

ABSTRACT

This bachelor thesis analyses the themes of memory and storytelling in the work of the American Indian poet Joy Harjo and argues that memory and storytelling are portrayed as indispensable means of survival and perseverance. A great emphasis is put on the detrimental effect of losing connection to one's culture as it jeopardizes the prospect of preserving one's life and culture. A renewed link promises the hope of survival and provides a way of overcoming the negative consequences of the past, of affirming one's identity and of persevering. The importance of memory as well as the crucial role of storytelling in ensuring the continuation of one's culture and people are examined in poems from the 1980s and 1990s poetry collections *She Had Some Horses* (1983), *In Mad Love and War* (1990), *The Woman Who Fell from the Sky* (1994), and *A Map to the Next World* (2000).

Memory and storytelling are introduced as key concepts in Harjo's poetry. Harjo's Creek (or Muskogee) heritage and her experience as an indigenous person in the United States influence her artistic relationship to memory. Memory includes ancestral knowledge and oral tradition; remembering becomes a way of reconnecting, of ensuring the continuance of the indigenous peoples and their cultures. Storytelling is examined as an essential traditional tool for accessing memory and keeping it alive. The emphasis is on the importance of the practice in the community: the sharing of stories among people, the importance of using one's voice and the power of imagination and language. Furthermore, it is discussed how Harjo's experience with her mixed-blood identity is connected to the aforementioned themes and how it influences her work.

A separate chapter is dedicated to the analysis of memory and storytelling in each selected work. In terms of content, remembering and the danger of forgetting is examined. Drawing from oral tradition of American indigenous peoples, Harjo also thematizes the interaction of the mythical and the physical world and its importance for survival. Storytelling

is analysed in the acts of telling and sharing stories, in connection to oral tradition and traditional practices. Subsequently, the influence of memory and storytelling on formal features of Harjo's poetry is discussed. The earlier poems frequently use repetition and are inspired by traditional forms of a chant or a prayer. *In Mad Love and War* introduces prose poems, an innovative form within Harjo's poetry, blending poetic and prosaic methods of expression. *The Woman Who Fell from the Sky* further experiments with the interaction of poetry and prose, pairing most poems with short accompanying prose pieces. This tendency is further explored in *A Map to the Next World* with the inclusion of more complex and independent prose pieces accompanying the poems.

Each chapter dedicated to the poetry collections also includes an analysis of prominent motifs and themes connected with the portrayal of memory and storytelling. In her poetry Harjo provides a complex portrait of lives of contemporary urban American Indians, mainly of their fight for survival in the face of devastation caused by colonialism. The need for overcoming fear and voicelessness and the crossing boundaries between cultures and people are depicted in *She Had Some Horses*. In *In Mad Love and War* the recurring motif is transformation of hatred into love and the power of positive reimagination. In *The Woman Who Fell from the Sky* the overarching theme is togetherness, focusing on the importance of creating connections among people and finding community. *A Map to the Next World* deals with the tension of constant destruction and renewal, also reflected in the motif of "returning from the enemy", an indigenous ceremony of facing devastation and finding a way back, offering the prospect of a better future.