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**Linda Hogan's *The Woman Who Watches Over the World* as a Native American variation on the long established genre of American autobiography**

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this bachelor's thesis is to analyze the Native American memoir *The Woman Who Watches Over the World* (2001) by Linda Hogan as a recent update on the ethnicsubcategory of American autobiographical genre and to manifest its significance within literature. The thesis is concerned with the form and content of the work and its possible interpretations. The theoretical part provides the general overview of American autobiographical genre. The practical part deals with the analysis of selected work, based on the theoretical part. It discusses the various themes and edifying quality of the memoir. It searches for connections between traditional conceptions of autobiography and the post-modernist approaches, regarding the Native American historical background.

**Key Words:** autobiography, the Native American, narrative, edifying content, history, self

## **Abstrakt**

Cílem této bakalářské práce je analýza memoáru *The Woman Who Watches Over The World* (2001) od Lindy Hoganové, která je původní obyvatelkou Severní Ameriky, a snaha dokázat jeho literární význam. Práce se zabývá formou i obsahem díla a jeho možných interpretací. Teoretická část poskytuje obecný přehled americké autobiografické tvorby. Praktická část vychází z části teoretické a zabývá se podrobnější analýzou vybrané práce. Zaobírá se poučným a povznášejícím charakterem memoáru a zkoumá v něm obsažené motivy. Hledá souvislosti mezi tradičními a moderními přístupy v autobiografii na pozadí historie severoamerických Indiánů.

**Klíčová slova:** autobiografie, severoameričtí indiáni, vyprávění, poučný obsah, historie, subjekt

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## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that this bachelor's thesis is the result of my own work and that I used only the sources listed on the Works Cited page.

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## Introduction

The autobiographical genre has been enjoying its renaissance since the end of the twentieth century. Finally, it has been recognized by critics as a genre worth analyzing and being a part of their main focus. Autobiography with its inherent subjectivity allows the reader to learn from the prism of the author's visceral experience, thus defying the general or objective perspective.

This thesis explores the Native American autobiographical genre with its primal orientation on the memoir *The Woman Who Watches Over the World* by the Native American author Linda Hogan, written in 2001. In its theoretical part, the thesis specifies on the genre of American autobiography, and tries to briefly adumbrate its features and subcategories. It proposes a brief genealogy and names particular representatives whose elements can be traced in *The Woman Who Watches Over the World*. The purpose of the theoretical part is to give an insight into the universal overtones of the autobiographical genre, with a particular emphasis on a particular ethnical subcategory. It concerns characteristic features of this subgenre and develops different types of narratives within the autobiographical genre in general. Moreover, it acquaints a reader with the writer Linda Hogan in a concise summary of her life with some concrete examples of her rich literary work. The practical part is exclusively focused on *The Woman Who Watches Over the World*. The very analysis precedes a short summary of the work for a better orientation. However, the summary is not sufficient for understanding the given issue and reading the book should be therefore given into account. The analysis is chiefly based on the text itself and is grounded on the theoretical part. The practical part strives for a deeper analysis and comprehension of the memoir but at the same time it proposes different perspectives and understanding of the text. Not only does it follow the storyline of the memoir, but it picks up the formal side of Hogan's writing.

The thesis aims to present autobiographical genre as a valuable and respectful record of not only personal history, but vicariously also of various tribal histories. Furthermore, it demonstrates that the Native American literature has an enormous, perpetual potential which reaches beyond fiction or even documentary fiction; it can be eventually an inspiration for the reader's life.

# Theoretical Part

## 1.1 The Term Autobiography and Its Crucial Concepts

The word autobiography is of Greek origin and its meaning could be translated as “a life account of self” (Oed.), or “self life writing” (Smith and Watson 1). This “self-writing” is therefore a record of events and experiences which happened in one’s life, which brings in the non-fictional character to the genre. It is generally described as self-representation in which “self” is not only an object, which is a focus of biography, but it is at the same time a subject, which means the writer herself or himself. Autobiography could therefore be considered as highly subjective since it is a personal transmission of one’s own life which is, additionally, delivered in a specific way as well as the content is subjectively customized. On that account, it is represented by a single person and it is usually written as a first-person narration. However, some recent tendencies have challenged this classic concept. These are first-person semi-autobiographical novels or third-person novels based on the author’s life experience, as in the novel *Ceremony* by a Native American Leslie Marmon Silko, which frequently defies traditional norms of autobiography.

As already mentioned, self-representation is the essential element as well as the cornerstone of autobiography. However, that would not be enough. The aspect of time and history is generally quite as important as the personal testimonies themselves. The self-narration also tends to be built and tightly bound to a specific period of time and situated within a specific historical context, and regards it retrospectively. The importance of history might be even more significant than the thematic focus as the idea that “life writing represents the subject in history and culture and actually calls into question an emphasis on individuality or autonomous selfhood” (Condren 22). Since autobiography is by nature subjective, the process of subjectification necessarily touches the history and time image. The concept of history and time as well as representation of self is restructured; although “the subjectification of history may be happening in memory-narrative, but that does not necessarily make it untrue” (Berghegger). There is therefore a transition, or even a permeation of “shared” history, which is “incapable of total objectivity” (Gaustad 8), and personal history, as described in Linda Hogan’s work.

The subjectivized perspective of an autobiographical work is formed or rather transformed by a concept of memory, which plays a crucial role in writing about self as well. This type of memory might be called autobiographical memory for our purposes and it is “memory for information related to the self” (Brewer 22). As far as human experiencing is concerned, something might happen even without a person noticing it. Not only that but, even if the person notices it, their message might not be transmitted correctly. “This difference is critical, because autobiographical memory depends on what was perceived rather than on what really happened” (Rubin 74). This again underscores not only the subjectivity contained therein, but also the writer’s personal choice of their life events and personal history. Personal history generates many different concepts which would be discussed in the practical part of the thesis.

Memory, history and time are interconnected. Gaustad quite aptly sums up this symbiotic relationship by claiming that “[m]emory provides the initial impetus for history, while history becomes reinforcement, possibly even a validation, of memory” (11).

## **1.2 Genealogy and Subgenres of American Autobiographical Genre**

It may be surmised that what is known as autobiography today started as narratives using autobiographical elements. However, the genre of autobiography in the United States cannot be easily traced as far as its origin is concerned. This self-referential genre “emerged in the Enlightenment and subsequently became definitive for life writing in the West” (Smith and Watson 1). Nevertheless, the writer’s focus on self-reference might be traced earlier than in the eighteenth century (Smith and Watson 1). It cannot be subdivided into specific and isolated subgenres, either. In fact, it might be considered as a genre of “million little subgenres” (Couser 6). Therefore, the more productive way of looking at potential autobiographical subgenres and for the purpose of this thesis is to concentrate on the main aspect or focus of representative autobiographical works or on the message which is to be delivered.

Regarding the subcategories, it is not the purpose of this thesis to name all of them. However, the one that should be listed is a memoir for its significance to Linda Hogan’s *The Woman Who Watches Over the World*. A memoir is understood as a sum of recollections or a collection of memories and these recollections “bracketed



one moment or period of experience rather than an entire life span and offered reflections in its significance of the writer's previous status or self-understanding" (Smith and Watson 91). Furthermore, there are also other genres of literature that interconnect with autobiography in general and whose patterns are used in autobiography. Possibly the most obvious generic examples would be "the bildungsroman or narrative of social development, the *künstlerroman* or narrative of artistic growth, the confession, conversion narrative, *testimonio* and quest for lost identity or homeland or family" (Smith and Watson 91).

Given the codified format of the thesis and its spatial limitations, the introductory theoretical part cannot possibly cover all noteworthy autobiographies in North American letters. As a result, the main summary criterion for choosing the works is either their overall significance or connection with the Native American autobiography.

One of the first steps toward autobiographies in Colonial America was made by Puritans in New England in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, and then Evangelicals by the nineteenth century. As Caldwell argues, "[l]ike all forms of art and nature, the puritan conversion story evolved; it did not spring full-blown from the brain of a creator, either divine or human" (Caldwell 45). These narratives, which from today's point of view might not be considered autobiographies in their essence, were conversion narratives or religious autobiographies. Nevertheless, there is not a sufficient definition of these genres (Stromberg 5). These narratives were specifically of a religious content and were to be read by the members of the church as well as (orthodox) believers. What makes these narratives autobiographical is their very content; it expresses religious visions and experiences of the writers. As far as the plausibility is concerned, the narratives pushed through the conversion message at the expense of originality in both content and language. The narratives are limited within the scope of theological archetypes. Necessarily, the point of incredulity in truthfulness of the autobiographical elements should be made. As Rodger Milton Payne posits, "certainly, evangelical spiritual autobiography and similar narratives of conversion cannot be read as descriptive texts if by this we mean that they give a straightforward account of the author's conversion experiences" (10). However, he adds that "neither can they be dismissed as insufficiently autobiographical because they offered only stale reiterations of theological paradigm" (10). The process of

“conversion” or transformation, and the subsequent need of telling it, is in its broadest sense a subjective impulse, so it might be considered one of the first recorded subjective writing about self in American literature. It is the subjective experience that “made a conversion narrative personally felt and experiential, rather than merely ‘objective’” (Caldwell 66). What a religious narrative brings in, therefore, is experiencing the world and the autobiographical activity, where “only the transforming self-constitutes both the subject and the object of proper autobiographical activity” (Payne 16). This again leads to the modern conception of autobiography. The Puritan conversion narrative can be (and frequently was) read generically, as one personal experience is meant to resonate with or speak on behalf of many other similar testimonies which were never captured in writing. This generic nature of Puritan conversion narratives is replicated in its various forms throughout American literature and is particularly relevant to minority literatures.

What opened the door for another approach as far as the genre of homegrown American autobiography is concerned was Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography*, which is considered one of the first works of this genre in America as well. This autobiography is without doubt significant for its content message of a self-made person who, through his life efforts, becomes an affluent and distinguished citizen. Central to this enlightenment narrative was “the concept of the self-interested individual of property who was intent on assessing the status of the soul or the meaning of public achievement” (Smith and Watson 1). Its importance lies in this very conception of a transformation from rags to riches and it became a cornerstone for a secular literary form in the eighteenth and nineteenth century by comparison with Puritan convention narratives, whose content was without exception religious. Moreover, it also has some generic overtones, as it was clearly meant to function as an educational matrix so that others could follow Franklin’s footsteps in becoming wealthy and contributive citizens.

Having emerged from the poverty and obscurity in which I was born and bred, to a state of affluence and some degree of reputation in the world, and having gone so far through life with a considerable share of felicity, the conducing means I made use of, which with the blessing of God so well succeeded, my posterity may like to know, as they may find some of them suitable to their own situations, and therefore fit to be imitated. (Franklin 1)

Furthermore, it pronounces the image of American culture and people's lives in the eighteenth century. This makes the genre of autobiography not only concerning the self, being a subject and object at the same time, but also adumbrating an object being somehow shifted from the sole focus on the self towards broader intentions and conceptions. It opens the doors for many different themes.

Yet another progenitor or continuator of the American autobiographical writing is Henry David Thoreau whose *Walden* should also be mentioned for its different approach towards observing "self" (however not exclusively) within the surroundings and finding identity, which is related to rebalancing oneself. The discovery and equalizing of one's identity might have a "healing character"; the people and characters are healing themselves through their understanding of self (Smith and Watson 32). The significance of a place and a human connection with it as well as searching for one's identity is even more important when referring to the Native American autobiography, especially Linda Hogan's *The Woman Who Watches over the World*.

### **1.3 Ethnic Autobiographical Genre**

It can be summarily argued, along with William Boelhower, that ethnic autobiography is "very much an act of higher criticism and an instrument of cultural construction" and by higher criticism is meant "implications in the sustained cultural work of juxtaposing different cultural models or spaces" (138). Ethnicity becomes a significant mechanism for self-referring within the scope of another culture. The process of emancipation and liberation of ethnic groups, such as Native Americans and African Americans, from the then superior race is distilled into the subcategory of ethnical autobiography. Ethnicity itself is a gate for themes which have never been explored or, alternatively, it gives the existing themes another dimension for its ethnical origin and of course historical background. African American generic narratives, therefore, have to be listed due to their common approach towards searching for identity and dealing with their historical heritage.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth century slave narratives or fugitive slave narratives, self-accounts of captivity of African Americans, should not be seen only as a record "of a process by which its protagonists became free of sin or slavery" (Andrews, *To Tell* 11). These autobiographies, as Frederick Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of*

*Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, embraced also the healing quality of writing; by the process of writing the protagonist attained self-liberation, which is “the final, climatic act in the drama of their lifelong quests for freedom” (Andrews, *To Tell* 11). His life writing extends beyond the slave narrative genre for it is not limited only on the quest for the escape and gaining freedom. “He carries it far enough to express disillusionment about the treatment of free black in the North” (Couser 124). His work might therefore be considered as a “bridge from slave narrative to black autobiography as practiced by prominent intellectuals” later on (Couser 124). Many of them, unlike the narrative by Frederick Douglass, lack the verbal skill and eloquence to describe their experience. Moreover, the autobiographies redefined personal freedom and triggered the discussion of “one’s bounds to the past or to the social, political and sometimes even the moral exigencies of the present” (Couser 125).

The problems of ethnicity and identity remain in African American autobiography even after the abolition of slavery. As William L. Andrews argues, “[r]econstructing their lives required many ex-slaves to undergo a disquieting psychic immersion into their former lives as slaves” (Andrews, *To Tell* 7). This retrospective psychological reenactment generated classic African American testimonials of the late nineteenth century, such as Booker T. Washington’s *Up From Slavery*, and its permutations can be found in the uneasy negotiations of racial identity in the literature of “passing” for white, with James W. Johnson’s *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* being possibly the best example. However, it was not only identity, but also certain alienation within the seclusive society. As in Richard’s Wright *Black Boy*, the protagonist faces differences between the two races which have gone past his notice until then. Later on, with the emergence of post-modernism, the issues of African American situation and historical legacy are seen through a prism of distance as well as rebuilding African American literature, which is visible in Charles Johnson’s Buddhist/philosophical novel *Oxherding Tale* (Andrews, *Introduction*), a pseudo fugitive narrative of a very light-skinned mulatto who manages to escape slavery and pass for a white teacher.

Along with the African American autobiographies, there are other significant ethnic groups within the American literature that should be taken into account. They discuss the common themes for ethnical subgenre, which is primarily identity, family, social

status and history. As Ramón A. Gutiérrez discusses Hispanic literature, he proclaims that it is “cultural affirmation of an Hispanic heritage [that is] increasingly interwoven into the historical fabric of the dominant Anglo nation center stage with issues of identity, subjugation and discrimination” (Gutiérrez 3). It is among many other Sandra Cisneros’ *House on the Mango Street*, dealing with these themes. These topics are also rendered by Jewish writers, such as Rabbi Chaim Potok and his novel *My Name Is Asher Lev* or Chinese ethnic minority, for instance Maxine Kingston. Not dissimilarly it touches also Muslim ethnic group, represented by Khaled Hosseini’s *And the Mountains Echoed*, where he indicates the nature of human relationships (Hoss.). Together with Afro-American and Native American literature, these ethnic groups create a stable basis for rich ethnical literature in America.

#### **1.4 Native American Autobiography**

Autobiography was not traditionally a common genre of Native Americans. The primary reason for this is the non-existence of recorded narratives due to the fact that Native American culture, in absence of alphabetic writing, relied on orally transmitted stories, many of them generic in nature. This palpable technological handicap was further accompanied by their distinct approach towards a conception of individuality. The Native culture “tended, in the first place, to construct conceptions of the person in more nearly collective (family, clan, moiety, tribe) than individualistic terms, and, in the second, to employ oral rather than written means to communicate, store and transmit information” (Widget 175). However, as a consequence of historical turmoil, Native American autobiography did not fall very far behind the first autobiographies written by the settlers, as Mary Rowlandson’s captive narrative and others. Its roots can be traced to 1768 when Samson Occom, a Native, who converted to Christianity and became literate, wrote “A Short Narrative of My Life”. “Unlike many late narratives, which were elicited and written down by white historians and anthropologists, it has the distinction of having been written by its subject unaided and unprompted by whites” (Couser 114). This indicates a distinction between, as Arnold Krupat calls them, autobiographies-by-Indians and Indian autobiographies. The first category, as Samson Occom’s work, is a life-writing by the Natives who “accepted Western civilization at least to the extent of learning how to write.” These writers usually converted to Christianity as well. The

Indian autobiographies, as he continues, are those texts which resulted from a collaboration of a Native, who is a subject of the text, and its Euro-American editor (Wiget 175). One of the many collaborative works is for instance the collaboration between a Native medicine man of Lakota origin, Black Elk, and John Neihardt, who preserved and published their discourses (Wiget 178). On the contrary to their work *The Black Elk Speaks*, where Native traditions and healings are represented, *Life and Journals of Keh -ke-wa-guo-nā-ba*, another, although much earlier, collaborative work from the first half of the nineteenth century, gives a different perspective to the Native world as it depicts the Native protagonist's life, yet primarily his conversion to Christianity, which is an analogy to Puritan conversion life-writings.

Among other tendencies in the Native autobiographies, the main focus was, in the first place, to explicate and reconcile the historical record, which is in many ways analogical to the African American literature, with whom they often share the compulsion to deliver the verity of their experience. History inevitably appears as a foundation for Native autobiography. It functions as a doorway to the various themes and orientations of self-writing. As a consequence, the autobiographies have, above all, a quality of ethnographical representation of the Native tribes, where the indigenous people are represented as “the others of European (and American respectively) discourses and cultural assumption” (Smith and Watson 157). This characteristic is connected with self-recognition and national identification. As Linda Hogan confesses in *The Woman Who Watches Over the World* while seeing her daughter's baby coming to existence, she “felt triumphant that another Indian child was entering the world. [...] We are getting back our precious gems, lives, bones, bodies” (192). Furthermore, history appears on a personal level, where for a Native autobiographer, the family and tribal genealogy is fundamental for their search or discovery of their identity. N. Scott Momaday introduces his mother's story with saying, “That is a whole story, hers to tell; yet some part of it is mine as well. And there is a large story; I think of where I am in it” (8). The same approach is presented in Linda Hogan's memoir. The relatives' destinies interconnect; they define the author's self.

The theme of self and identity is like a trunk on which its branches grow and spread into different directions. It is principally a recent tendency which comes as a result of post-ethnic identity. New kinds of narratives have emerged and they challenge the

traditional autobiographical principles as well as approaches towards narrations of ethnic identity as fixed in place, history and culture. However, these narratives might be perceived even in non-recent self-narratives, above all, The African American and Native ones, which “inherent belonging, explore biracial heritage, parentages, identities” (Smith and Watson 157). The problematics of biracial heritage appears in such a work as Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony* or Linda Hogan’s memoir. Not only does the biracial, but also cultural integration dominate, dealing with “the shifting meanings of whiteness in changing ethnical communities” (157). Ohiyesa in his book *From the Deep Woods to Civilization* balances between the Native cultural inheritance and the influence and assimilation within the American culture.

The non-existence and seeking for identity manifest themselves in narratives of grief and mourning, which “address larger social, cultural and political issues.” These autobiographies discuss “collective vulnerability and communal loss” (Smith and Watson 139). Eye-witness narratives, which exist primarily within the ethnical subgenre of autobiography, “seek to tell a story of a radical injury and harm and to claim the stage for a narrative counter to the official story of the aftereffects of violence” (Smith and Watson 140). What appears as a typical tendency in the Native American autobiographies is a narrative of addiction as a consequence of historical burden, which might again be traced in *Ceremony* and *The Woman Who Watches Over the World*. There is an interconnection with the common theme of a body being in its senses a materiality a “central site for remembering the past and envisioning the future” (Smith and Watson 141). A human body records both physical and psychical suffering and therefore carries medical discourse in itself. Disclosure of these human body conditions and their further healing is represented primarily in the illness narratives. These narratives might overlap with conversion narratives, whose origins could be traced to Puritans. What they share is the theme of transformation as an unavoidable reaction to various intense body conditions; either the spiritual or the material ones. The subsequent bodily or psychical breakdowns and breakthroughs bring in an ennobling quality to the autobiographical genre.

### **1.5 Autobiography of Linda Hogan**

Linda Hogan, born in 1947 in Denver, is a Native American writer and activist of half Chickasaw origin. Due to the fact that her father was a military sergeant, they

moved a lot during her childhood and she therefore did not live in the Native American community. It was Oklahoma that she finally called home. After she graduated from English and creative writing from University of Colorado in 1978, she started as a poet but soon made a move from poetry to prose. Her literary work is influenced by her life experience. As a mixed-blood writer, she mainly deals with searching for identity, represented by her novel *Solar Storm* (McClinton-Temple and Velie 167), the tribal relationship to nature and women writing. The relationship with her father developed her tight connection to her family and relatives as well as her tribal awareness, visible for instance in the books of poetry *Seeing Through the Sun*, *Calling Myself Home* or *Eclipse* and later by her novel *Mean Spirit* from 1990. It was her grandmother who influenced her love and sensitivity for nature, especially horses and birds, which made an enormous impact on her writings, namely *The Woman Who Watches Over the World* or *Dwellings: A Spiritual History of the Living World*, retrospective essays concerning nature and environment. Furthermore, her love for nature and her caring for the environment lead to becoming an activist for wildlife rejuvenation. All of these, her grandmother's and father's influence along with her tribal history, made her perceive the importance of belonging, home, land and spirituality. Furthermore, what had a huge impact on her writing was her neuromuscular disease and devastating accident. Her life work celebrates unspoiled environment, female strength, the Native power and spirit as well as humble ordinariness, yet it also opens the wounds of exploited nation and plundering historical events. However, in spite of life-changing events and historical heritage, she "continues to share the beauty she sees through writing, teaching and living example" (Vid.). She was awarded various respected prizes and her name stands in Chickasaw Nation Hall of Fame (McClinton-Temple and Velie 167), which again underscores her importance on not only the Native American literary ground.



## **2. Practical Part: Analysis of *The Woman Who Watches Over the World***

Linda Hogan's memoir *The Woman Who Watches Over the World* is an inseparable part of the American literary heritage. The book itself is the very example of the fact that the Native American literature, particularly autobiography, has no longer been attributed to peripheral literature of a subtle significance. The subsequent analysis of Linda Hogan's memoir demonstrates that autobiography has emerged beyond the classical conceptions of the genre and opens up for various themes and approaches. The practical part therefore delivers a deeper insight into various conceptions of the memoir, regarding the content and form. These conceptions depict the author's art of articulating the whole scale of themes, from the personal to the global ones. The memoir manifests that the Native philosophy is of great importance for understanding the social, political and historical nexus. The book points to the global ethnical, environmental and social problems of the past and contemporary America and Europe and, eventually, the whole world. Simultaneously, it stands as an edifying healing book, a personal confession and understanding of oneself and as a deeply philosophical meditation. Altogether, it pronounces the remarkability as well as immense importance of the Native American Literature.

### **2.1 A Brief Summary of *The Woman Who Watches Over the World***

The memoir's framework extends beyond the writings about one's life. Linda Hogan presents a compact legacy of her life, her beliefs and interests along with historical events and stories of her relatives. It is therefore quite difficult to pick a single storyline since there is more than one, working the way in fragments up to the whole compact story at the end of the book. The book is divided into chapters of a specific theme, where each chapter is further fractioned into sections where the author touches the theme from various perspectives. In the beginning, she leads us through her difficult childhood, being a timid half-blood girl, having a relationship with a much older man in her early teens, yearning for love. Among these, she mentions tribal mythical stories and gives hints about her future life events. Further in the text, she depicts alcohol addiction, deals with historical burden of all Native tribes and goes further in revealing her family and relatives. There are pages disclosing the

heavy burden of having adopted two abused Native American children, her memories of her mother and snippets of different historical figures of the Native American movement, their philosophies and ideas. They are intertwined with the author's thoughts about life, spirituality, themes and countless numbers of other themes. Towards the end, she talks about her half-lifelong illness and a severe accident. Having fallen from a horse and having been bed-ridden for half a year, she undergoes a bodily and spiritual transformation, opening herself to love for nature, beauty and the omniscient spirit.

## 2.2 Formal Aspect of the Memoir

*The Woman Who Watches Over the World* is a rather recent update on the American genre of autobiography. As a consequence, the modernist or postmodernist approaches are intertwined with the traditional ones. In both its content and form Linda Hogan touches on the different techniques which affect the content and by this interference they widen the realm of possible ways of reading the work – it can be read as a historical legacy as well as a philosophical writing or spiritual guide. Being the autobiography actually a memoir, it leaves some space for concentrating only on specific events, not trying to cover objectively the whole life of the author. The tendencies of autobiographical genre presented in the theoretical part will be further discussed and demonstrated in connection with the analysis of *The Woman Who Watches Over the World* as well as its form and techniques in which the memoir is written.

Even though a larger part of the memoir sticks to the first person narration, a traditional formula in the genre of autobiography, the text quite considerably shifts into a different narrative point of view. Linda Hogan builds her narration not only on her personal memories and experiences, but she also uses experiences and little stories of her relatives as well as people who she has been inspired by, thereby assuming the generic quality of slave narratives and other classics of the American autobiography. Furthermore, these memories are interwoven with citations of and intertextual references to many different people. All these citations and memories play a crucial role in constructing a text based on modernist and postmodernist patterns. The chapters are divided into separate parts, where each part discusses a different take on a theme introduced by the name of the specific chapter. It therefore

creates a special tension since it gives different perspectives of looking at the theme, but at the same time it still keeps its subjectivity because of its very narrator, for whom everything is greatly personal and who is both the subject and the object as well. This specific distribution of text units leads to the perceived fragmentariness of the whole text, which is a typical feature of modernist and postmodernist literature. The formal fragmentariness is even more significant for its connection to the content with which a highly fragmentary narration is created; a narration that reflects the process of memorizing, forgetting and remembering as well as experiencing and diverse attitudes of the author. The cohesion is also disrupted by a frequent usage of flashbacks and flash-forwards with their indications, which make the recalled memories seemingly disorganized, quickly flowing. However, it still does not leave the reader completely lost. Rather, it makes the reader even more absorbed and acquainted by her personal recounting. Being fragmented, the text underscores the relativity and subjectivity of history, personal history and experiencing as well as comprehension of time in general. What is more, the use of describing a story in a past tense and commenting on it in the present tense projects the currency and omniscience of personal history. The dismembered character of the work therefore does not follow the classical documentary value, which might be seen in such works as Benjamin Franklin's autobiography.

If there are memories expressed by flashbacks and foreshadowing of the future, they are also manifested in the repetitive pattern of words, sentences and thoughts. "As a child, I was permeable and I'd been starved for a soft human hand, love, and it was a hunger now fulfilled by Robert, so I wanted this relationship as the hungry want food" (Hogan 45). In this particular sentence, the author uses words expressing a lack of food to describe her feelings about her childhood. Repeating words of the same or similar meaning produces natural flow of thoughts, which might be seen already at the beginnings of the Modernist era. In this similar fashion not only memories are constructed, but also Hogan's thoughts and opinions. What might seem especially important for her is mentioned throughout each chapter, but it also permeates the whole text. A specific element is mentioned seemingly without a definite contextual embedding; however, it draws a full circle within a few pages or at the end of each chapter. To demonstrate this technique, in the first chapter, there is a description of the life of Sedna, "the Sea Mother, 'the one down there', (who) is one of the denizens

of the deep” (Hogan 39). This piece of information is then abandoned and followed by disconnected thoughts, only to be resumed later in the text of this chapter to put the whole theme together; the theme, which goes beyond and covers the individual chapter. “As with Sedna, the girl whose lost fingers became seals and whales, life sometimes comes out of tragedy,” and she mentions Sedna one more time:

With Sedna, an inward dweller of the sea, as with the daughters of Atlas, it was indwelling that saved them, it was knowledge of the depths, and this is what stories try to teach us, even our own; that what’s below and beneath and inside is a generative, life-giving power. I became an indweller. And hidden worlds are only a door we pass through the difficult earth surface world. (Hogan 50)

Here, the author introduces her thoughts about life by coming back to the story of Sedna. Approaching the inner self as the inner driving power is the trigger for change. Furthermore, she puts an emphasis on the importance of stories, a topic which she contemplates further in the book. This is very sophisticated foreshadowing which could be traced solely by reading the whole memoir. It might be compared to a construction set; from tiny pieces of information, which might not make sense on their own, the whole meaningful concept is created. The author makes a full circle where not a single piece of writing is left out of the range of higher theme context.

### **2.3 History and Geography**

As already mentioned in the theoretical part, a conception of history plays a special role in the autobiographical genre. Much like in a traditional memoir, the understanding of history as well as a method of expressing depends on a particular author. In *The Woman Who Watches Over the World*, the comprehension of history which is in tight relationship with geography is even more subjective because of the author’s ethnicity. In this work, Hogan puts an emphasis on history and geography, their relativity as well as their extensive possibilities of how to be interpreted.

Memory, the main means for writing autobiographies, which is selective and therefore not dependable, has also been discussed in the theoretical part. Linda Hogan in her work indicates that memory functions on the basis of remembering but at the same time forgetting, which might be intentional amnesia. Hogan’s selective

memory necessarily makes her memoir attitudinal. However, it does not mean that her authority as a writer-confessor would be unreliable. Her authority in her memoir is no less veracious than any other author of this genre. She successfully positions herself “as a confessing subject whose account adequately fulfills enough of the requirements of confession” (Ashley et al. 32).

History is expressed on three different levels. These levels are intertwined and together they constitute one compact abstract unit of history of the whole world. What every person experiences is primarily their personal history. This personal history as well as belief, Linda Hogan thinks, is “not so far away from histories of land, time and space, water, and exploitation” (49). What the author expresses is her belief that every physical or even abstract unit – time or space - has its own experience and history. This is where the author leaves the canons of classical autobiographical genre or even the subgenre of memoir and opens up for postmodernist paradigms of subjective understanding of experiencing one’s own life. What overlaps these histories is history of fact, the one which is “shared”, and seemingly objective reality of events in the past. However, this “objective” history, which is a sequence of unique, unrepeatable events, is in the postmodernist approaches relativized and in the same manner which appears in *The Woman Who Watches Over the World* (Brockmeier 284). This relativization is managed in two ways. One of them is laying factual material of the chronicled history from different sources, eye-witness accounts captured in words, and the ensuing discussions and commentaries on these accounts right after they are stated. Therefore, by placing the subjective observation, the relative objectivity is changed into the author’s subjective point of view. Furthermore, she uses other people’s experiences and stories to demonstrate and reveal the events of American history as well as her subjective convictions. For instance when recounting her daughter’s painful life, she writes: “She is yet, over twenty years, still a tangle of threads and a war-torn American Indian history that other Americans like to forget” (Hogan 77). Another way of subjectivizing and relativizing historical accounts is the means of language. Since history is captured in words, there must be a language system functioning in a way which is fit to capture the particular event.

As a young person, coming from silences of both family and history, I had little of language I needed to put a human life together. I was inarticulate to

vice it, therefore to know it, even from within. (...) There was never a language to say it, to form a geography or map or history of what had happened, not only in terms of history, but to ourselves. (Hogan 56)

As she writes, there is not a language background which would be a pillar for capturing of reality, potentially history. The conscious impossibility of capturing self and life in words, which on the other hand stands against the fact that the writer, in the end, puts self and history into words in the memoir, makes the theoretical objectivity disappear.

When it comes to terms to geography, the author grasps this term on as personal level as history. Linda Hogan approaches the human body the way one approaches geography; it is a map which records everything that touches the human shell. There is a strong connection, even unity, between a body and a land, which originates in Native spirituality. And when the body is bonded with the very homeland of the victims, the Native Americans, it shadows and reflects the history. The body is the world; a surface which keeps a record of not only geography, but also history. She points out that either a genesis or “the destruction of the body and land have coincided in history” (Hogan 63). As she experiences the grief and destructive behavior of her relatives and people she works with at that period of time, she, for the first time, begins to know that “history, like geography, lives in the body and it is marrow-deep. History is our illness. It is recorded there, laid down along the tracks and pathways and synapses” (Hogan 59). And she continues, “History (is) present in our cells that came from our ancestor’s cells, from bodies hated, removed, starved and killed” (59). An indigenous person of America therefore emerges from their own personal history and the geography of one’s body and builds itself within shared history and geography of Native Americans. Bodies become means of expression as Linda Hogan says that “we hurt ourselves; our own bodies became our language” (56). What was mentioned above as a lack of language, which would express a personal experience and memories, is articulated by one’s own body. “The history still reverberates, entering into this and every day” (Hogan 59).

## **2.4 Search for Identity**

There is a strong sense of identity within the concept of a physical body which is an embodiment of history and geography. Identity permeates both history and

geography. Hogan intimates her feeling of belonging, in both communal and emblematic terms, in the following quote.

I suppose I have always been caught in the waves and tides of time, place and history. There were my grandmothers and grandfathers, whose pairings, some loving and some miserable, brought me to life. Then there is the body with its innumerable waves of memory, its own destiny, its own tides and ways a single person is shaped (Hogan 33).

There is also a direct connection between identity and memory. What a person remembers shapes their identity; the past experiences shape the present. Moreover, identity lies also within a range of memory of others near to a specific person as the author compares it to mothers, whose stories are inherited by their children and remembered by their bodies (Hogan 91). For the Native Americans, identity does not result from individuality, as might be traced for instance in the seminal work of American Enlightenment, the *Autobiography* of Benjamin Franklin. The Native identity is compatible with the history and geography of all indigenous antecedents and their experience, bound to the land, standing on “the communal attitude towards land” (Matthiessen 17). ““Long series of “reform” laws (were) designed to assist the Indian into the American mainstream by breaking down his traditional means of existence”” (Matthiessen 18). The loss of land, which, according to their belief, was never their property, the destruction of their knowledge system and spirituality, as well as the death of the Natives, resulted in non-existence and search for identity. As Zitkala Sa describes in her autobiographical work, when she was forced to change the traditional hairstyle, “I cried aloud, shaking my head all the while until I felt the cold blades of the scissors against my neck and heard them gnaw off one of my thick braids. Then I lost my spirit” (56). The indigenous people were stripped of their Native identity.

Reminiscent of Thoreau’s *Walden*, one of the ways in which *The Woman Who Watches Over the World* could be read is a quest for finding her identity, which is a common, if not canonical, theme of Native American autobiographies. Linda Hogan describes her childhood as a period of time without an identity, being tossed and turned by the great silences and histories of her family and tribal origin. One of the key elements in finding her identity was drowning one’s grief, memories and soul in alcohol. Alcohol was on one hand an escape from reality, but on the other it was,

even though desperate, chase for the ruined self. What was left there were the devastating memories.

I drank suicidally, peroxide, cough syrup, and I was not alone. [...] I was a drunk, not an alcoholic. For me, there was a difference; a drunk wants to lose the memory of every day. For her it is not a matter of being weak-willed, not even a territory of morality. It is – was – a way of not remembering. It was an escape from the pain of an American history.  
(Hogan 54)

She believed that only by losing her memory she would be able to regain her lost identity. However, the problem does not lie only in remembering and forgetting.

The preceding passage has touched slightly on the joint issues of identity and ethnicity. The memoir can be seen as standing for an ethnic problem of people which were exploited by a self-proclaimed superordinate nation. The issue spans two aspects. There is the persistent ethnical difference between these cultures where on one hand there are Native American tribes which can be summarily classified as the so-called collectivist cultures. These “collectivist cultures place a high value on common goals, group harmony and shared identities” (Rubin 64). The impossibility to display their nationality brought them towards losing the collective identity, thus the only identity they could have. On the contrary, the individualistic society of America emphasized “qualities associated with individuality, self-expression and personal uniqueness” (Rubin 64). What once was a clash becomes, in Hogan’s rendition, an interconnection of these contradictory perceptions of individuality. Throughout the narration, not only does the author regain her lost Native American shared identity, a communion with land, histories and geographies, but she also discovers what might be called a Western interpretation of identity – a self-conception as a unique, individualistic human being. Nevertheless, the attained identity arises with the emergence of a lifelong process of transformation.

## **2.5 Self-transformation and Healing**

As the author concludes in one of the chapters, “But something did come in, and it saved me: a love for all nature, all life, a place created by words; I lived in a place words built. I saw my humble, beautiful spirit, after a childhood where I wanted to



die, I saw a soul with living in spite of flaws and imperfections and history” (Hogan 57). What the author insinuates is that she went through a life-changing transformation. This transformation transgresses the genre of memoir and its ethnical alternative by spilling out into various literary fields.

The author’s transformation is, first of all, not dissimilar to the puritan conversion narratives. A person is transformed by encountering an extraordinary experience. Resonating with their experience, the person forms the new self. The same happens with Linda Hogan’s lifelong search for her lost identity, during which she experiences a metamorphosis of the whole self. Of course, what stands aside the puritan conversion narratives is the fact that her conversion is not related to Christianity; however, this is not even the point of this discussion. What makes it analogical is the sudden impulse coming from within which commences the conversion.

One day, the words came. I was an adult. I went to school after work. I read. I wrote. Words came, anchored to the earth, to matter, to the wholeness of nature. There was, in this, a fall, this time to a holy ground of a different order, a present magic, a light-bearing, soul-saving presence that illuminated my heart and mind and altered my destiny. Without it, who would guess what, as a human being, I might have become. (Hogan 57)

What appears is that there is a certain notion of unpredictability; there is not a reference to a particular impulse which would trigger the transformation. A little girl incapable of articulating her feelings has transformed into a writer where writing empowered her to break through the past non-self towards the full-self. This corresponds with the conversion narratives where the narrator finds their new self within the new belief. Furthermore, Linda Hogan mentions a miracle, or magic; something inexpressible, which is the activating mechanism. There again might be seen a certain analogy between the conversion narrative and the memoir, which tends to be largely a narrative of self-transformation.

There is as well a certain amount of efficacy in her self-transformation which coincides with a therapeutic nature of autobiographical genre. Her transformation and coming to her real self both work as a healing process whose traces might be discovered even in Thoreau. As for the subgenre in this case, the memoir by Linda

Hogan also touches on the grounds of addiction narratives as well as illness narratives (Smith and Watson 145). In addiction narratives, a common subject matter in the Native American literature, the protagonist usually describes their “individualized fable of being lost and then found” (Smith and Watson 147), which is basically their testimony of overcoming the days of drunkenness. Linda Hogan uses it in an even broader context, where not only does she describe her addiction to alcohol, but she presents it as a communal problem of the tribal people. It is therefore within the context of cultural, economic, political and social rejection (Smith and Watson 147). In *The Woman Who Watches Over the World*, as in the autobiography of Janet Cambell Hale, addiction is positioned as an inseparable consequence of the shared history of Native people “experiencing century-long structural injustice that fostered addiction” (147). The memoir has a form of “scriptotherapy”, which is “an attempt to coming to terms with traumatic events by representing and interpreting, in the writing” (Couser 113). Nevertheless, this therapy is not realized only in regards to her alcohol rehabilitation. Even though it was not written during the author’s addiction treatment, the ability to write about her experience with alcohol and its overcoming becomes a part of convalescence and her transformation (Smith and Watson 147). As far as illness narratives are concerned, this memoir is undoubtedly one of them. The memoir chronicles the subject’s journey through her physical affliction as well as psychological breakdowns. “The process of learning to recognize the bodily sensations [stands] as valid and forceful knowledge” (Avrahami 158). By gaining the knowledge, the subject’s condition evolves in breakthroughs and recovery.

Her healing progresses into self-reinvention, both of which occupy a broader position within the author’s conception. It is above all writing that cures her. “Something did come in, and it saved me: a love for all nature, all life, a place created by words; I live in a place words built” (Hogan 58). If, by being embarked on writing, the self-exploration and self-discovery came, the memoir, therefore, speaks as much to her as to the readers. It “resonates with the readers” and they find in it consolation, instigation towards transformation and a meaning and wholeness of their selves (Hogan 152). This particular quality creates a common thread that spans the memoir’s diverse discourses.

## 2.6 The Tale with an Edifying Content

The edifying discourse stands within a relationship of the memoir and its reader, as well as within the relationship of the writer herself and her self-writing. It presents different qualities. In the narration, edification transgresses a moral quality and includes as well spiritual and intellectual discourses and they simultaneously overlap the various issues that are indicated in the previous chapters. The edifying content is not exclusively in this particular memoir; the Native American genre of autobiography indicates practically preordained edifying qualities which are inevitably connected to the Native historical heritage.

The edifying reverberation is placed upon the reader in one aspect principally, which is a morally driven content of the memoir. The concept of morality might be traced throughout the writing in diverse realms. Many of them are connected to humanitarian steps of the writer but as well to the very opposite – her personal descriptions of her and her relatives' worst years and rendering their tribal history. The moral basis of the memoir's content naturally concerns the author's ethical values. These moral principles are just as explicitly expressed as they are decipherable between the lines, which not only gives the reader the freedom to choose, but this also opens the door for multiple potential ways of reading the memoir's message. By stating her opinions and experiences, the readers might be prodded into facing their own moral values, eventually. The memoir, on that account, might additionally serve as a means of instruction or a guide. The negativity is challenged and finally overcome by the subject, which might guide the reader towards following these unintentional, rather natural, directions. What is more, there is a very human quality to it for her wrong decisions and life choices, which makes the narration even more accessible for the readers. This might be demonstrated on the author's confessions about the years of her alcohol addiction, where she admits her erroneous steps: "Falling isn't always bad. Sometimes it is into a better world. When I think of my drunken falls, it was as if I wanted to fall into my own life, fall into the healing earth. My instinct had been right, my way wrong" (Hogan 66). The author perceives the wrongness of her deeds but at the same time adverts to and questions the immoral practice that led to this problem, common for so many people. This depiction is also visible in her decision to adopt Native American children instead of having her own, as she "wanted children already in the world and without

homes” (Hogan 75). There is a moral relativism to it, for it represents “an individual’s basic moral commitments” which are not derived from the general moral norms based on the cultural and social background (Timmons 39).

In general, where the author claims her personal failings, she evenly alleges a realm of the “shared” culpability of the Native American history and history in general. Furthermore, the Native cultural moral codes, having been violated by the Euro-American culture, are compared with the moral codes of, for the aboriginal people, inimical culture. There is this “whiteness burden” question, namely to what extent life is a personal choice or historically-driven unchangeable condition and as far as the author’s tribal history is concerned, it is, primarily, precisely the morality which is being questioned. This moral and ethical responsibility is culturally driven; it is a collective theme for the Native autobiographical genre, appearing in the memoir of N. Scott Momaday, *Ohiyesa* or even in the *Ceremony* by Leslie Marmon Silko, where it even spills over to the realms of post-traumatic stress disorder connected to the war. As a result of the historically burdened culture and the incongruous moral codes that shaped it, the preachifying character features the Native autobiographies.

The edification touches not only ethics, but it appears within a spiritual scope of the content. There could be made an analogy between the rags-to-riches autobiographies and those, such as *The Woman Who Watches Over the World*, which have a character of spiritual growth. Both subgenres are characterized by the protagonist’s life-changing experience when the person is elevated from poor to superior condition or position. Whereas in rags-to-riches stories the life change concerns specifically the materialistic side of the writer’s life, in Linda Hogan’s memoir the turnabout came within the intangible aspect of human life. Throughout the narration, Linda Hogan refers to the Native American spiritual traditions and their spiritual conceptions of the world around. Its traces go to the Earth which is the substantial element for their tribal spirituality. The attachment to the land, which has been discussed in one of the previous chapters, appertains not only to the geographies and histories, regardless of whether personal or not, but as well the spiritual realization which is vital for the wholeness of each personality. The relationship of the author and the land covers and objectivizes various aspects of the tribal spiritual experience. It is, first of all, connected to the discovery of one’s identity and self-realization as well as the tribal integrity within their cultural system of values and manners. Furthermore, the

spirituality makes the person self-aware and appreciates their national belonging. The spiritual edification is also one of the aspects which play a crucial role in the author's overcoming the life-long illness. The spiritual growth therefore bears a cathartic quality within itself. The bond to the Earth is also and especially edifying for its ecological overtone, which is still a current issue not only in literature. As with the moral subtext of the memoir's content, even the spiritually edifying character expands to the realm of instructing and educational potential of the literary work in a relationship with the reader as well as documentation of tribal cogitation in contradistinction of the Euro-American one. Yet, even the documentation character advertises its spiritual and purgatorial implicit meaning towards the readership. As she writes,

Yet, there was then, as now, a search by Euro-Americans for what they thought American Indian represented. Not for the best of what we have to offer, our knowledge of the world, our complex theologies, our remembered ecology, but for a romantic tie to the earth the Europeans have forgotten and severed, and could now have back, but for self-deceit. (Hogan 62)

Reconstructed identity is another content element of edification. The author's incessant self-reflection and self-projection creates a stepping stone that should facilitate the reader's identification with the text. The content is in its very substance venerating body and soul, both of the writer and the reader. There is a strong notion of transcendent law of good and evil, or positive and negative, and their mutual dependency on each other as well as a harmonious relationship. The author says, when commenting on her own illness, "I do not want to grace the state of illness because it is not a place of nobility", where she is aware of the dubious character of it. However, she adds afterwards, "Yet, in some ways, I am grateful to have seen this underworld, to have been a stranded creature without water. For out of unwholeness something began to grow, generate" (Hogan 34). What seems as an insurmountable obstacle appears to be possible to overcome. The edifying message that comes out of her life experience is the universal law that the evil or negative inevitably brings with it positive things. And by facing the negative aspect of her life, she, as she describes it, developed not only the spiritual growth, but also empathy and hope out of pure necessity (Hogan 34). The consequence of bringing one's "self" around makes the person be aware of their identity and all the aspects that it bears with it.

## 2.7 Edifying Function of Narration

The autobiography is endowed with the edifying condition on two levels. Apart from the content, what makes the work enlightening is the narration itself. The concept of a story functions in a larger framework. By narrating her personal history within sundry stories, she puts together the whole of what she is at the end. Moreover, the writer captures and therefore preserves stories of different relatives, communal tribal stories and myths, transforming the self-writing to the collection of stories, which makes the autobiographical subgenre step out of the typical norm and shifts its boundaries. She says that each tribe has its own emergence story (Hogan 203). There is a resemblance to her self-writing, which may also be perceived as a story of personal emergence and spiritual growth, which is as illuminating and instructive as the traditional tribal myths. There is the metaphysical enlightening side the concept of narrative, advertised by phrases like “I will tell you something about stories. [...] They are all we have, you see, all we have to fight off illness and death” (Silko 2). As written in L. M. Silko’s *Ceremony*, Linda Hogan also speaks about a certain transcendent overlap of a story. She reflects on the connection between a body and a story and says, “Our stories and myths remain because skin isn’t where a person ends. We live not only inside a body but within a story as well” (Hogan 204). What this quote indicates is the author’s belief that stories are the essentials of living, changeable, illuminating and edifying and it is the basic element of human experience. It eventually opens the histories and geographies of not only self, but the world in general. As she concludes, “There is a place where the human enters dream and myth, and becomes a part of it, or maybe it is the other way around, when the story grows from the body and spirit of humankind. In any case, we are a story, each of us, bundle of stories, some as false as phantom islands but believed in nevertheless” (Hogan 205).

## Conclusion

*The Woman Who Watches Over The World* definitely defies the stereotypical classification of the autobiographical genre. Equally, it is not possible to deny its roots of the first traces of the American autobiographical genre. By both its content and form the author creates a piece of work which is traditionally a memoir and at the same time a spiritual text and environmental record.

Linda Hogan uses modernist and post-modernist techniques, which creates a fragmentary narration with not just a single storyline. The fragmentariness opens a space for the author's comments on historical facts, her thoughts about her personal and tribal history as well as philosophical discourses about dreams, memory or illness. It proves that out of various fragments of a human memory, a complex picture of one's life might be sculpted. The narration itself functions as a connecting line between the author's message and the reader. It is the world and the reader which stand to face each other. This evolves into an inspiring, educational as well as transformational character of the book.

The content is indeed, beyond a mere depiction of the author's life. As far as the content is concerned, the memoir engages the themes typical for ethnic subcategory of the genre. On the other hand, these ethnic formulas are engaged into much extend conceptions. Linda Hogan deals with a concept of not only tribal history where she takes into account its relativized objectivity as well as personal history and history of an ethnic group. These kinds of history interconnect and build a picture of the world history, which is always subjectivized by its observer. This compact aspect of history is a basis for a personal experience. As far as experiencing is concerned, there is a logical relationship between history and geography. The author draws a transition between these and a human body. A human body is a record, memorizing the world history, feelings and illnesses and interconnects the ancestors and descendants. Nevertheless, it is the very body capable of resurrection, transforming into a full self.

Linda Hogan's uplifting memoir delivers rich and original message of her personal life and proves that a Native American autobiography reaches far beyond a self-narration. It shows that the Native American autobiography is worth studying and understanding and can have an impact on a global scale. The memoir is not only a manifestation of global problems, the historical and the present ones, but it is above

all a deeply spiritual and philosophical text, an immensely inspiring voyage of transformation into the rediscovered fundamental elements of life: self and love.



## **Abbreviations**

Oed. Abbreviation for Online Etymology Dictionary

Vid. Abbreviation for Video

Hoss. Abbreviation for Khaled Hosseini Web

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