

Healing Wounds in Joy Harjo's *Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings* and *An American Sunrise*

By Sally Michael Hanna*

This paper deals with the healing of trauma of memory and history in Joy Harjo's two recent volumes Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings (2015) and An American Sunrise (2019). Such a task is achieved by rewriting the story from the perspective of the victimized by drawing upon themes of unison with nature, unity and fluidity of time, and music as an alternative language of nature, along with the English language, once considered a space of personal erasure, is now presented as the transformational space of naming and claiming. Healing through forgiveness ensues leading to transcendence over loss through the grace of letting go. The process presented is one of circular journeying in places and spaces of memory to transform anger into grace and forgiveness, and to perceive home as an internal space of memory rather than a place lost to an atrocious past.

Keywords: *healing, trauma, memory, history, alternative language of nature, grace, circular journeying, transcendence, naming and claiming*

American writers of ethnic origin have shared across generations the urge to tell their story as chosen keepers of hi/story. They know that by telling hi/story they become guardians of not only it but also a culture at the risk of extinction. While history is the objective, public narrative as presented by the discourse of power, memory is a personalized rendering of the tale as it intersects with one's personal arc of experience. Hi/story features a potential combination of both domains, the subjective and the objective. This paper deals with the healing of trauma of memory and history in Joy Harjo's two recent volumes *Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings* (2015) and *An American Sunrise* (2019) by taking into account the orality and tribal features of the poetry. Such a task is achieved by rewriting the story from the perspective of the victimized by drawing upon themes of unison with nature, unity and fluidity of time, and music as an alternative language of nature, along with the English language, once considered a space of personal erasure, is now presented as the transformational space of naming and claiming. Healing through forgiveness ensues leading to transcendence over loss through the grace of letting go. The process presented is one of circular journeying in places and spaces of memory to transform anger into grace and forgiveness, and to perceive home as an internal space of memory rather than a place lost to an atrocious past.

It is worth mentioning that Harjo's work situates Native American literature in a position of prominence within mainstream American literature. While earlier attempts by writers of Native American literature included anthropologists, folklorists and historians who navigated the turbulent waters of tribal history,

*Professor of American Literature, Independent Scholar, Egypt.

Harjo's poetry salvaged the canon from marginality and brought it to the limelight. Like her predecessors, Harjo's two volumes address the orality of the tradition, namely in creation, trickster and animal stories. Songs, ceremony and prayers are also included as ancestral aspects of Native American tradition best introduced through Harjo's performed text. The historical aspect of her verse is also dealt with, which represents an integral aspect of Native American writing. The depiction of landscape, communal identity, language, place, journeying in place and time feature in her verse. Genocide as apocalypse is also introduced through the several retellings of the tale of wrong. Combining oral and written, artistic and political literature remains Harjo's forte as she sets herself apart from her contemporaries by imbuing her verse with a communal American spirit. Despite her conformity to Native American tradition, Harjo features a rather unique attempt at transcending the hurt through art, an attempt that may set her apart from her predecessors and contemporaries and earns her a space of literary distinction.

Breathtaking in its scope, Joy Harjo's poetic oeuvre excavates grief and pain in the hope that exposition of hurt may bring about healing and resolution through poetry, song, storytelling and dance. In her recent memoir *Poet Warrior*, Harjo shares with the reader her urgent need to keep the memory alive, although according to her "memory appears to be an enemy bringing only pain" (128). Memory in this context is influenced by the history of loss, rape and eviction from a landscape and a home. Despite her travail, she speaks to Bill Moyers about her responsibility of recall: "Especially because I'm a person from a tribe in the United States of America, I feel charged with a responsibility to remember. I suppose a poet in any tribal situation feels that charge to address the truth which always includes not just the present but the past and the future as well" (41). Harjo's avid quest for truth in her verse renders her poetry one of witness featuring a connective vision of time. She speaks to Angels Carabi about the colossal presence of memory:

Memory for me becomes a big word. It's like saying 'world.' Memory is the nucleus of every cell; it's what runs, its gravity, the gravity of the Earth. In a way, it's like the stories themselves, the origin of the stories, and the continuance of all the stories. It's this great pool of knowledge and history that we live inside (138).

Harjo courageously takes on the responsibility of remembering in order to tell and in turn preserve the memory of her people: "My generation is now the door to memory. This is why I am remembering" (Harjo 2012, p. 21). To Harjo, remembering comes from a rather different space than that of other poets. In her interview with Oprah Winfrey, she acknowledges the fact that "babies know everything, they remember that an ancestor has come here to help them through. Remembering often comes again when people grow older." Remembering in this context is a spiritual occurrence meant to invest the present with meaning. Such an action is often related to spiritual purity in infants before they are molested by the world and in the elderly who through an act of personal cleansing on earth are ready to join the next world. Harjo stresses the importance of remembrance as a means of unifying time and savoring the beauty of the present in her conversation with Joseph Bruchac: "The way I see remembering, just the nature of the word,

has to do with going back. But I see it in another way, too. I see it as occurring, not just going back, but occurring right now, and also future occurrence so that you can remember things in a way that makes what occurs now beautiful” (Harjo 2012, p. 24). The dual action of going forward and backward in time marks Harjo’s poetry as distinctive. Going back to the past is in no way an entrapment, instead it is a journey of self-renewal through the nourishment of a bodily form of memory related to the landscape as a space of remembrance.

To Harjo, memory is a natural power that one holds in one’s core representing survival. In an interview with Tanaya Winder, she refers to memory as a locus of control: “The only control you have is over what you are carrying in your center, your memory and everything that has brought you to that moment. The page, however, has a more controllable environment” (56). Memory in this context becomes quasi-constant in a world of variables. While homes and riches may be pilfered, memory holds an innate resistance to molestation by otherness since it embraces the power of bending reality in favor of a truth that is yet unspoken. In her interview with Laura Coltelli, she refers to memory as “a delta in the skin,” that renders her “memory alive” (Coltelli 1996a, p. 61). Moreover, memory often appears as writing on the body that cannot be erased creating a continuum in which all time can be preserved for posterity, and in turn unify the global memory of the peoples of the earth. Harjo stresses the unity of all time as an aspect of memory:

It is Creek and touches in on the larger tribal continental memory and the larger human memory, global. It’s not something I consciously chose; I mean, I am not a full blood, but it was something that chose me, that lives in me, and I cannot deny it. Sometimes I wish I could disappear into the crowds of the city and lose this responsibility because it is a responsibility. But I cannot. I also see memory as not just associated with past history, past events, past stories, but nonlinear, as in future and ongoing history, events, and stories. And it changes (Coltelli 1996a, p. 61).

The changeable nature of memory garnered by the fluidity of time gives Harjo the golden opportunity to unify time and to rewrite the story in favor of those whom doom frowned upon. In this context of fluidity, Harjo rewrites her narrative of the victory of the vanquished through the art of storytelling, and the celebratory dance, song and the shuttling between past, present and future. Storytelling becomes the logical framework of memory since it has the magical power to change at will. It bends to meet the needs of the soul. Story to Harjo is a “matrix” that is inclusive and connective of everyone. In her Memoir *Crazy Brave*, she explains the importance of storytelling as both process and responsibility: “A story matrix connects all of us. There are rules, processes, and circles of responsibility in this world. And the story begins exactly where it is supposed to begin. We cannot skip any part” (28). Her verse bears honest witness to the story that she carries as a spokesperson of her people.

To Harjo, poetry is an act of physical and spiritual journeying in song beyond sunset. It is also a way “to document the spirit of the people” (Hobby 2011, p. 79). Her poetry acknowledges grief, anger, sadness and destruction only to surmount them in an act of passive resistance and determination: “It is not in me to give up/

our spirits needed a way to dance through the heavy mess" (*An American Sunrise* 101). Her poems express phases of grief over loss which she perceives as a chance for growth through mourning giving rise to morning sunshine. A constant alternation between despair and hope colors the poetry of Harjo as she attempts to journey between them in the hope of achieving transcendence. Laura Coltelli refers to the process of revisiting pain as a "cyclical pattern" wavering between "unison, loss, separation and longing" (Coltelli 1996b, p. 6) followed by the quester's voice seeking a home coming. A new day to Harjo is an opportunity for the human body to revel in a dance and a celebration of the earth and nature to which all humanity is greatly connected.

Motion is an integral part of the physical journey. It is only normal that Harjo's poetry picks up on the reality of movement brought about by eviction; a truth that marks the lives of American Indians to this day (Coltelli 1996b, p. 7). Her work becomes a reliving of a reality of exile that marred the lives of her ancestors. Harjo shares with Bruchac her perception of origin vis a vis movement: "It's caused a great deal of polarity within myself. I recognized my roots but at that time there was a lot of pain involved in going back. I thought about it many times why I travel, why I am always the wanderer in my family" (23). Avid readers of Harjo's work can often locate the sense of chase, a "rootlessness" adopted as a defensive strategy against the fear of belonging leading to concomitant "displacement of the spirit" (Stever 1996, p. 75); a condition in which physical displacement leads to spiritual displacement. Her poetry features a "moving geography of the soul" (Coltelli 2011, p. 196) in order to find respite and make sense of the pain, coupled by the physical journey of locating a home only to conclude "that my home is within me. I can take it everywhere. It is always there" (Stever 1996, p. 76). The home she discovers is innate and spiritual not to mention inviolable; a finding that leads to the spiritual healing of body and soul (Jossa 2007, p. 592) as an acceptable alternative to the physical process of healing.

Harjo's poetry is often referred to as "ecological" (Bryson 2002, p. 169). Nature is presented as a vibrant and sacred being, battlefield and a haven for regeneration, sunshine and blessing, and a resource for self-completion. Earth features as an essential element of regeneration (Coltelli 2005, p. 287) because in this earth is inscribed the hi/story of violence as much as the memory, the stories and songs that are in our bodies. Such memory emerges as a space of naming and performance not only of hurt but also of resolution through the performance of song and dance. Nature is sometimes represented as a "mythical presence" since it has been lost to western atrocities. Anthropomorphism marks Harjo's representation of nature as reflective of her state of mind and of a panentheistic God expressed in everything. Nature in her work represents the full expression of divine presence. Elements of nature often appear in Harjo's poetry to express certain emotions or dispositions and sometimes emerge as characters playing on her cosmic stage. The wind, for example, is associated with freedom, words and poetry, trees with being and life, birds with singing and love, rabbits with creation and music. Earth is always presented as a mother and a queen, plants as healers and the moon as a performer playing the horn. She shares her thoughts about plants and plant life with Lorie Roy:

There are established relationships. Plants are beings and require respect and singing if they are to be helpful. We all owe our lives to the helpfulness and sacrifice of plants. Corn is very powerful. Corn has managed to be included as an ingredient in almost every manufactured “food” item in this country. The impetus of corn therefore is very powerful. If we enslave plants, disrespect (64–65).

Harjo reveals her personal and tribal beliefs when she insists that “we are the earth, everything is connected.” To Harjo, “we are part of a much larger force of sense and knowledge” (Buntin 2011, p. 09) that emerges as a locus in which nature and humanity are subsumed in each other in a balancing act of harmony that testifies to their wholesomeness and belonging in what she refers to in *Secrets From the Center of the World* as the ‘non separate’ (1). Harjo journeys toward the “spiral in which all beings resonate;” (Ruwe 1996, p. 127) representing a state of unison, harmony and balance with the world. She clearly demonstrates the life of the soul as a dimension of existence that unites human beings with creation since the soul reckons what the body cannot- “it is the ancient road the soul knows/It carries us home” (*An American Sunrise* 64). A home to Harjo represents spiritual and psychic strength, a space of security and comfort influenced by place as remembrance.

Language becomes Harjo’s clay in maintaining the power of telling and thus conserving the memory of her people. About the importance of language in Native American writing, Dean Rader argues that “native communities have invested in language the ability to control identity and destiny” (147) thus becoming a mover and shaker of reality. Unfortunately, such languages are almost lost owing to the extinction of its people. Harjo speaks to Bill Aull about her frustration with language in general and particularly the English Language:

My frustration with the language, particularly the English language, stems from anger with the colonization process in which the English language was a vicious tool. The colonizers know what they were doing when they tried to destroy tribal languages, and which, infuriatingly, they were successful at in many instances. Language is culture, a resonant life form itself that acts on the people and the people on it (99).

Inspired by indigenous writing, Harjo adopts confrontation in the language of the enemy which according to her is “materialistic and subject oriented” (Bruchac 1996, p. 22). In her attempt to arrest personal and tribal annihilation, Harjo brandishes the language that was meant to destroy her and her people (Kallet 1996, p. 118) in order to build a saga of human transformation through memory. Harjo opts for the language of the colonizer to create her own truth, the renaming and the reclaiming of the narrative that has always been their own. So, the language that has once been a space of personal erasure, emerges as the space of naming and claiming of both self and story. Moreover, she cites the language of clouds, hummingbirds, and the language of nature as adequate alternatives. Harjo sought her entrance into language through the spirit of nature and the language that it offers as an alternative medium of reckoning. Music as the universal language of nature became her entry into poetry. Language in this case becomes a cite for human empowerment as well as a space of personal transformation crafted

through the act of telling and bearing witness (Jossa 2007, p. 587). Transformation of anger, fear and pain into power that rocks the world remains the only possible means of living with the aftermath of destruction.

Pain depicted in the poems is only reversed by the regenerative power of nature that compensates for all loss. "Grace" emerges in Harjo as an analogous regenerative power of existence representing a locus in which memory and place as space of remembrance merge themselves with the poet's words. Grace according to Eliza Rodriguez and Gibson "provides possibilities of negotiating the conflicted histories and relationships" (111). Gibson argues that Harjo's awareness of historical pain propels her to create art that helps deal with loss and grief. The new sense of subjectivity emerging is one of long experience at survival and the celebration of nature and self despite loss. Forgiveness also features as the power of transcendence over loss. Harjo's poetry attempts to harmonize nature and humanity in an unbreakable bond of existence that ensures the survival and nourishment of both. She creates two parallel universes in which the attributes of nature are finally endowed on humanity, humanity too like nature can regenerate itself and its narratives despite potential destruction. Her literary product is presented as the interweaving of stories, poetry and music in a mosaic of grace (Harjo and Winder 2011, p. 57). The following section features an analysis of selected poems from Harjo's two volumes *Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings* and *An American Sunrise*.

Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings starts with the initiative for historicization in a poem entitled "How It Came to Be." The poem refers to the American Indians "as the origin of the land" and stresses their entitlement to both their beliefs and their language. The poem clearly sets a claim to the ownership and stewardship of the land, a sense of entitlement so grand that no government can violate. The insistence on her perception of humanity coupled with silent tears tells the reader that a huge portion of the violence against humanity is hushed down. Violence takes place often because of distancing and the inability to perceive the oneness of all creation.

Only the Indian people are the original people of America. Our roots are buried deep in the soils of America. We are the only people who have continued with the oldest beliefs of this country. We are the people who still yet speak the languages given to us by the Creator.

This is our homeland. We came from no other country.

We have always looked at ourselves as human beings . . .

Every tribe has a trail of tears. We wonder when it is going to end (xii).

"Rabbit is up to Tricks" is Harjo's version of a genesis devoid of the sanctity generally inscribed in stories of beginnings. This poem features the raw history of human greed and how it marks our lives today. She uses "the Rabbit trickster," a persona common to Native American literature. He is a creature of the wild who witnesses the story of human transgression and magnifies the folly in people's hearts. Joy Harjo comments on the nature of tricksters and the role they play in Native American Literature:

In our tribe, the Muskogee tribe, trickster is rabbit. I always remember Bob Thomas, the Cherokee culturalist and storyteller extraordinaire, telling me, “The rabbit’s not male or female, it’s both. It’s always walking that line between the sacred and the profane—the trickster is always about the duality between here and there, sun and moon, sky and earth. Somebody has to patrol, I suppose, or be on that line making sense of what really can’t be made sense of. Sometimes I think what I do as a poet or as a human being is walk that line And even as you think you might be fooling them, they fool you. I don’t think there’s anybody on earth who’s not beyond being fooled, or we wouldn’t be here. This is earth. But everybody, everything serves a purpose, and tricksters serve purpose of embodying the sublime and the ridiculous (Harjo and Winder 2011, p. 70).

Harjo opens the poem with the memory of a world that is no more, a world of abundance in which all are included. This world is no longer a reality because of human transgression: “somebody got out of line” (8). Rabbit, a mischievous creature, is Harjo’s parody of a deity too bored and lonely, who in turn decided to entertain himself by creating a human made of clay and puffing life into him. The clay man stood up and started to learn the tricks rabbit taught him. Stealing a chicken, stealing someone else’s wife were among his teachings and clay man obeyed. Greed has overtaken clay man and later became unstoppable. The need for more has blinded him and he proceeded to satisfy this craze until “wanting infected the earth” (9).

And once that clay man started he could not stop.
Once he took that chicken he wanted all the chickens.
And once he took that corn he wanted all the corn (9).

Greed lost people track of their calling in life and of the true purpose of living. People forgot the songs and stories which are to Harjo the essence of life and her way of connecting with her ancestry (Buntin 2011, p. 35). In Harjo’s creation narrative, something went wrong with clay man. Rabbit failed to summon him back when his greed had backfired and started to annoy rabbit himself. Clay man does not respond because rabbit forgot to create his ears!! The poem holds truth relevant to humanity’s interest in ownership rather than in stewardship which in turn creates a culture of lack rather than abundance.

In “Once the World was Perfect” Harjo blames humanity for the destruction of the world. According to Harjo, humanity has planted the first seed of discontentment, doubt and then fear and jealousy ensued, emotions powerful enough to snuff the light out of our lives: “We destroyed the world we had been given/ For inspiration, for life— Each stone of jealousy, each stone/Of fear, greed, envy, and hatred, put out the light” (14). Harjo creates a world of darkness but never fully forsakes it; she introduces the first act of kindness in giving away a blanket: “A spark of kindness made a light/The light made an opening in the darkness/Everyone worked together to make a ladder” (14). Harjo is an avid believer that “the most humble kindnesses make the brightest light” (Harjo 2012, p. 14). The volume makes recourse to jazz and blues as the music of origin. “Reality Show” is Harjo’s overdue wake up call to those who have totally been

disoriented by war and have lost track of their state of disastrous living: "What are we doing napping, through war?/ We've lost our place in the order of kindness/ Children are killing children/We call it real" (26). Harjo names two atrocious outcomes in her verse, losing land and losing innocence represented in children killing each other. Harjo's poetry makes constant recourse to wars all through her work. She speaks to Harbour Winn about the exploration of a sense of innate enmity:

Yeah, it was difficult to recognize that War was in me. I have more than a fair share of pride. When I began to really examine this war within myself I then found a common link between myself and those I name my enemy. Maybe being born with the blood of two warring tribes within has come to some good use (72).

The war she cites is an internal feud that she found hard to identify in its complexity. Going deep for Harjo is discovery, a fact that makes it necessary for her to revisit the pain in order to fathom it. The need to engage pain is elemental in the process of letting go in the hope of attaining transcendence.

Section two of the volume attests to Harjo's oneness with nature as it features anthropomorphic tendencies. Aware of her Indian heritage, Harjo features the interconnectedness of nature and humanity creating a flow that leads to the convergence of all in the spirit of creation. All life emerges as one. In many instances Harjo depicts a world in which the things of life emerge and are transmitted by an energy that unites people, plants, and animals, "an engagement and not a dominant concept" but something "that opens everything up" (Coltelli 2011, p. 118). She states her belief about her role as a writer and about the inherent connection of all things in her interview with Marilyn Kallet: "I feel any writer serves many aspects of culture, including language, but you also serve history, you serve the mythic structure that you're part of, the people, the earth, and so on-and none of these are separate" (111). The sense of connectedness is best served by her belief in energy as a unifying matrix; a thought that she shares with Susan Hobby:

My focus lately has been the study of energy. Everything is energy. A poem is an energetic matrix given shape and meaning by words, phrases, silences, voice ... it is a giving back, to dreams, to relationships, to the spirit of an age. If we understand that there is a kind of consciousness in all creations, both natural and human-made, then we are constantly in a state of reciprocity, though often it's unconscious. Gratitude ups the spin of consciousness. It gives consciousness. Ignore and it will fall away unacknowledged (80).

"The Wanderer" is the opening poem in this section. It records Harjo's communion with the earth that has been usurped from her people. Mother earth is referred to in the poem as "we," which is not as much a reference to the land as it is to the people of this land:

(Everyone came to her table from the four directions to hear her stories.)

"One day I will be gone," she said.

And what will you remember of what I tell you?"

I realize now that she was the very Earth herself, talking (30).

The urgent sense of communion with nature is quite evident early on in Harjo's life, namely in her book *Secrets from the Center of the World*, a work that she and photographer Stephen Strom have put together as a *mélange* of words and photography. Harjo's commentary on the pictures encapsulates her unmistakable sense of fusion with the scenery. She asserts "you become the land, beautiful" (4). This statement bolsters the notion that Harjo sees an inseparable bond between the people and the landscape as God's creation. Moreover, she specifically "developed even more profound ties with the landscape of the Southwest, which would become as significant in its impact on her creative path" (Coltelli 2005, p. 284). The impact cited is clearly seen as an attempt to recall a place into being as the creative path to a home coming based on the spaciousness of memory rather than that of place. Place in this context is only a point of entry not a destination in itself.

"Talking with the Sun" is a poem that represents Harjo's identification with nature as it reinforces her love of the sun: "When explorers first encountered my people, they called us heathens, sun worshippers. They didn't understand that the sun is a relative and illuminates our path on this earth" (31). Harjo clarifies that the kindness of the sun heals human vulnerabilities and creates a sacred field of meaning in which humans exist. She lists the atrocities that led to the change of the eco system to the detriment of animals and nature and closes with the realization that "The quantum physicists have it right; they are beginning to think like Indians/ everything is connected dynamically at an intimate level" (31). It is this connection seeped in the kindness of nature that stops desecration in its tracks.

In part three entitled "Visions and Monsters", Harjo relies on shocking detail in order to delineate in broad brushstrokes the heinous acts perpetrated against American Indians:

Imagine if we natives went to the cemeteries in your cities and dug up your beloved relatives, pulled off rings, watches, and clothes and called them "artifacts," then carried the bones over to the university for study so we could understand you. Consider that there are more bones of native people in universities and museums for study, than there are those of us living (61).

Harjo attempts to tell her version of the story in "In Mystic," highlighting the atrocities carried out in the name of freedom and democracy.

I do not want to know this, but my gut knows the language of bloodshed. Over six hundred were killed, to establish a home for God's people, crowded the Puritan leaders in their Sunday sermons. And then history was gone in a betrayal of smoke. There is still burning though we live in a democracy erected over the burial ground (63).

In the lives above, Harjo mocks the version of democracy that America stands for. Moreover, she reinforces the concept of betrayal, of taking the land by force under the guise of a law-abiding system of governance.

"Suicide Watch" outlines the warped misery that creates an almost unstoppable domino effect of toxicity. The cacophony of questions about her being and existence as "an unworthy soul" point out to the unjustified prejudice against American Indians. In this poem, Harjo creates a cycle of entrapment initiated by drugs that

have become companions tasked to lift her spirits up in the absence of other possibilities. Instead of wallowing in misery, the protagonist chooses to “stand up” and follow the battle “in the sunlight” in the hope that the fight brings about rights denied. While maintaining courage in the naming of perpetrators on whose hands the guilt of rape and killings reside, Harjo finds herself for the first time in a moment of transcendence as she joins “the dance of dragonflies over the river” (72). Being part of nature has always been Harjo’s way of both surrendering to fate and transcending the atrocities that would have otherwise kept her captive.

“This Morning I Pray for my Enemies” chronicles a unique awakening of the heart in which Harjo borrows from the sun the ability to shine on both the good and the bad in a unanimous act of forgiveness. When her mind opens from her heart, she finds it possible to make friends with her enemies. It is quite unmistakable that *Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings* sets ground rules for the stewardship of the land:

Recognize whose lands these are on which we stand.
Ask the deer, turtle, and the crane.
Make sure the spirits of these lands are respected and treated with goodwill.
This land is a being who remembers everything.
By listening we will understand who we are in this holy realm of words (77).

Harjo cites “listening” as the answer to the dilemma leading to desecration of self and land. It is a form of communion with the sanctity of words that create the world. The language of justice is the language that resolves the standoff. In “Use Effective Communication Skills that Display and Enhance Mutual Trust and Respect,” Harjo recounts the history of signing the treaty with the United States and the harrowing details that ensued:

The lands and waters they gave us did not belong to them to give. Under false pretenses we signed. After drugging by drink, we signed. With a mass of gunpower pointed at us, we signed. With a flotilla of war ships at our shores, we signed. We are still signing. We have found no peace in this act of signing.

A casino was raised up over the gravesite of our ancestors. Our own distant cousins pulled up the bones of grandparents, parents, and grandchildren from their last sleeping place. They had forgotten how to be human beings. Restless winds emerged from the earth when the graves were open and the winds went looking for justice.

If you raise this white flag of peace, we will honor it. At Sand Creek several hundred women, children, and men were slaughtered in an unspeakable massacre, after a white flag was raised. The American soldiers trampled the white flag in the blood of the peacemakers.

We had no choice. They took our children. Some ran away and froze to death. If they were found they were dragged back to the school and punished. They cut their hair, took away their language, until they became as strangers to themselves even as they became strangers to us. If you sign this paper we will become brothers. We will no longer fight. We will give you this land and these waters in exchange “as long as the grass shall grow and the rivers run.

We say, put down your papers, your tools of coercion, your false promises, your posture of superiority and sit with us before the fire. We will share food, songs, and stories. We will gather beneath starlight and dance and rise together at sunrise (78, 9).

The poem outlines the betrayal featured in a so-called pact that stole the peace and the lives of American Indians. Harjo insists that despite the unspeakable miseries of kidnap, rape and murders, the act of sharing singing, dancing and telling stories is the path of transcendence that she charts for those who witness it firsthand or through reading.

“Reduce Defensiveness and Break the Defensiveness Chain” presents a celebration of the light beings that enter human cells and transform them. They transform the human state from sadness to joy that is rather infectious from the earth to the sky and all in between. Dancing is presented as a ritual of unity of all creation; a transformative power of goodness that dissolves all darkness, thus bringing about the light: “We are here dancing, they said/There was no there/There was no “I” or “you”/There was us; there was “we” (82).” This dance is an invitation to “know each other” and to master “the ability to move about in the world without question” (Winn et al. 2011, p. 68). In “Eliminate Negative Views During Conflict,” Harjo emerges as a black panther poised under the Cyprus tree with fiery green eyes, fire being the third natural element that she refers to in the volume. Morning light is what the universe in the poem is waiting for. Part six entitled “And, Use what You Learn to Resolve Your own Conflicts and to Mediate Others’ Conflicts”:

We gave thanks for the story, for all parts of the story because it was by the light of those challenges we knew ourselves-
We asked for forgiveness.
We laid down our burdens next to each other (84).

Harjo plays a note in the rhapsody of pain, fear and anger resolving all such feelings in the harmony of peace and grace. She names the loss of a home and a brokenness that can only be salvaged by letting go. Forgiveness of the self and otherness remains the only panacea allowing one to put down one’s burdens and live; an idea that Harjo fully expresses in “Forever: A Song.”

In the night of memory
There is a mist
In the mist is a house.
It’s the heart where we lived.
In that living was a radio.
Guitars played our song.
You’d catch me in your arms
We’d go round and round.
Where does it go, this forever?

Once I was broken by time.
There was no house in the mist.
I lost sunrise. I lost your fire against mine.
A country was falling and falling.
I turned my ears to catch music.
Nothing came back.
No angels of laughter, no you.

I stood alone in the emptiness of memory
Forever and ever— (86).

Harjo recreates a home of the heart hidden behind the mists of memory and forgetfulness. Yet, an unhappy turn of events occurs in the “falling” country. Broken by fate, this magical home of the soul is shrouded by mist and is nowhere to be seen. Losing sight of it in the poem is a concomitant to losing “sunrise” which is the light and energy of the universe. Memory according to Harjo is emptied out of meaning because of being cheated out of light and warmth. The poem delineates the horrific effect of barrenness caused by the colonizer’s hatred and denigration. However, Harjo envisions “a home of the heart” as a replacement to the home lost to the colonizer. “I am not Ready to Die Yet” is a poem that reinstates Harjo’s love of life and the need to fight back: “I was once given to the water./My ashes will return there,/But I am not ready to die yet—” (90). Water appears as the fourth element that teaches her and her people to flow not fight (Seiferle 2011, p. 28). Harjo claims a stewardship of nature that helps her emerge as the hero of her world through imagination: “In one house lives the sun, moon, and stars./Within that house is another house of sun, moon, and stars. /And then another, and another./There is no end to the imagination” (93).

“The Last Word of Fire and Trash Song” names the hurt referred to earlier as “betrayal” of the heart and mind by an enemy who holds the protagonist hostage. The author’s will, however, is expressed in her decision not to give in to this enemy and threatens the enemy with the demons raised out of fire and a broken heart. While fire is a symbol of warmth, it may as well stand for destruction of what she refers to as “trash.” The poem commemorates a rite of passage to a world that is cleansed of trash by a song of fire.

I’m Indian in a strange pastiche of hurt and rain
smells like curry and sweat
from a sunset rock-and-roll restaurant.

I can’t get betrayal out of my heart,
out of my mind
in this hotel room where I’m packing for home.

The most dangerous demons spring from fire
and a broken heart, smell of bittersweet aftershave.
and the musk of a thousand angels.
And then I let that thought go running away
because I refuse to stay in bondage
to an enemy, who thinks he wants what I have.

So I send prayers skyward on smoke.
Hvsaketvmese, Hvsaketvmese.
Release this suffering.
May the pretty beast and all the world know peace.
I refuse to sum it up anymore; it’s not possible.
I give it up

to the battering of songs against the light,
to the singing of the earnest cricket
in the last world of fire and trash (96,7).

Fire in the volume purges the world described of all impurities. As Harjo sits by the sea, she has a revelation about the story: “You can Change the Story, My Spirit Said to me as I sat near the sea” (101). Turning the story of wrong on its head is the best decision that Harjo comes up with to save her life and the lives of many. The story she tells maintains its own spirit and “wants to live. It dances and sings and breathes. It surprises me with what it knows” (104). The story “is still in my tongue, my body, as if it had lived there all along” (104). It is in this poem that Harjo finds the resolution to the conflict in “a story” retold from the perspective of the vanquished bringing light into the darkness of unknowing and calling for a justice long overdue.

“Sunrise Healing Song” is a song of light and healing emanating from dancers in the milky way. They chant of a reality that “What obscures falls away.” Darkness will soon come to an end to be replaced by the light of knowing of the story of liberation and justice. “It’s Raining in Honolulu” reinstates rain (water) as the element of cleansing that ought to be celebrated. The rain brings shivers and celebration in the hope of nurturing the plants and the land: “We stop all of our talking, quit thinking, to drink the mystery. We listen to the breathing beneath our breathing. We hear how the rain became rain, how we became human” (108). Rain cleanses everything, even the perpetrators. As a celebration, Harjo decides to plant songs to cleanse the curses. “Praise the Rain” is Harjo’s prayer of grace. Gratitude, according to the poem, is the panacea that heals all ills befalling the human soul.

Praise crazy. Praise sad.
Praise the path on which we’re led.
Praise the roads on earth and water.
Praise the eater and the eaten.
Praise beginnings; praise the end.
Praise the song and praise the singer.
Praise the rain; it brings more rain.
Praise the rain; it brings more rain (111).

“For a Girl Becoming” outlines Harjo’s rules of the American Indian journey: give, give water, kind words, love, attention, empathy, praise and give thanks for all things. Harjo tells a story of one of her friends who was visiting an ill friend. She could not remember where she left the car but saw a blind man in the place where she thought she parked her car. He asked her to take his arm and he taught her the lesson that Harjo is alternatively teaching the reader: “See with your own heart, not with your eyes” (134). The volume closes with “Sunrise” the cheerful ending of a long night of starless, dark skies. Harjo’s prayer of grace in this volume is one of praise, giving and forgiving all hurt.

And this morning we are
to stand with all the rest

and welcome you here
 we move with the lightness of
 being and we will go
 where there is a place for us (139).

In *An American Sunrise*, Harjo is the historian of her people, keeping count of all the atrocities committed unto them. Finding “her way home” features in a prologue entitled “Map of the Trail of Tears.” She recounts the violence perpetrated against them in “we were surrounded by soldiers and driven away like livestock at gunpoint” (xv). The volume cries out the pilfering of lives and belongings during “the trail of tears.” It is Harjo’s attempt to acknowledge trauma by telling the story like it is, in simplicity and in the silence that renders pain most felt. Harjo believes that in poetry “silence is a tool that is just as important as words. I believe the role of the poet is truth-teller” (Harjo and Winder 2011, p. 15). It is in this volume that Harjo magnifies the power of words and silence to express the truth of her people.

“Break my Heart” is a poem that presents the inevitability of departure brought about by exile, death or heart break. The heart is transformed into a fist ready to fight and pray for deliverance. Harjo believes that while people may be led like sheep in situations of violence, poetry, cannot be proscribed or limited: “You cannot force poetry with a ruler,/or jail it at a desk” (3). Mystery and beauty have endowed poetry with a sacred space that cannot be infiltrated but can be beautifully shared with readers in a spirit of grace to reclaim what was lost. Hi/story according to the poem has the most elaborate and warm embrace that a mother can ever have: “History will always find you and wrap you/ In its thousand arms” (3). In this sacred place of memorial recollection, miracles are bound to happen: “Someone will lift from the earth/Without wings./Another will fall from the sky/Through the knots of a tree” (4). The volume also tells stories about Harjo’s elders namely her grandfather Monahwee, and their journeys beyond their homeland.

“Do not Return” is a warning that a return has the scariest repercussions of upsetting the dead. “Perched over the blood fields/Where the dead last stood. /And then what, you with your words/In the enemy’s language,/Do you know how to make a peaceful road/Through human memory? And what of angry ghosts of history? Then what?/---If I turn to salt/ It will be of petrified tears/From the footsteps of my relatives/ As they walked west” (6, 7). While salt is the symbol of goodness in the New Testament “you are the salt of the earth,” it represents the punishment of petrification for those who dare look back. In this poem, Harjo shares her inability to master letting go of her pain and most importantly of the story of her people. She finally concludes “we are still in mourning” (9) for the children that have been stolen by the government. Desecration of body and soul ensues in the poem as she reinstates scenes of rape and transgression representing a hostile and toxic environment that leads to life imprisonment in “cages” like cattle. “Grief is killing us. Anger tormenting us./Sadness eating us with disease./ Our young women are stolen, raped and murdered. /Our young men are killed by the police or killing themselves and each other” (10). Harjo’s poetry features an escalation from places of serenity and quiet to the apex of conflict that crescendos

at will only to culminate in peaceful spaces as Harjo learns to channel her anger into power that peacefully rattles the world.

Love of nature is expressed in the poems, loving trees and waters and creatures of the wild. Amidst the mayhem, Harjo reminds us that her communion with nature builds up a parallel universe of goodness that endows the American Indian experience with meaning that far surpasses our matter-of-fact world. The tree in Harjo's poetry sings of the history of the trees conjuring up a sense of natural camaraderie. Trees stand as living symbols of survival by forming a community that commiserates with itself. They are planted in the soil as witnesses of the atrocities taking place as they ensure the survival of nature as an alternative world that reverses the reality of death and desecration. The tree is a storyteller in the poem. It bears witness to the truth that will eventually set captives free to enjoy a new sunrise because, according to Harjo "they remain" (13). "Directions to You" calls for the need for communion with the self and otherness to be understood. "To find/To be found/ To be understood/To be seen/ Heard, felt/ You are, Breath/ You are, Memory/You are/Touch/You are/Right here (23, 4)." Remembering based on Harjo's work requires a simultaneous celebration of pain, life and the baptism of light that ensures continuity.

All night we dance the weave of joy and tears
 All night we're lit with the sunrise of forever
 Just ahead of us, through the trees
 One generation after the other (25).

"Weapons" is a poem that incites tacit violence in the title only to be neutralized in the text. The poem refers to verbal inaptitude, which leads to resorting to alternative defensive strategies. Storytelling is the weapon that Harjo takes up against cultural extinction. The poem tells the stories of ethnic groups in the United States starting with blacks, moving forward to yellow and finally to red. While the colors represent ethnicities in the United States, Harjo tackles them as the colors of nature. Black is the color of night, yellow is the color of sunrise and red is the sunset and the blood representing suffering. "Black" represents the point of start when imagination birthed life for the campers around a river that represented sustenance in the darkness. "Yellow" represents the rising of the sun, when members of the tribe started sharing stories pointing to an underlying tribal consciousness that brought them together. In the poem, they shared food, the symbol of peace and nurture that started life. The language of nature was added creating an unbreakable bond among the members. Celebration in song and dance is the order of the day which is inherent in the culture of the people. "Red" symbolizes sunset, or the moment in which the strong bonds fostered break out causing a sea of blood that does not seem to abate. The scarlet waters are waters of belief that holds the American Indian people together. It may also be interpreted as the blood circulating their veins. "Green" represents the promise of regeneration, after snowy winters promising renewal of being echoed in "the winds in song." "Blue" renews the promise of a new dawn, singing and celebration to eternity.

“Washing my Mother’s Body” is a poem about the power of memory as a space of self-forgiveness and release from guilt. Unable to carry out the ritual, Harjo enters her space of memory in order to make peace with herself. The ritual that Harjo elects for takes her back to childhood as she picks up the washing pan in which she was washed as a child. Readers later know that this pan has been given to Harjo’s grandmother by the American government on the trail of tears. Harjo fills the pot with lukewarm water as she tells the story of her mother: a woman who did not have much as a child, who had “to wear the same flour sack dress to school every day, the one she had to wash every night” (30). As a result, she capitalized on acquisition, buying dresses she “had not had time to wear” in her adulthood. Harjo observes during the washing of her mother’s body that the story of her mother’s suffering is tattooed on her body. Finally, Harjo shares her intention that a woman like her mother “should be honored like a queen” (33).

Then I sing her favorite song, softly.
 I don’t know the name of the song, just a few phrases,
 one of those old homemade heartbreak
 songs where there’s a moment of happiness wound through—
 And then I let her go (33).

The volume includes a series of songs in the tradition of the blues. “Beef Issue at Fort Sill” speaks of the denigration of the American Indians who according to Harjo’s language were “corralled” or ambushed like sheep. The song focuses on “hunger” to portray their suffering. The poem is written in six lines and contains repetition like the classical blues bringing about a sense of ritualism that makes the sentence lift off the page and into the heart of the reader like a chant. Song three entitled “Soldiers” reflects on the urgent need to defend the land, the most precious acquisition of Indian Americans because it is through the land that the bond with nature is fully defined and expressed. Song four entitled “Sioux-Soldier- Sold” is confrontational in its content as it explores the law and the atrocious onslaught onto American Indian territories:

There is the law of the Creator which
 Tells us:
 Do not take what is not yours to take.
 Do not take more than you can use.
 Respect life and the giver of life.
 Give back.
 Defend your people when there is need
 For defense (40).

‘Take’ is an action verb that Harjo repeats in the song to highlight the unspeakable horrors perpetrated against her people. Greedy ‘taking’ is the emotion that Harjo captures in these lines. In contrast to “taking,” giving is the creator’s paradigm since we can keep only what we give. Harjo legalizes the act of self-defense in the face of aggression.

And when a people strips your spirit of
Your body and sells your "red skins" for
Bounty, then they are the ones
Who have broken the law (40).

"Zero Hero" is the fifth song in the series outlining what could have been had the authorities capitalized on togetherness rather than divisiveness. The zero-sum game according to Harjo has lost the "hero," the supposed victor, a share of victory because it was not based on the principle of oneness. "We are one people" asserts Harjo at the opening of the poem. She lists possibilities about an alliance, or a communion that could have been shared. They could have feasted and carried out activities together. Song six "Let'm eat Grass" is a rather curious choice for a title which taps into the life of animals grazing in the wild. It is Harjo's way of referring to the oneness of all creation—a unity that defines our relationship with animals and nature.

Song seven entitled "Three Ghost Figures" features the death of all time. Time is divided and transfigured into a state of decay. Being a ghost in the poem refers to the sense of suspension between life and death. The sense of stunted growth and in betweenness defines the nature of time for American Indians:

The past rose up before us and cried
In the voices of the children who were dragged
To Indian school and never returned.
The Present spoke up and those who remembered
How to listen could hear.
The Future was a path through soldiers
With Gatling guns and GMO spoiled crops
Motioning us to safety (43).

According to the poem, the past is as much lost as the treasures of children gone under its thrall. The present is the time in which communication takes place, that is only useful for the few who can exercise the power of active listening. The future is already soiled with armed soldiers representing aggression on the physical level along with other evils like poisoning the land leading to carcinogenic food choices. In order to heal time, Harjo experiments with this interface between linear and eternal time. The act of moving between these two categories helps create an opening in consciousness leading to epiphany. She shares the American Indian perception of time with Moyers:

I don't see time as linear. I don't see things as beginning or ending. A lot of 'people have a hard time understanding native people and native patience—they wonder why we aren't out marching to accomplish something. There is no question that we have an incredible history, but I think to understand Indian people and the native mind you have to understand that we experience the world very differently. For us, there is not just this world, there's also a layering of others. Time is not divided by minutes and hours, and everything has presence and meaning within this landscape of timelessness (38-39).

Harjo's depiction of timelessness is an attempt at its healing. Harjo's understanding of time is clearly featured in her poetry as fluidity that is best described as movement through spheres of time that represent consciousness and connection. Her perception of time is expressed as unison, like her understanding of the human relationship with nature. Such an understanding is elemental to the process of transcendence through forgiveness since she maintains the power of looking at time from an external vantage point as a wholistic presence that is endowed with meaning rather than divisions that render perception impossible to achieve.

"How to Write a Poem in a Time of War" delineates war and chronicles the losses represented in rape, incineration, murder and pilfering. According to Harjo, her people came close to losing the story they share with posterity in favor of a version of the narrative of subjection and servitude.

A baby strapped to its mother's back, cut loose. Soldiers crawl the city, the river, the town, the village, the bedroom, our kitchen. They eat everything. Or burn it. They kill what they cannot take. They rape. What they cannot kill they take.
They started teaching our children their god's story,
A story in which we'd always be slaves (47, 8).

Harjo tells the reader that "terror had become the familiar stranger" (49). In *MVSKOKE MOURNING SONG*, she laments her losses: "I have no more land. I am driven away from home, driven up the red waters, let us all go, let us all die together and somewhere upon the banks we will be there" (51). Running in the poem is the answer to Harjo's trouble as she becomes an agent of change. At the end of the poem, she metamorphoses into the wind, representing survival on the one hand, change and wrath on the other: "It was my way of breaking free. I was anything but history. I was the wind" (51).

"Bourbon and Blues" plays a celebratory note in the volume consecrating the spiritual relationship between humanity and nature. Harjo proclaims that we are spirits with a calling that brings us to this planet dressed in the colors of the earth like birds and plants. The calling is to celebrate in praise and song: "Every day was a praise song, every word or act had import /Into the meaning of why we are here as spirits/Dressed in colored earth" (61). Harjo presents an unmistakable sense of identification with the earth. The earth to her represents the oneness of all things and in it is engraved the collective identity of her people. "Road" contains a rumination on roads and the search for a rite of passage that guides spirits on earth back home. This path is instinctively known to humanity: "It's the ancient road the soul knows/We always remember it when we see it/ It beckons at birth/It carries us home" (64). Harjo's attempt in this poem is to find her way home (Coltelli 1996a, p. 60). Gratitude is certainly the right path for a home coming fully expressing in "Honoring," a poem of thanks and gratitude:

Let's remember to thank the grower of food
The picker, the driver, The sun and the rain.
Let's remember to thank each maker of stitch and layer of pattern,
The dyer of color in the immense house of beauty and pain.
Let's honor the maker. Let's honor what's made (69).

In this poem, Harjo shares her gratitude with all those who add color to the tapestry of beauty and pain. The poem is a praise song for the sun and the rain, and all natural elements that make life livable not only by providing for us but also by being testimonials on the sanctity of living. It is impossible to savor beauty without experiencing the pain and the agony of living. Life is referred to as a ceremony of nests raising kids like birds in a nest until they take wing and depart.

In “When Adolph Sax Patented,” music is presented as the magical space of being and forgiveness, a space so enchanted that it is transformative of emotions and fate. Harjo presents the saxophone as a human voice and tells the reader why it is important to her:

The saxophone is so human. Its tendency is to be rowdy, edgy, talk too loud, bump into people, say the wrong words at the wrong time, but then, you take a breath all the way from the center of the earth and blow. All that heartache is forgiven. All that love we humans carry makes a sweet, deep sound and we fly a little (77).

Harjo speaks of the transformative power of music as a rite of passage in her act of transcendence. Music is to Harjo an alternative language that maintained power of connectedness:

My rite of passage into the world of humanity occurred then, through jazz. The music was a startling bridge between familiar and strange lands. I heard stomp-dance shells, singing. I saw suits, satin, fine hats. I heard workers singing in the fields. It was a way to speak beyond the confines of ordinary language. Because music is a language that lives in the spiritual realms, we can hear it, we can notate it and create it, but we cannot hold it in our hands (Harjo 2012, pp. 18–19).

In *Crazy Brave*, Harjo writes about the power of music, influenced by the Cherokee composer Louis Ballard: “Music is direct communication with the sacred. It exists in a virtual invisible realm. There is no border of the corporeal, though words can be carried and lifted by music” (85). Music empowers Harjo to create out of her poetry a prayer, an incantation of gratitude which chants hurt in a modulation of joy. Music in that sense presents an alternative language of communication governed by harmony and peace rather than discord.

“Let There be No Regrets” asserts that planet earth is not a person, but God’s Handiwork that keeps tally and maintains patience until the time of reckoning comes. In this poem, Harjo passes judgment on the destroyers who will be doomed because of the same acts and deeds: “To the destroyers/Earth is not a person/They will want more until there is no more to steal/ Earth who does not know time is patient/ The destroyers will destroy themselves” (78). A prayer for the purging of the human self and of the land is Harjo’s way of consecrating her world: “Let there be no regrets, no sadness, no anger, no acts of disturbance to these lands” (78). The circularity of traversing from anger to peace is Harjo’s literary hallmark.

In “Advice for Country Advanced, Developing and Falling,” Harjo pinpoints the danger of power when centralized and placed in the wrong hands. Sharing power is only the beginning of wisdom: “Power is dangerous when wielded in the hands of one. It is meant to be shared” (79). She continues to deliver a lesson in

democracy about the representation of all the voices: "There will be no balance without all voices present in the power circle" (80). Harjo's contribution in the world is shared in "Tobacco Origin Story" in which she writes her own version of genesis, a beginning of the world that can only be maintained by planting songs and celebration of life: "In the moonlight tobacco plant had silver/Moon buttons all up her back./We're getting dressed to go plant new songs with words" (82).

Harjo includes many historical references about the Battle of Horeshoe Bend Grounds. She acknowledges this battle a massacre (100) as she arms herself against melancholy. Harjo courageously faces a reenactment of the killing years after. She had already picked up her grandfather's skill of bending time and reality. Her ability to be present in the spectrum of time assures the reader that the killing has only desecrated bodies but not souls. The souls of ancestry live on in stories told to younger generations to come. Harjo has always been made aware of her ancestry and of how alive their worlds are within her to the point that her poems have "become travels into that space" (Moyers 1996, p. 38). Harjo insists that "the battle did not destroy us" because survival is the instinct that drives American Indians. The secret of self-regeneration lies at the core of Harjo's anthropomorphic beliefs expressed in the oneness of nature and humanity, a reality to be celebrated all the way through eternity. The answer to desecration is the celebration of bodies that still stand and incorporate the philosophy of survival in the face of chaos: "Our spirits needed a way to dance through the heavy mess" (101). Embracing the mess remains Harjo self-defensive strategy in the hope for a transfiguration bringing about transcendence through the acceptance of the light: "I read about transcendence, how the light/Came in through the window of a nearby traveler/ And every cell of creation opened its mouth/To drink grace" (102). Upon revisiting her uncle's stolen home, she calls the beauty surrounding it: "the waters of this river/these healing plants, these stones" along with the "suns of our lost days." "They could not remember because to remember would have killed us, when nothing else did" (103).

"An American Sunrise" is the title poem of the volume. In it, Harjo proclaims: "We are running out of breath, as we ran out to meet ourselves" (105). It was in nature that Harjo found comfort and explanation of her life and that of others. What she discovered is a story of connectedness: "we knew we were all related in this story" (105). She later compares human connectedness with the origin of the blues; the music that was made in Africa and later America to cry out the wrongdoing done to African Americans. Harjo harnesses the power of all ethnic struggles in the US and brings them in connection to her own: "Forty years later and we still want justice. We are still America. We" (105). Despite her overriding sense of wrong, Harjo never for a second lost her sense and pride of belonging to the United States. "Bless This Land" is Harjo's powerful closure of the volume. Instead of harboring hatred and enmity, Harjo blesses the United States as a land shrouded in ambivalence as she acknowledges the incidence of new stories to be told.

Bless this land from the top of its head to the bottom of its feet.
Bless the eyes of this land for they witness cruelty and kindness in this land.

Bless the ears of this land, for they hear cries of heartbreak and shouts of celebration in this land (106).

This paper chronicled the journey of healing of the trauma of memory and history in Joy Harjo's two volumes *Conflict Resolution of Holy Beings* and *An American Sunrise*. The Analysis of the poems proves that Harjo successfully rewrites a story that features pain and joy leading to transcendence and personal freedom through acceptance, love and self-forgiveness. Her poetry presents a composite of trickster tales, oral traditions as well as modern native American writing that represents an echo of old and new. Drawing upon themes of human unison with nature, fluidity of time in the act of remembrance and using the English language as a linguistic medium for the victorious claiming of the right to memory and to transcendence. The two volumes chart geographical journeys in places and spaces of recall with the hope that the soul finds a space that it calls home. Both volumes feature patterns of circular journeying between pain and joy, light and dark, holding hurt and releasing it, withholding self-forgiveness and finally embracing it as the power of self-liberation. The lost places of memory are transformed into spaces of remembrance tempered with the weight of the past but also punctuated with the light of the present. The two volumes discussed in this paper pave the way for her later work published in November 2022 entitled *Weaving Sundown in a Scarlet Light* in which she gets inspired by Navajo horse songs and jazz as she formulates her vision of the contemporary world.

Harjo's dexterous ability at naming and claiming marks her for distinction. She named hurt and claimed healing. She named anger and claimed forgiveness and grace. She chose to change her story and that of her people. It is a story that "wants to live" and has the ability to arrive at "the non-separate," a point of harmony that is only found in nature as a matrix of unity and regeneration. Hers is a story made of fire as warmth and light, made of wind as change, made of earth as both sustenance and witness, and made of the waters as baptism and cleansing. She named a language of erasure, only to claim a rite of passage to an alternative version of the language of nature as liberation from bondage transforming rootlessness and physical displacement into a spiritual home coming in verse that journeys the expanse of time unified. Harjo carves for herself a space and a voice that is distinctive of an American writer who dwells on the restoration of being. Her work is compelling as it stands at the apex of Native American literary writing as she strikes the note of survival and continuity. Harjo salvages herself and her people as she weaves her own version of the narrative interlaced with words and seeped in the music of creation and nature; a music that ensures that tomorrow's sun will rise and dispel the darkness of the night.

References

- Aull B, et al. (1996) The spectrum of other languages. In *Joy Harjo: The Spiral of Memory: Interviews*, 99–110. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Bruchac J (1996) The story of all our survival: interview. In *Joy Harjo: The Spiral of Memory: Interviews*, 22–30. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Bryson JS (2002) Finding the way back: place and space in the ecological poetry of Joy Harjo. In *Melus 27* (3 Native American Literature), 169–196.
- Buntin S (2011) Exploring the depth of creation and meaning. In *Soul Talk, Song Language: Conversations with Joy Harjo*, 31–37, with Joy Harjo and Tanaya Winder. Wesleyan University Press. Kindle Edition.
- Carabi A (1996) A laughter of absolute sanity: an interview with Angels Carabi, *The Spiral of Memory: Interviews*, 133–142. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Coltelli L (2011) Forward: a carrier of memory. In *Soul Talk, Song Language: Conversations with Joy Harjo*, 77–199, with Joy Harjo and Tanaya Winder. Wesleyan University Press. Kindle Edition.
- Coltelli L (2005) Joy Harjo's poetry: the power of the word. In *The Cambridge Companion to Native American Literature*, 283–296. Cambridge University Press. Kindle Edition.
- Coltelli L (1996a) The circular dream. In *Joy Harjo: The Spiral of Memory: Interviews*, 60–74. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Coltelli L (1996b) Introduction: the transformative power of Joy Harjo's poetry. In *Joy Harjo: The Spiral of Memory: Interviews*, 1–13. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Harjo J, Strom S (1989) *Poet warrior: a memoir*. Tucson: Sun Tracks and the University of Arizona Press.
- Harjo J (2021) *Poet warrior: a memoir*. W. W. Norton & Company. Kindle Edition.
- Harjo J (2019) *An American sunrise: poems*. W. W. Norton & Company. Kindle Edition.
- Harjo J (2015) *Conflict resolution for holy beings: poems*. W. W. Norton & Company. Kindle Edition.
- Harjo J (2012) *Crazy brave: a memoir*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Harjo J, Winder T (2011) *Soul talk, song language: conversations with Joy Harjo*. Wesleyan University Press. Kindle Edition.
- Jossa E (2007) The colors of the earth: nature and landscape in the poetry of Joy Harjo and Humberto Ak'Abal. *Journal of the South West* 49(4): 585–602.
- Kallet M (1996) In love, war and music. In *Joy Harjo: The Spiral of Memory: Interviews*, 111–123. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Moyers B (1996) Ancestral voices. *Joy Harjo: The Spiral of Memory: Interviews*, 36–49. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Hobby ST (2011) The craft of soul talk. In *Soul Talk, Song Language: Conversations with Joy Harjo*. Wesleyan University Press. Kindle Edition.
- Rader D (2002) Word as weapon: visual culture and contemporary American Indian poetry. *Melus 27*(3 Native American Literature): 147–167.
- Rodriguez, Gibson E (2002) Love, hunger and grace in the poetry of Lorna D. Cervantes and Joy Harjo. *Legacy* 19(1): 106–114.
- Roy L (2011) Song language: creating from the heart, out. In *Soul Talk, Song Language: Conversations with Joy Harjo*, 61–67.
- Ruwe D (1996) Weaving stories for food. In L. Coltelli (ed.), *The Spiral of Memory: Interviews*, 124–132. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

- Seiferle R (2011) Music poetry and stories: returning to the root source. In *Soul Talk, Song Language: Conversations with Joy Harjo*, 27–30. Wesleyan University Press. Kindle Edition.
- Stever S (1996) Landscape and the place inside. *Joy Harjo: The Spiral of Memory: Interviews*, 75–87. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Winfrey O (2019) *Interview with Joy Harjo*. In *Super Soul Sunday*. Youtube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JLmGUOwoOe4>.
- Winn H, et al. (2011) You might as well dance. In *Soul Talk, Song Language: Conversations with Joy Harjo*, 68–77. Wesleyan University Press. Kindle Edition.

