

Witness the Broken Ocean

And, with Linda Hogan, imagine it healing

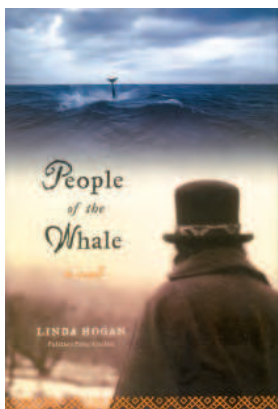
PEOPLE OF THE WHALE, fiction by Linda Hogan. W.W. Norton & Company, 2008. Hardcover, \$24.95.

Linda Hogan likes to anchor her novels firmly in reality, a taste that would make them more like nonfiction if she didn't write in cascading images about characters who find a way to call the injured world home.

But perhaps that's the most realistic part — that the wounded Native Americans in her fiction search through the wreckage, environmental and emotional, in order to connect and survive. Her 1990 Pulitzer Prize-nominated *Mean Spirit* brought attention to the "oil murders" of the 1920s in Oklahoma, when white men married and then murdered Osage women for their oil-rich land. Hogan's 1995 novel *Solar Storms* used as its basis the environmental degradation of Canada's James Bay project, which also collapsed the towns and villages of the Cree tribe living near the flooded and dammed areas. *Solar Storms* connects the white world's exploitation of Native peoples and the land with emotional and physical

abuse within the affected tribe. For the main character, 17-year-old Angel — as vulnerable and sweet as she is tough and angry — healing comes from activism and learning about her community. Like Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, *Solar Storms* weaves gorgeous, other-worldly writing with a tale of pain and potential redemption for those making a way in a racist, sometimes murderous world.

Now *People of the Whale* brings another tale from the headlines into novel form. Hogan, along with writer Brenda Peterson, spent years writing for the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* about the interactions among the Makah people, who live at the tip of the Olympic Peninsula in Neah Bay, Wash.; various countries that wanted to open up whaling; and the migratory patterns of great gray whales. Their articles culminated in a book, *Sightings: The Gray Whales' Mysterious Journey*. That work seems to have led directly to this novel, in which controversy about whaling erupts in a Pacific Northwest village (though Hogan fictionalizes the tribe and its village by using different names, as she did in *Solar Storms*).



stone over the opening" — were it not for his dreams. Late in the book, Hogan writes that Thomas "comprehends the immensity of all his decisions, the long line of American tragedies that had shaped him."

Those tragedies range from the environmental to the martial, from Thomas' loss of soul during the war to the loss of dignity that comes to the A'atsika when they sacrifice tradition. Meanwhile, the compelling but too-strong Ruth serves as the conscience of the tribe — and pays dearly for her sense of tribal tradition and justice. Yet Hogan, who has worked hard for and with animals for years, never leaves a reader in despair. Healing may be contingent, it may be partial, but with years of work, it may arrive. **EW**

Hogan reads from *People of the Whale* at 7:30 pm Thursday, Aug. 21, at Powell's on Burnside in Portland.

BOOK NOTES

Thomas Frank discusses *The Wrecking Crew*, 7:30 pm 8/14, Powell's on Burnside, Portland. **Larry Crane** discusses *Tape Op: The Book, Vol. II*, 7:30 pm 8/15, Powell's on Burnside, Portland. **Dirk Wittenborn** reads from *Pharmakon*, 7:30 pm 8/18, Powell's on Burnside, Portland. **Kira Salak** reads from *The White Mary*, 7:30 pm 8/18, Powell's on Hawthorne, Portland. **Win McCormack** discusses *You Don't Know Me*, 7:30 pm 8/22, Powell's on Burnside, Portland. Farewell party for **Tsunami founder David Rhodes**, 5 pm 8/23, Tsunami Books. **Frank B. Wilderson** discusses *Incognegro*, 7:30 pm 8/26, Powell's on Burnside, Portland. **Daniel H. Wilson** discusses *The Mad Scientist Hall of Fame*, 7:30 pm 8/28, Powell's on Burnside, Portland. **Shannon Wheeler** presents *Postage Stamp Funnies*, 7:30 pm 8/28, Powell's on Hawthorne, Portland.

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