead colliding. The medicine hole is said to be how Native families escaped from an attack on a Sioux trade village by General Sully. Warriors fought when the battle was turning against their favor, and gave the families time to flee. Sully was unable to find them and it is said that they went through the cave known as the medicine hole, and found a way out, away from the soldiers (Killdeer). Herod

Small War is the embodiment of the land and the people through his identification as the medicine hole. Herod Small War is everything and “everything is everything” (Howe, *Choctalking* 20)



The Medicine Hole, Dunn North Dakota. North Dakota
Department of Mineral Resources

According to Howe Tribalography is a “native propensity for bringing things together, making consensus, and connecting one thing to another...no matter the form pull[ing] all the elements together of the story tellers tribe, people, land, manifestations and revelations...connect these in past, present, and future milieus” (Howe, *Chocktalking* 31). That is what Power accomplished by taking her readers to the past to meet Dakota ancestors through the present-day culture. She incorporates Dakota stories and moves counterclockwise through time.

Embodied Tribalography in N. Scott Momaday’s *The Indolent Boys*

N. Scott Momaday is the first and only American Indian writer to win the Pulitzer Prize for his work, the 2019 Ambassador Richard C. Holbrooke Distinguished Achievement Award,

2019 Ken Burns American Heritage Prize, the Golden Plate Award from the American Academy of Achievement, an Academy of American Poets Prize, an award from the National Institute of Arts and Letters, and the Premio Letterario Internazionale "Mondello." He is an established Native American writer of poetry, prose, and children's literature. His play *The Indolent Boys* is a true story of Kiowa history blended with fiction, much like Howe's works that are based on Choctaw history. Momaday attempts to tell both sides of the tragic true story of three boys fleeing a Kiowa boarding school to find their way home, or to the camps, only to freeze to death. The children who died are not true characters in the play, and the main character is John Pai, a Kiowa student ready to graduate, who is trapped between his Native self and the white world around him.

The story of the frozen boys is a part of Kiowa history (the winter of 1890-91, "the schoolboys frozen") that is marked down in pictographic calendars that are "maintained by Kiowa chroniclers and historians for generations, denoted each year with a drawing of the significant event or events of the year or the season" (Katanski 179-180). When this is looked at through a tribalographic lens, it highlights the connection the people hold with the land. In the past and the present they are still using the stories of the people and the land to keep time. According to Smithsonian ethnologist James Mooney, "Sett'an was born in "cut-throat summer" (1833), and his earliest recollection is of the "head-dragging winter" (1837—38)" (Mooney 146). One of the boys is in fact named after Sitting Bear, Sett'an or Set-angia. "Schoolboys frozen" is a memory that is not just part of the families of the children lost, or of the people who were present at the camps when the boys fled the school. This is a memory of the tribe, of the Kiowa people, in all past and present and future generations; 1890-1 will always be the winter of the frozen schoolboys. Momaday himself says "I have heard the story of the boys who froze to death

from the time I was a child. It is deeply embedded in Kiowa oral tradition” (Momaday, 5). The history of “schoolboys frozen” is embodied by the timeline of the Kiowa and in turn the people through the timeline; this timeline is manifested through the medicine wheel (discussed below) upon the land. The story Momaday presents in his play as a Kiowa representation, rather than what the records of the government conclude: “Through his dramatization of the event, which privileges tribal history as more accurate than documentary records, Momaday presents a truly tribal story, a chronicle that holds significance within the Kiowa nation that it lacks for outsiders” (Katanski 181).

The boarding schools that all tribes were exposed to, Kiowa included, decimated their culture. The schools were all formed under the model that Henry Pratt, the founder of the Carlisle Indian School, created. His motto was: “kill the Indian and save the man” (Pinazzi 90). The boarding school experience has done much more harm than is realized. According to Paula Palmer’s article “The Quaker Indian Boarding Schools: Facing Our History and Ourselves,” “Studies are showing, for example, that such trauma can be passed from one generation to the next. This means that the boarding schools of the 19th century are still affecting Native people today” (294). Momaday is adding a Native perspective to the incident but also to the experience Natives had in the boarding schools. This is important because as Palmer points out,

Almost anything that was published in the 19th and early 20th centuries was published by white editors who could select pieces for publication that supported their own biases. Public statements by Native people in their own languages had to be translated, and it’s hard to know how accurately this was done. (Palmer 294)

Katanski agrees with Palmer’s views:

This is certainly the case with the story of the frozen boys, which does not make it into U.S. history books but remains a defining moment in Kiowa history, explaining and referencing an entire year. The traces of this story that do remain in U.S. historical documents represent the government educators' perspective. (180-181)

The Native schools, as demonstrated in *Miko Kings*, *The Indolent Boys*, and elaborated on by Palmer (300-302), stripped the children of all they knew and belittled them in the process. Hope Little Leader in *Miko Kings* was punished for speaking his language and practicing his religion by leaving food out for the spirits. The schools would cut the children's hair, male and female, something that for most was insulting and degrading unless they were mourning and offering a sacrifice. They took the gender roles the children had known all their lives and swapped them with white gender roles, making warriors dig gardens, and moving the female children into the home. They took their names away, a key part of their self-identity. In his memoir *The Names*, Momaday imagines that his great-grandfather Pohd-lok names him Tsoai-talee (rock-tree boy of the 7 sisters history), the appellation of the bear-boy in the Kiowa myth of Tsoai (Momaday 55-57). As Momaday explained, "My name is Tsoai-talee. I am, therefore, Tsoai-talee; therefore I am. The storyteller Pohd-lokh gave me the name Tsoai-talee. He believed that a man's life proceeds from his name, in the way that a river proceeds from its source" (Stegner 292).

For Momaday, his name feeds his life, and when that is stripped from him, it is a total destruction of the spirit or soul: "They left cuts and little tufts of hair on my scalp. That is how we Gaigwu look when we are grieving. It was as if I was mourning my own

death” (Momaday 33). Palmer even says as much while investigating the Quaker schools: “The goals of the Quaker schools and the off-reservation schools were the same, however: to assimilate Native children and eliminate Native cultures” (Palmer 306). Momaday expresses the hypocrisy with his white character Wherritt’s claim, “I want them to be, by God, Americans, Mr. Gregory! I want them to feel at home in America!” (Momaday 20) while trying to prove whipping the schoolboys was justified to Mr. Gregory. It was under such harsh conditions that the three Kiowa boys tried to flee and seek their families in the camps miles away. Every attempt was made to cut the children from their culture, and through a tribalographic lens, we can see that every attempt falls into the definition of tribalogy. Their hair and clothes are a representation of their culture, the tribe represents their histories,

In the play, Momaday features the Kiowa symbol of the Medicine wheel as a focal point. This is a replica of the large earthen wheel at Big Horn, Wyoming, painted on an animal hide by the grandfather of one of the children. Wherritt calls it, “some sort of religious figure...a medicine wheel Carrie calls it” (Momaday 14). According to the Wyoming State Historical Society, “Researchers have identified as many as 150 medicine wheels in Montana, South Dakota, Wyoming and the Canadian provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan,” but the one at Big Horn is the oldest and best preserved site. According to the Kansas Historical Society, “Tribal members gained their medicine from pledging a Sun Dance, praying, fasting, receiving a vision, or through inheritance from an elder...archaeological site located in the Bighorn Mountains of Wyoming consists of boulders arranged in a circle and resembles the medicine wheels constructed for the Sun Dance” (Kansas Historical Society).



Big Horn Medicine Wheel, Association of American Indian Affairs

The Sun Dance, the most important Kiowa dance, unified the tribe socially and spiritually...marked the only time the Kiowa bands, as well as the Plains Apache, coalesced in a single encampment; the success of the ritual was contingent on collective cooperation. On a spiritual level, Sun, the life-giving power of the universe possessed the strongest *dwdw* (power), symbolizing life itself. Sun gave power directly to the buffalo, on which the Kiowa depended, so that Sun was the father of Buffalo and the Kiowa (Kratcht 19).

According to Stanford solar center, it is believed that the medicine wheel is a type of astrological observatory and calendar. The twenty-eight spokes are a possible representation to the twenty-eight days in a lunar cycle or a heliacal rising: "The dawn or heliacal rising of a star is important because it pinpoints a date exactly. This is the day a star is first seen, just before dawn, after it has been behind the Sun for an entire season" (Bighorn Medicine Wheel).

According to the stage directions in *The Indolent Boys*, the medicine wheel is in the middle of the stage emphasizing the people's connection with the land and illuminated when John Pai seeks his audience with the portrait of Abraham Lincoln. He makes mention of the hero twins that are cared for by Grandmother Spider (as embodied by Grandmother Goodeye in the play), but he focuses on how the children are treated at the schools, "[Mr. Pratt] has given us schools in which we learn to slough our red skin, forget our languages, forget our parents and grandparents, our little brothers and sisters, our dead ancestors. School here. Mr. Lincoln, is a camp where the memory is killed. I am taught not to remember, but to dismember myself" (Momaday 24). When he finishes, he turns back to the wheel, staring at it, and tracing its shape. When Carrie, the teacher, enters and tells him to remember himself he stares at the wheel again, and says a prayer for the three boys. This wheel is calling to John, much like Lena was called to return home in *Miko Kings*. The wheel does not speak to John the way the land called Lena through the hymn and prayer, but it pulls him without words, calling him back to the camps and his tribe.

The wheel is not there when Emdotah has nothing to report and is chided for "singing" in the barn. He stands mute when he is asked where the children are, and though Emdotah gives no response John Pie says, "I know the song," (Momaday 38) knowing that the boys have died since there is no way they would have survived a trek across the river. Momaday leaves it to the reader to understand that this is their land, and they do not need to find the bodies to know that the boys are dead. The wheel returns when Mother Goodeye is mourning the boys and has cut off two of her fingers. The scene changes to a tense conversation between Carrie and the disciplinarian, Wherritt,

and when John enters again, he looks straight at the wheel. It is always John with his eyes on the medicine wheel, conscious or unconscious. It provides a connection, a piece of home, that he is preparing to leave. Since the medicine wheel is how the Kiowa gain their medicine and power, it seems to pull John every time he sees it, giving him a bit more strength to make up his mind, to follow the path the school has laid for him, or to return to his family and tribe. Once he has made his choice, the wheel is no longer the center of the stage. It is not illuminated, and he does not focus on it each time he enters the stage. It is as though his medicine has returned to him, and he calmly waits for his “graduation” to leave the school and abandon the path to the seminary the boarding school made for him. The wheel makes a return at the end of the play when Mother Goodeye tells about the funeral of the frozen boys, after John returns to the camps. As the play closes, the wheel is illuminated and becomes brighter until the blackout signaling the end of the play. It is a symbol of the Kiowas and their people and power. The medicine wheel that has attracted John every time he was in its presence is a signifier of how he and the Kiowa people are holding on to their culture and history. This is a connection of the land and the people, much like the Choctaw and the mother mound in *Shell Shaker*. The Evening Hymn 93 “because you are holding on to me, I am not dead yet” also expresses the connection of the Kiowa to their land displayed with the medicine wheel. The medicine wheel is a representation of that land and culture, and as we see through John who does not let go of his Kiowa self, the people and their culture continue to live on.

Grandmother Goodeye is more than just the narrator of the play. She is a storyteller, she has power to control the audience, and to get them engaged, having them

call out the dead children's names at the opening of the play (Momaday 10). According to Kiowa history, Grandmother Spider is an important figure to the tribe. In Momaday's *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, he tells the story of Grandmother Spider. There is a beautiful baby girl, much loved by her parents. The Sun sees the baby, and when she is left in her baby chair in a tree, Sun appears as a bird and makes the tree grow higher and higher until they reach his home at point the girl is a grown woman. He was no longer a red bird, but the only man in that place he was the Sun. After time, she had a son and when she argued with the Sun, she dug up the root he told her never to touch. It opened the sky, and she could see her kinsman below. She made a rope to take her and her baby down to her tribesman, but it was not long enough. When the Sun saw what she had done, he threw a gaming wheel at the woman and killed her, leaving the child alone. The child made it to the ground and saw the dwelling of a spider. The boy was afraid, so the spider had to make a trap to catch him. This was Grandmother Spider, and she knew he would be hard to raise, but she did. She told him never to throw the wheel that Sun had used to kill his mother in the air. One day he did not listen, and threw it up, and it hit him on top of his head, and split him in two creating the hero twins. Grandmother Spider raised them both, until they told her about a large snake, they killed that was in their tipi. Grandmother cried and told them that it was their grandfather that they had killed, and then she died. The boys lived on for a long time and were honored among the Kiowa (Momaday 22-34). Grandmother Goodeye is a reincarnation of Grandmother Spider, who in the prologue when introducing the frozen boys' states, "Seta and Set-angia, and I. We have holes in our heads, you see. Surely that is a great sign and a powerful medicine" (Momaday 11-12). She is also present through the play, in the

prologue and epilogue but also in the dream states that are ceremony with John Pai and Emdotah. Much like Shakbatina's sharing of de Soto's invasion and Grandmother of Birds history in Howe's *Shell Shaker*, Grandmother Goodeye tells the creation history of the Kiowa people through a translation of John Pai, while he is sleeping. She is the embodiment of the Kiowa history and people, similar to Ezol Day in *Miko Kings*, and much like Ezol, Grandmother Goodeye also transcends space and time.

Unlike Ezol, Grandmother Goodeye brings others with her as she slips through time and creates the dream for the boys' ceremony. Grandmother Goodeye performs a ceremony over the dead bodies of the frozen children while Emdotah, with his own ceremony, cuts his hair off to mourn his son Seta. She tells a lot of the Kiowa History in the ceremony, marking her as a storyteller, but also by her merging of the history. She tells the creation history, but again engages her audience (John and Emdotah) into telling the history of the tribes *Kaitsenko* warriors, the chief being Set-angia, Sailor's namesake. It is her presence that holds the dream world together, her medicine that unites Emdotah and John, the only people at the school that can mourn the boys' deaths properly and have the connection to them. Pinazzi sees Grandmother Goodeye as a storyteller noting, "The stories told by her, by John Pai and by Emdotah, though brief (another case of awareness of the medium) and without disrupting the rhythm of action, have the important role of relating the present experiences of a particular individual to the past and communal experience of the tribe" (Pinazzi 93).

The dream mourning also undoes the continual ridicule that the children were condemned to endure after their deaths, at the hands of their instructors. Sailor/Seta is particularly singled out by the school because he is seen as threat due to his standing in

his tribe. Grandmother Goodeye explains in the prologue that he is fifteen years old, but he is seen as holy, boy priest. His namesake is Set-angia, Sitting Bear. According to the Oklahoma Historical Society, Sitting Bear was a warrior and a medicine man. He was a member of the Koitsenko warrior society and was angered when his *favorite son* was killed by whites. He started to join raids, was captured, and was killed when he attacked them. Sitting Bear's history explains why Grandmother Goodeye wanted the history told, even though audiences still would not understand it. Emdotah does give a short history of Set-angia, noting that when his son was killed, he went to Texas and brought his bones back. He would hang his son's bones on his horse and go raiding (Momaday 61). Momaday is bringing the culture and history of the Kiowa to the present, much like Howe has done with the matrilineal line. Grandmother hears a flute, and after seeking confirmation that the others hear it, she asks Emdotah to "tell us what it is." Emdotah then tells the story of what happened to the children when they fled the school. When Emdotah explains what has happened, it is clear that Seta has honored his fallen friends in ways the whites could not understand, so they ridiculed him. They accused Seta of leaving his friends behind and stealing their clothes so that he may live. Through the dream formed by Grandmother Goodeye, Seta who was older and stronger than the others, could have been out of danger, but stayed with the younger boys. When Mosate dies first, Seta honors him by removing his jacket and tying "it round the small body in a dignified manner, like a coup string, like the captured possessions of a strong enemy" (Momaday 62). Farther on after Koi-khan-hodle dies, Seta does not take the clothes to preserve his life and improve his chances of survival. He actually "removes the uniform, tears it, defiles it with dirt and mud, and puts it on like a trophy, as if it were the war

shirt of a best enemy” (Momaday 63). Emdotah then tells how Seta knew that he would die, and he taunted the night and the cold:

I sing my own death song: I am ashamed for you. You killed my brothers so easily, without sorrow, without asking forgiveness, and now you would kill me without honor or dignity or sorrow. Shame! You do not beg my forgiveness. But, haw! I forgive you and make you ashamed. You are forgiven! (Momaday 63)

Momaday is bringing the history and culture back to the present, as Howe does with her continued emphasis on the matrilineal line. Momaday highlights that the warrior culture of the Kiowa is not lost; they are still counting coup and singing their songs. As the names are cleared and the dead honored, the dream ceremony ends. When Grandmother Goodeye appears in the prologue and epilogue, she is dancing and singing. When they enter the dream ceremony in Act One, Scene Four she opens and closes the scene with “eh, neh, neh, neh!” When she appears alone on stage for Act Two, Scene One, she appears before the illuminated medicine wheel. The dream ceremony in Act Two, Scene Three, seems to be a continuation of the first, where John is used as a conduit, and a translator. Grandmother Goodeye also closed this scene with “eh, neh, neh, neh!” As a storyteller and embodiment of Kiowa histories she is showcasing traditions through ceremony by singing, dancing, and telling the histories.

Caught between two worlds, John Pai is vacillating. In the first half of the play, he seems torn. He is always looking to the medicine wheel when he is on stage but seems to be resigned to the path leading him to become the “Kiowa Messiah” (19). In his talk to the portrait of Abraham Lincoln, he shows how torn he is, feeling as though

he has no choice but to assimilate, though he is constantly thinking of the camps and going home. In Act Two, Scene Two, he writes the names of the dead children on the board, followed by the names of the three apostles, with his name in the middle between the two groups. He does not place his name in the column of apostles, nor with the children who have died, but right between the two. John knows that he has one foot in the Kiowa camps and the other in the school. It is made clear through all the insulting dialogue about John (that he hears) that no matter what he becomes, even Reverend John Pai, he will still just be a Kiowa, a child, and a savage. When Carrie asks John what he is doing, he touches his name with the stick and says, “counting coup.” This is when the audience finally knows that John has no intention of going to seminary school and he has made the choice to return to the camps. The notion of counting coup is a Kiowa tradition of touching the enemy to show bravery (Katanski). This is how Seta honors his first fallen fellow escapee in the snow when he ties his jacket around his body like a coup string.

In *The Indolent Boys*, Momaday has brought the stories of the native Kiowa people and placed them in a setting that undoes some of the damage being wrought on the children. He gives the frozen schoolboys honored deaths, though it was not something the white people understood. Through the schoolboys he is bringing the history of the warriors, the *Koitsenko*. In John Pai he wove together the evangelical with the Kiowa, though John returns to his tribe, rather than venture into the white world. When looking at the play through a tribalographic lens, the reader can understand how the people embody the land and stories through Grandmother Goodeye and the “schoolboys frozen.” Momaday also transcends time and space through the dream

ceremony that is created by Grandmother Goodeye, creating a space that is neither here nor there, existing in John's dream. John Pai returned home, just as the schoolboys were trying to do.

Conclusion

LeAnne Howe's theory of tribalogy and its expansion into embodied tribalogy are ever evolving. They can be seen in her creative work and reach out and touch other tribes continuing to bring everything together and make a consensus that "everything is everything" (Howe, *Choctalking* 20). In her essay "The Story of America: A Tribalogy," she explained that Dakota author Susan Power's Novel, *The Grass Dancer*, as well as Navajo author Irvin Morris's novel, *From the Glittering World: A Navajo Story* are excellent examples of tribalogy (32-35). My application of Howe's theories to her own creative work demonstrates how tribalogy operates. I then used it as a lens to analyze a work that Howe uses as an example of her theory, *The Grass Dancer*. Moving beyond tribalogy, I applied embodied tribalogy to Power's novel and also to Momaday's play, *The Indolent Boys*. This play is a different genre, a different tribe, and predates Howe's theory, but it is still applicable, perhaps because "everything is everything" (Howe, *Choctalking* 20).

In forming her theory of tribalogy, Howe has made herself a form of tribalogy as well. Through Howe's Native works, histories, cultural traditions, and language are being brought back to life. She is bringing Native ancestors' voices back through her works such as *Shell Shaker* and *Miko Kings* and putting them among the living. Through her book, *Savage Conversations* she is also bringing back non-Native ancestors and highlighting their role in histories forgotten or overlooked. Her work with Monique Mojica on mounds "developing new Indigenous performance models based dramaturgically on Indigenous cultural texts: earthworks" (Howe, "Embodied Tribalogy: Mound Building" 80) and her work on Nanih Waiya, help display how

the embodiment of the land is never ending, even after a forced removal. Her stories will transcend time and space, because as Howe puts it, “A story is active and a story changes the world. A story is changing the world as I write this” (Macklin).

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