Remember Rough Draft

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Joy Harjo is a Native American poet and a member of the Muscogee Creek Nation. According to New York Times, she “…has since published volumes of poetry that explore the connection between spirituality, nature and womanhood, with a focus on Native American history and experience.” In “Remember”, Harjo focuses mainly on the connection between some of these themes: nature, womanhood and Native American history.

Since Joy Harjo typically focuses on Native American history and culture in her poems, they are repeatedly brought up in “Remember”. A major part of Native American culture is remembering the trauma experienced. While conducting research on American Indians and how they have dealt with trauma, researcher Teresa Evans-Campbell said, “Yet respondents also shared many coping strategies, including having deep emotional attachments with others, holding traditional values, helping others, and focusing on future generations” (Evans-Campbell, 2008). Going back to “Remember”, Harjo wrote the word remember 16 times throughout the poem, while also being the title, making it the most repeated and significant word. As a coping strategy of the trauma she has faced, Harjo seems to be holding traditional values and focusing on future generations. By writing this poem she seems to be sending the message to future generations to remember where they came from. It could be to also reflect on what past generations went through, being a metaphor to remember because they were forced to forget during assimilation.

Interpreters of the poem often say things like, “It seems to be addressed by a Native American speaker who remembers her heritage, telling her story to another person who may have forgotten this shared identity” (Poetry for Students, 2010). I think that the “forgotten the shared identity” part could mean assimilation. Native Americans used to be forced to go to schools by the government in order to “forget” their culture and turn into something they aren’t. They had to cut their hair, change the clothes they wore, speak a new language and change their names. They were discriminated against and punished because of their culture, a lot like victims of the Holocaust. The mistreatment and assimilation of Native Americans is similar to the Holocaust in some ways. In a study conducted by Teresa Evans-Campbell, she focuses on American Indian and Native Alaskan communities, but brings up groups that have experienced similar traumas and effects from said traumas. For instance, she says, “Holocaust survivors demonstrated tremendous resiliency and coping after massive trauma, yet many also experienced a range of negative mental health symptoms” (Evans-Campbell, 2008). So many ethnicities, religions, races, and genders have been persecuted, and all the victims deal with the trauma faced in different ways. For instance, Elie Wiesel, a survivor of the Holocaust, puts pen to paper and writes his book, *Night*, about his experiences. Much like Wiesel, Harjo puts pen to paper and writes to past, present, and future people.

Ecological poet- : Go into the importance of nature with native americans

Being known as an ecological poet, Joy Harjo a journal says her focus is“…(1) to create *place,* making a conscious and concerted effort to know the more-than-human world around them; and (2) to value *space,* recognizing the extent to which that very world is ultimately unknowable” (Bryson, 2002). In “Remember”, over half of the lines focus on natural objects, and personify them. In her opening lines, Joy Harjo writes, “Remember the sky that you were born under,  
know each of the star's stories” (Harjo 1983). When people look at the sky, they don’t tend to think about the “star’s stories”, but Harjo does. She gives the stars history and connects birth to nature by saying we are born under the sky. Normally when talking about birth, people say they were born in a hospital or in a house, but Harjo intentionally establishes the initial relationship between human and nature from the very beginning of life. Another line where nature is giving human qualities is, “Remember the plants, trees, animal life who all have their tribes, their families, their histories, too” (Harjo 1983). By giving these plants, trees, and animals history and families, they can be seen as just as important as humans who also have history and families. When Harjo says too, it is implying that they have just as much importance as humans do, because they are like us “too”.

Throughout “Remember”, there is a theme of not only personifying nature, but establishing the moon and wind as women. Harjo writes, “Remember the moon, know who she is.” (Harjo 1983). In an overview of “Remember”, it is said that “In tribal traditions, the moon is a deity and her cycles govern planting times, harvest, hunting, and especially ceremonies” (Poetry for Students, 2010). I think that the moon can also be seen as a woman because “she” watches over you at night and seems to be protective while you are helpless while asleep. When picturing a person to protect you while sleeping, I picture a mom, who would do whatever it takes to keep you safe. As far as governing the cycles of Native American culture, it makes sense to be a female. Going back in history, women typically focused on planting, harvesting, and cooking, as opposed to masculine jobs like hunting and warfare. Another line in the poem is

“Remember the wind. Remember her voice. She knows the  
origin of this universe.” (Harjo 1983). I think that the wind is seen to be a female because of her strength and knowledge. The wind knows everything about the universe.

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