

**Writing Sounds and Singing Words: Transgeneric
Aesthetics in the Works of Joy Harjo**

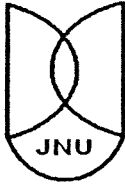
Dissertation submitted to
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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Philosophy
by

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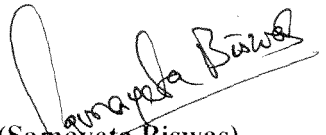
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DECLARATION BY THE CANDIDATE

This dissertation titled "*Writing Sounds and Singing Words: Transgeneric Aesthetics in the Works of Joy Harjo*" submitted by me for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any University or Institution.


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INTRODUCTION: "SENDING A VOICE"

I. The Native Americans had a song for everything—for death, for birth, for war, for peace, for sorrow, for happiness. I am reminded of a Seminole medicine-song for birth as I begin my journey, a lullaby sang to the new born child introducing him/her to the rhythms of the world.

Song for Bringing a Child into the World

Let

The child

Be

Born

Circling around

you day-sun

You wrinkled skin

circling around

You flecked with grey

circling around

Circling around

you night sun

You wrinkled age

circling around

Circling around

you poor body¹

¹ Swann, Briann, *Native American Songs and Poems: An Anthology*, Courier Dover Publications, 1996:1.

II. In his introduction to *Native American Renaissance*, Kenneth Lincoln writes: “ Among the Lakota on the Northern Plain where I was raised, “sending a voice” invoked the mysterious and sensible powers that moved the world....*Skán* was the sky, and was also a spirit that was everywhere, and that gave life and motion to everything that lived or moved.... This power that moves the moving world vast as the sky itself, can still be petitioned through *Tate*, or the wind, in a person’s own voice.”² Lincoln further adds, that the belief that the human *voice* can act as power to invoke the *Wakan* or the Spirit of the world, lies behind almost all of the Native American literatures of the world, in a regard that remains Pan-Indian, even if in the modern age we will not know it in the form it manifested itself before colonisation. “ Indian literary history spans older oral traditions (crying for vision or recounting honourable deeds, telling tribal stories or chanting personal songs, making medicine or entreating spirits, retelling communal past or prophesying the future) over the long cultural odyssey into written contemporary poetry, fiction, essay, drama, and treatise. And so, tracing the connection between the cultural past and its expression in the present...”³

The literature of most of the world almost exclusively begins with the awareness of its native and tribal population of a kind of sentience that pervades the life of the landscape and the space around them, the expression of which manifested itself in their various rituals, sacrifices or creations from songs to drawings to carvings. It is not just a manner of speaking or writing alone, but a listing of the complete progression of life from the birth, to growth and finally, to death, in terms of its economic and social existence, language, history, beliefs, traditions, and ideals, and it is imperative for us to keep in mind that the majority of this, was unwritten, transmitted orally through the various devices of memory to the succeeding generations. In Native American ways of being, most of these words, memories, stories, and this awareness was transmitted through song and poetry, the voice reciting to uncomplicated harmonies all the facets that made up the tribe’s life. Their way of telling, seeing the world and the word, creating memories and essentially what was vitally considered as the same-spirited art of music and poetry and dance, in celebration all ceremonies of life, sacred or of daily existence.

² Lincoln, Kenneth, *Native American Renaissance*, University of California Press, 1985; 1.

³ *Ibid*, 2.

One often finds the interesting placement of materials by Native Americans in libraries, book store section, research archives or music stores, very telling and if not in the least, intriguing, classed either in ethnography or ethnomusicology section or that exotic version of it called “New Age”, a style of allotment that invariably involves an inherent ideological standard. For example, neither Walt Whitman or Leonard Bernstein is usually placed alongside The Visions of Black Elk or Recordings of Traditional Navajo Warpath or Beautyway songs, though both of them belong to analogous and relevant categories of literature and music, leading one to wonder or maybe even believe that if such works may be either *different* in some way or may be even *inferior* to standards of “civilized” artistic or literary or musical practices. Native American literatures and performative arts have traditionally been stored and categorized and labeled separately from what we include in our regular, “mainstream” diet, and as such the Canon of literature or music has no necessity or liberty for either of them, neither is the consideration that music and literature, especially poetry, might share something serious together that can transcend the respective realms, of pure musicological practical concerns unintelligible to the litterateurs , or absolutely literary and theoretical apparatuses hardly serviceable to the musician.

In a typical speech characteristic of what the traditional concerns nineteenth and early twentieth century academia canonized as regards poetry and music, Albert Mockel speaks in an address in 1941:

Music will be eternally jealous of poetry, because the latter can express not only emotions but ideas. And written poetry, in turn, can be jealous of its novel rival music, because musical language knows nothing of dialects, races and borders. ⁴

Even to the uninitiated in the rites to the turns which critical thinking has recently taken to accommodate the non-canonical, the various –isms to re-think our basic presumptions about

⁴ Acquisto, Joseph, *French Symbolist Poetry and the Idea of Music*; Ashgate Publishing: 2006, 2.

literature, culture and the societies that produce them, the above declaration comes out as rancorous in various aspects, but particularly in making such a squeaky clean distinction between music and poetry and ascribing limitations to them, almost guilty of anthropomorphic fallacy in the most negative of human emotions, divisive instead of all-encompassing. For the Native Americans, especially the Mississippian tribes, whose descendents include the Mvskoke/Creek, the word, the thing, the symbol and the object had the same call, and it is the awareness of that, which brings about the regenerative powers of the medicine songs or the healing chants, or even songs and poems sung and spoken about any non-ceremonial occasion. The poet, supplements the ability of the thought by his utterance because it is by now instilled with the power of sound, for music is instinctive in poetry, as in all verbal arts, for poetry alone has the singularly inimitable quality of stimulating the brain functions of both the right and the left hemispheres, both the verbal functions as well as the spatial functions of music, and rhythms. It is not speaking it out, that makes us forgetful of the power of thought hidden in the sound of it, which has woven the gamut of the oral traditions from the times of dreams to the harsh realities of a postcolonial era.

The Native Americans have long been constructed under an 'Othering' experience through a series of politically endorsed endeavours at wholesale cultural annihilation of thought and language throughout the literary and cultural history of America. Spoken word offers insight into the expansion of these signifying processes in the shifting edifying praxes of multicultural America, this being the only remaining and the only potent instrument of resistance when all physical resistance fails, not in form of violence but the inherent belief that words and singing can "make things happen"⁵. As Dean Radar says,

From the Ghost Dance to the Mayan power song "They Came from the East" to the Iroquois's anti-Anglo spell "Magic Formula" to the Yana's "Curse on People that Wish One Ill," Native communities have invested in language the ability to control identity and destiny....The ghost dance is a provocative vision of resistance, and it stands as a

⁵ Radar, Dean, "Word as Weapon: Visual Culture and Contemporary American Indian Poetry", MELUS, Vol. 27, No. 3, *Native American Literature* (Autumn, 2002), pp. 147-167:147

complex example of how Native Americans see language as a viable weapon to protect cultural identity and sovereignty.⁶

Although there exists an extensive amount of work on performance poetry, the interaction between poetry and music, the linguistic functionality of sound as resistive, on Native American Poetry and the mixed-blood, the minority and the immigrant in the American multicultural context, none of these has attempted to weave all these disparate strands together in one composite whole, especially in reference to Native American studies. Harjo's work covers all these concerns in to one single swift edition of her vision regarding the one-ness of poetry and music, where she draws on the impulses of her native and oral traditions regarding language and spoken word into creating a new epistemology. In this project, I plan to study and illustrate how Joy Harjo, of a Mvskoke-Cherokee-French-Irish heritage, essentially a mixed blood, tries to re-negotiate the interaction between poetry and music, working on the Native American idea about language and oral traditions, which acts not only as a primary mechanism for understanding and disseminating the culture of the spoken word in the sacred, secular and all permeating life of the tribe that expressed itself through song-poetry-dance rhythms, but also the many linguistic, political and cultural trajectories trodden simultaneously by a woman of mixed-blood heritage in modern America which otherises the native and indigenous tribe and their lives. I would illustrate how she uses the primary conception of language, nurtured by the Native Americans, to re-discover the link between the written text and the spoken act and take it back to the originary impulse where poetry and music were the same, and use it innovatively not only to illustrate her own hybrid space in a debatably postcolonial America, but also as a mode of resistance to the linguistic, cultural, aesthetic and thus ideological hegemony of the logic of the print capital in Canonisational practices and the colour blind universalism of the United States. Being primarily a poet, having begun as a poet, and holding on to music as she proceeded to her journey further into exploring the realms of jazz and poetry, I take under consideration the poems of Joy Harjo which she has, till date, adapted to music (which is nevertheless the major part of her oeuvre), and try to understand how the concerns delineated above work themselves out thus in the respective pieces. In order to understand what Harjo does, I would suggest in the preliminary

⁶ Radar, Dean, "Word as Weapon: Visual Culture and Contemporary American Indian Poetry", MELUS, Vol. 27, No. 3, *Native American Literature* (Autumn, 2002), pp. 147-167:147.

portions of my thesis, it is highly necessary, almost simultaneously, to understand the way most of her contemporary poets and musicians, writers and thinkers of native mixed blood origin refer to the oral traditions and beliefs in the all-pervasive power of language to create and dis-create, while innovatively using these arcs to express the in-between worlds of the hybrid, the one-of-many-worlds, the marginal voice that can tell many stories at once. As Diane Glancy says, “I am a marginal voice in several worlds. I can tell several stories at once. Mixed-blood stories of academic life and the experience of Christianity. Nothing fitting with anything else. The word ‘community’ has always meant being ‘left out’. But...the voice is one story holding the disparate parts”⁷.

Joy Harjo, of the Mvskoke band of Native Americans, (“a stolen people in a stolen land”⁸), popularly introduced as one of Native America’s most famous and internationally known and revered poet-musician, was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Even if she is known and works originally as a poet, she is also a musician who plays alto saxophone along with her band *Poetic Justice*, who has earlier won awards for her paintings, and she has been working in the films for almost as long as poetry or theatre, and currently training to become a competitor at open sea outrigger canoeing competitions in Hawaii, and till recently held a professorial post at UCLA. Winner of a number of awards from international as well as Native American circles of music, poetry, paintings and many more, this is not a space to introduce her anew, for her numerous works and introductions are present all over the poetry and music circles. Harjo started writing poetry inspired by what has been popularly referred to as the Native American Renaissance, which encouraged several young writers, poets and artists to find a voice, to legitimize their being as a human with something important, something lasting and sometimes even visionary to utter. As Harjo says, talking about the influence of Leslie Marmon Silko and Simon Ortiz on her during this period that chalked out her path for the rest of her when she was, in her own reminiscences, standing in a whirlwind of pain and silent confused screams:

⁷ Glancy, Diane, *The Cold-and-Hunger Dance*, Nebraska: U of Nebraska Press, 2002: 1.

⁸ Harjo, Joy, “Autobiography”, in *In Mad Love and War*, Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1990: 14.

I started writing as an art student at the University of New Mexico. I met her [Leslie Marmon Silko] then. She gave me my first electric typewriter, among other things. She gave me a tremendous amount of support and was one of my best critics. And of course, Simon [Ortiz]. They began it for me.⁹

As already stated, breath, speech and music were considered by many Native American tribes as being One, and having a tremendous invocative power (in Lakota, it is the *Taku Skanskan* or “What-Moves-moves”, which can be invoked by the *Niya*, or the life-breath) , so much so that one singular word was often used for all three of them. There were no separate concepts for them, so much so that the separate criterion of ‘art’ did not exist at all. All these processes were part and parcel of life, everyday or ceremonial. Like the Navajo, the Creek and the Cherokee who believed that the thoughts of the gods created the world by actualizing it through language and idea into spoken acts, Joy Harjo, ties together her different destinies, and sings her words, putting music to poetry and putting poetry in music, to recover song and poetry in its ordinary sense, to retrieve the foundational principles of the people, which is a also, way of living her non-indigenous heritage as well as her indigenous ones. Harjo is telling is her story, the story of her people and the story of her poetry and her music, and how their one-ness inspired her to talk, to talk herself into being and into survival, weaving new webs of stories and songs where the old ones tear down, much in the fashion of what Leslie Marmon Silko describes how the Laguna creator, the Thought-Woman created the universe:

Thought-woman, the spider,

Named things and

As she named them

They appeared.

.....

⁹ Jakoski, Helen and Joy Harjo, *A MELUS Interview: Joy Harjo*, MELUS, Vol. 16, No. 1, Folklore and Orature (Spring, 1989 - Spring, 1990), pp. 5-13. 7.

She is sitting in her room

Thinking of a story now

I am telling you the story

She is thinking¹⁰

Each experience is distinctive in itself, in its own way, but that does not necessarily imply that they form a world so closed that a poet's world becomes dissociated from the musician's experience. It is true that both of them require to a certain extent a kind of a specialized sensibility, but neither can be pleurably benefited up to their highest potentialities in complete and utter independence of each other. From the ancient Greek concept of *mousike*, to the Native American performance of Ghost Dance ceremonies that were believed to hold so much power in the spoken word as to articulate the white man out of existence; the notion of the union or oneness of word, music and dance, could not be further away from what we see in the modern day poetry or music departments. Among attempts by the various native American tribes to claim the past and the cultural identity, happens to be various performances, dances, powwows still performed by the various plains tribes, specially the Hopis, which is often an attempt to assert back the title of the 'Anasazi', the ancient people, by resorting to this technique to going back to the root of all creation through a simultaneous understanding of language, word, speech, dance, ceremony and music. They were created for tribal occasions both sacred and regular, to pass on tribal history, codes of conduct, the geography of the land, chanted to drums or other musical accompaniments, spoken, repeated, chanted over and over again, the singer imagining himself as the buffalo or the rain cloud that he wishes to attract, sung in the most economic of words- for example this beautiful Dream Song, " as my eyes search the prairie/ I feel summer in the spring./ whenever I pause/ the noise/ of village"¹¹- evoking the very verve at the spirit of the tangible understanding of the being or the experience in its exactitude. "I do not know how many are these songs of mine, only I know that there are many, all in me is song. I sing as I draw breath".

¹⁰ Beginning song in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* which refers to the Spider-Woman or Thought Woman or Grandmother Spider, who, in Laguna-Pueblo mythology, believed to have thought the world into creation.

¹¹ Quoted by Francis Densmore, titled "Dreamsong".

¹² Fundamental as existence itself, the oral traditions survive in America, forming its very fabric, even when surrounded by alterations of colonialism, for more than forty thousand years. They speak of mutually shared lives, the story of all people, not separate from the everyday context or even the language of the birds and the hills. In spite of it all, for a long time, native and tribal speakers were segregated from American literary scenario. And now while they speak, many more complex issues are coming to light, that concerns culture and identity, and the perceived differences which make both of the continuums neither a stable nor a static phenomenon, especially after four hundred years of forced acculturation, genocide and colonialism.

Native writers like Simon Ortiz, Leslie Silko, Wendy Rose or Joy Harjo understand the process of this change that helps them negotiate their identity in an ever-changing madly-churning world of American multiculturalism, while simultaneously inhabiting several in-between realms. As Wendy Rose says, reacting to native red-on-red exclusionists; "The colonizer and the colonized meet in my blood. It is much more complex than just white and white Indian".¹³ The same can be said of Harjo. Harjo considers poetry as saving her life in literal terms, she says:

I arrived there barely alive...I was suicidal. At IAIA I was given permission to be an Indian artist. I was given permission to be human. That was no small thing...I don't believe I would be alive today if it hadn't been for writing. There were times when I was conscious of holding on to a pen and letting the words flow, painful and from the gut, to keep from letting go of it all.¹⁴

¹² Quoted in Swann, Brian ed. *Smoothing the Ground: Essays in Native American Oral Literature*, University of California press, 1983. 17.

¹³ Rose, Wendy, quoted in *I Tell You Now; Autobiographical Essays by Native American Writers* ed. By Brian Swann, U of Nebraska Press, 2005, 258.

¹⁴ Root, William Pitt, "About Joy Harjo", *Ploughshares*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (Winter, 2004/2005), pp. 180-185. Pp 182.

She brings tropes of invariable movement, of travelling between realms, worlds, and connecting the disparate, of bridging boundaries and polarities in a constantly shifting planet. Her creation, Noni Daylight moves between spaces factual and fabulous, along unusual courses, investigating the confines of the world, herself and an assortment of personas intrinsic inside the half-breed's blood, singing through the ages of the long and complicated history of America's interaction with the native and the settler cultures. Harjo's project connects different categories not only thematically but in the due process of itself as well, an exploring of the in-between space of an inhabitant of a contact zone, the "trans-everything" zone, incorporate existences, dreams, and knowledges together in an account that stretches from and places an acknowledgment for the past, as well as the continuously changing present.

Joy Harjo's works are interesting on a number of levels. Her poetry for one is primary and fundamental to the attendant cultural instance of her Native American heritage, in fact the cultures of all the indigenous people of the Americas, the First Nations, the Native Americans, the American Indians, call them by different names with the different politics that white-Anglo-Saxon-protestant culture has designed for ages. Even though the few last years have been enlightening in terms of the improvement it has made in a rather extraordinary maturity in the comprehensive management of the issues in the literature of the women of colour, especially the Native American women among others. However, it still stands that a decisive management of the concerns of the native population cannot be sufficiently covered by those of conformist anglo-feminist or postcolonial or the various -ism 'ic' questions alone, but by adequately addressing the arrays of concerns within a larger field of acuity that entails it to be positioned within a larger field of Native American discursive and literary practices. She says:

Without poetry, without song, without dance I would not be alive. Nor would any of us. We come from root cultures in which song, poetry, stories, art was something that belonged to all of us. They were not "spectator sports" as they are mostly in this over-culture. Everyone sang, everyone, danced, made art. It was/is integral to being human. Now it seems reserved for the elite, for those who can afford the time. We need

expression to feel connected, not just to our communities but to who we are down deep, past the eyes and the gullet, to the heart and the incredible depth past it.¹⁵

Harjo has listed in her poems her concerns about the abundant evils of alcoholism, poverty and brutality, the confusion regarding identity and sense of belonging that is often at heads-on with the idea of culture in mainstream America, and she uses her voice to bring out these concerns to the forefront, to make people out there listen, because for her, the extension of the entire human population listening is an extension of the tribe. She sways to the rhythms of her jazzy grooves and memorable synths and hooks drawn from a plethora of legendary musicians, sings chants and dances to her poetry, speaking again and again how the Anglocentric culture has produced dreadfulness prevalent to what she calls “Land of Nightmares”¹⁶, while exploring the attempts made by the dominant centre to eradicate the memories of this holocaust along with the culture, legacy and language of the people living an inconsistent life ravaged by divisions, divorces and conflicted sense of identities, remembrances of the attendant genocide and endeavours to live meaningfully at “the ragged end of this century”(Letter from the End of the Twentieth Century). Harjo describes the modern idea of language as a culprit, saying that it alienates, it creates an un-space that is utterly un-centred, the un-home that has severed her people from the roots of their legacies and the subtle sounds through which the land and the tribal world seeks to manifest itself till today, severing people from the synesthetic somatic awarenesses that spanned the dreamtime and united the people with the world around them in one common sense.

In her edited book *Reinventing the Enemy's Language* (1998) Harjo speaks of re-addressing and re-cognizing the same language that was used for colonization and turning it over to make it a tool of resisting and self-discovery. When she writes, she takes the words on the pages to be a kind of fixed orality, the frozen counterpart of sound, for the way she reinvents the nature of way

¹⁵ Harjo, Joy quoted in *Interview with Joy Harjo: Rebecca Steferle*, <<http://www.thedrunkenboat.com/harjoview.html>>, Web, July 10th 2011.

¹⁶ Joy Harjo in her poem “Reconciliation”, from the collection *The Woman Who Fell From The Sky*.

one can possibly use words long dead and dull and breathe new life into it makes it sound like speaking images, and her music bridges the number of 'horses' running through her past and present, making up whoever she is, taking the words finally to its destination into speaking, into making music.

Harjo's recollections about her childhood give us some insight into the nature of poetry and how it should be read, learnt and taught:

The way poetry was usually taught in the classroom taught us to be fearful of it. The first question after reading a poem was usually, "What does it mean?", when the question should have been, "How does it mean?" So, I found poetry in my mother singing songs with the radio, in the sayings and stories of the people around me, in the shapes and forms of things of beauty.¹⁷

Emphasizing these concerns is necessary, because I think the main impetus behind whatever Harjo does or did in her poetic career has been intimately related to these burning questions that needed to be answered and corrected if necessary, not only for herself but for her people as well. As against the imagists or the beat poets or the numerous other poet-singers who have attempted to will attempt the tread the same trodden ground of marrying back the now divorced poetry with music making them just two expressions of the same species, Harjo's work is made complicated by the fact that she is writing as a native woman, a woman of colour from the minority population of the multicultural American states, writing back at centre from the third space to reclaim the various aesthetic, cultural and linguistic practices of her tribe and her people. It may seem that the very familiarity of her poetic images or the instruments and musical genres she employs for her music makes it and her a support to the popular consumerist fantasies about an already highly exoticised culture, yet in this fashion she disrupts rather than maintain dominant

¹⁷ Quoted in Interview with Joy Harjo by Maria Camboni, , *Dialogue with Joy Harjo: Maria Camboni*, RSA journal, Vol 11, 85-101: 88.

social structures. Yes it is true that she does borrow her elements from mainstream writings and musical structures, that is read and listened to by the 'visibles' and the 'invisibles' alike in the world, but instead of throwing it out along with the 'popular' tag, I would try to think more carefully about the different tags and continuums and the boundaries and definitions and set ideas about poetry, music and western aesthetics that she challenges.

Her poetry and her music grew in her consciousness together, as she has repeatedly stressed over a period of time, so much so that the structures of her poems changed significantly when she started performing them with her band Poetic Justice for the first time, which required providing a separate structure to the poems. The fatalities of the written text on human contact, the context of time and place, and a sense of relationship or bonding to the listeners, are also disregarded as a result of our time's putting undue stress on the importance of the eye, the all-seeing eye at the expense of the ears as well, and the sound that the text embodies. Harjo tries to correct the easy dislocation written language provides to our conception, developing these initiative notions of song-poems and public discourse in a multicultural platform through an original amalgamation of Performative poetics of the 'word', of political statements, and often, of simple and pure soulful lyrics. Her achievement is underlined by her vision in such a way that they challenge the conventional definitions even if it may seem that they continue to affirm the primary significance of performative and literary arts in lived reality.

There exists an extensive amount of research on performance poetry, poetry and music, linguistic functionality of sound especially music in performing a role in defending against static linguisticity, on Native American poetry and the especially poems by women of ethnic minority groups in America specially in the multicultural contexts, but none of these studies have attempted to wove these strands together into one singular coherent whole. Scholarly efforts which attempt to view performativity in modern poetic functions in regards to performing a resistive function as having been resuscitated with an organic connectivity with native American aesthetics, have been largely left untouched.

The first chapter will discuss the critical issues regarding studying artistic mediums not in isolation from one another but in correspondence of one another crossing over and beyond the artificial distinctions taking cue not only from the traditions of Native American thought and beliefs regards performative and sacred arts but also drawing analogies from the thoughts on similar issues from thinkers and philosophers, musicians, poets and writers from world over. It is important to keep in mind the belief in ever-changing, boundary crossing all inclusive realities that Harjo and Wendy Rose talks about that is the essential characteristic of a mixed-blood, and we would do well to remember Tayo's vision in Silko's *Ceremony*:

He [Tayo] cried the relief he felt at finally seeing the pattern, the way all the stories fit together-the old stories, the war stories, their stories-to become the story that was still being told. He was not crazy; he had never been crazy. He had only seen and heard the world as it always was: no boundaries, only transitions through all distances and time.¹⁸

The native aesthetics of oral and indigenous traditions have survived into the present day of colonial written aesthetics of the English language by adjusting and even incorporating the disparate art forms to their advantage thereby building a bridge, as Harjo does when she invokes her inspiration from all that her native traditions have given her, between not only her past and her present, her identity as a member of collective memory of the Mvskoke tribe and mixed blood professor at a university, her oral and her written traditions, between music and poetry, establishing connections thought to be long lost and long broken.

The second chapter considers the analysis of Harjo's works and attempts to look deep into the heart of her philosophy behind her creation, what she draws from her land and her indigenous traditions, the many horses of Noni Daylight, and her attempts to hold the sounds and the words in the same hands, to feel their potential and flesh out something alive resounding and powerful.

¹⁸ Silko, Leslie Marmon, Quoted in *Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony: the Recovery of Traditions*, by Robert M. Nelson, New York,: Peter Lang, 2008; 131. Google Book Search, July 9, 2011.

out of the mere intangibility of air and resounding silence, recreating the tenuous thread of reciprocating sounds. She tells us how she first began 'listening', and it is this listening that poetry and music taught her, in midst of all destruction, at a time when everything round her was falling apart. It is this listening that Harjo declares told her of the essential connectivity of all life inhabiting the Oklahoma red earth or the Mississippi delta or the whole country. To quote one especially resonant line that Harjo recounts espousing this growing consciousness that later coloured all her creations as well as the way she did them:

I traveled far above the earth for a different perspective. It is possible to travel this way without the complications of NASA. This beloved planet we call home was covered with an elastic web of light. I watched in awe as it shimmered, stretched, dimmed and shined, shaped by the collective effort of all life within it. Dissonance attracted more dissonance. Harmony attracted harmony. I saw revolutions, droughts, famines and the births of new nations. The most humble kindnesses made the brightest lights. Nothing was wasted. I understood love to be the very gravity holding each leaf, each cell, this earthy star together. ("The Woman Who Fell From the Sky")

In her prose-poem "The Woman Who Fell From the Sky", Harjo tells us the tale of the Navajo creation-woman, who fell from the sky and created earth at her behest, and her thought. It is her action that we tell in stories, sing and recite, and it is through the spoken word a Tayo or a Saint Coincidence realize that convoluted yet brilliantly coloured world of the half-blood, the one that occupies the in-between space, as well as the power of words to transform reality by creating a sacred space to create identities and control occurrences. It is much in the same way the singing of this old Navajo story held the medicine, the power of creation, so would Harjo's new version of the Woman and Saint Coincidence wield similar power, but this time not by an un-adulterated past but by a going back to the past by accepting the many 'horses', the many 'personas', all her worlds and all her heritages. Harjo thus employs all the equipments they have provided her, into creating a mesmerizing synthesis of blues, poetry, jazz, rock and roll, chants, Creek drums,

vocables and talk-songs, to arrive at what she metaphorically espouses in her first and most popular as well as most enigmatic poem and then all the later cuts, performances and versions of “She Had Some Horses”.

Those were the same horses.

The third chapter considers the rest of Harjo’s works which, as I shall illustrate, takes on the philosophy of “She Had Some Horses”, trying to secure the diverse ends together, while simultaneously attempting to provide a common reconciliatory cord to the same, right from the invocative chant of “Creation Story” to the fulfillment of “Promise” finally situating herself with the landscape in “My House is Red Earth”, from a collection of poetry and still shots called “Secrets From the Centre of the Earth”. On the other hand, she deals with social injustice expressed in musical rhythms and poetic structures in “Fear Poem” to “For Anna Mae Pictou Aquash”, with a paradoxical and austere combination of otherwise disparate metaphoric successions, which reflects in her music as well. Harjo’s conversation with many worlds takes further maturity with her album “Native Joy For Real” which recognizes the ultimate power of singing in rendering the difficult and often impossible nature of crossing distances made possible.

III. What can have a definite way of describing and a definite definition is probably worth only that much to say, only that very much that lives between those lines and those spaces and not beyond it, you can not hold it in your hands as if it will spill over and feel the texture of it or roll over the thoughts in your heads like your favourite candy, discovering new flavours every moment. Poor indeed is what expires the moment you close the last page, or know what follows

the moment when you open the first. The writers of yesteryear invoked the gentle reader to accompany them with the journey, leaving thus with a thread to guide through the forking paths of thought and things done with much love, that refuse to contain its life within a verbatim summary but extend far beyond it. This simple wanderer being not one with magic of weaving wondrous worlds with words or discover new truths with a flair of fingers, is left for being the silent partner in the reader's journey beyond these pages. May there be new words and new truths discovered thus left unsaid and un-summarised, and new vistas exposed, the thoughts of which might linger long after the reading is done, to agree or to disagree, I 'send my voice' – much in the way of the old Lakota beliefs in utterances- to hope to create some importance in what, has held much meaning for me, and as like the following Navajo invocation which would be the soul music for most native writers' as well as Harjo's vision in her project:

Talking God, Speaking God

Dawn God, Wind

We ask for your assistance in creating words

Which bring enlightenment.

With corn pollen I will create

Create the words that beautify

Create the words that bridge misunderstanding

Create the words that enlighten

Create the words that bring harmony¹⁹

¹⁹ Boyne, Grace, *Invocation: Navajo Prayer*, in *Reinventing the Enemy's Language* ed. By Joy Harjo and Gloria Bird, New York: Norton, 1997: 33.

“The hills are alive
With the Sounds of Music,
With songs they have sung,
For a thousand years...”²⁰

²⁰ Lyrics from the Original Soundtrack, Motion Picture, *Sound of Music* (1965).

CHAPTER 1: Writing Sounds, Singing Words

Spoken word is a dramatized monologue, while poetry is song tied to the paper. Poetry came into the world of music and dance before paper was invented, so when I sing rejoice poetry about leaving the paper-Joy Harjo. ²¹

In an unbroken continuum, the oral tradition reaches down to our day....This orality is the true pure lyric. It is not for the eye; it must be seen with the ear, heard in the heart, felt in the spirit -Maurice Kenny, Mohawak Poet.²²

What if there were, lodged within the heart of the law itself, a law of impurity or a principle of contamination? -Jacques Derrida, *The Law of the Genre*. ²³

I. German poet Wilhelm Muller wrote on an eve of December 15, 1822, a letter to a composer who provided music to his poems, Bernhard Klein -“ indeed, my songs lead...only half a life, a paper-life, black upon white...until music breathes the breath of life into them, or at

²¹ Harjo, Joy, “Originating in Music”, Joy Harjo Interview, Stockholmes Fria: Tisdag: 2009. Web. 21 Jan 2011. <http://www.joyharjo.com/Stockholmes_fria.html>

²²Zeitlin, Steven J., “The People’s Poetry.” Oral Tradition 18.1(2003): 6-13. *Project Muse*. Web. 21 Jan 2011. <<http://muse.jhu.edu>>, pp 1.

²³ Derrida, Jacques and Avital Ronell, *The Law of the Genre*, Critical Inquiry, Vol. 7, No. 1, On Narrative (Autumn, 1980), pp. 55-81. Web. 21 Jan 2011. <http://mission17.org/documents/Derrida_LawOfGenre.pdf>, pp 4.

least, when it slumbers within, calls it out and wakens it.”²⁴ To quote Josef Von Spaun, who was writing on the lieder as well about the same time, the tradition of German art songs where songs were composed to poems, of Franz Schubert who had also worked on Wilhelm Muller’s poems: “That which moved the poet’s breast Schubert rendered true and transfigured in tone in each of his songs as none had done before him. Everyone of his songs is actually a poem on the poem that he set to music”.²⁵ Before the spread of what is generally called the Gutenberg Revolution, something that brought the eye before the ear, the visual word, the printed text before the sound of the Word, almost all of the literary genres, poetry and theatre included were performed, usually with some sort of music, which was thus gradually replaced by an estranged silent individual reading of the page. Paul Valery’s idea of a poem on a page being merely an “inadequate musical score”²⁶ or K.N. Wilson’s idea “we may enjoy poetry as absolute music, and so we may enjoy poetry...as a succession of beautiful sounds”²⁷ echo the same resolution as the Mohawak poet Maurice Kenny, who characterized the sound, the oral nature, which is always inherent in poetry, as “true pure lyric”²⁸, as the Sound of Music.

American literature commences with the flash of realization, when the Native Americans first articulated the observed landscape and life around them in words, sound, poetry, pottery, song, and dances. If literature is awareness and understanding above all, the oral traditions and performative expression of such by the tribes are equally compelling to undertake, in order to understand the landscape and its life-space. This foundational body that comprises a an idea of that acuity of the landscape and presentation of that insight, occupies an extensive portion in the study of the aesthetic life of the nation, and can be regarded as the first ‘literature’ or ‘music’ or ‘art’ created in that land. Its continuance played and continues to play an extensive and a vital

²⁴ Quoted in Lawrence M. Zbikowski, *Conceptualizing Music, Cognitive Structure, Theory and Analysis*, London:Oxford University Press, 2005, pp 243, Google Book Search. Web. May 18, 2011.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Quoted in Steven Paul Scher, *Essays on Literature and Music(1967-2004)*, Netherlands: Rodopi, 2004, 38.

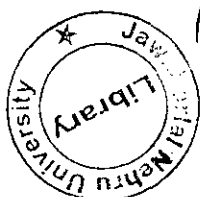
²⁷ Ibid, 39.

²⁸ Zeitlin, Steven J., “The People’s Poetry.” *Oral Tradition* 18.1(2003): 6-13. *Project Muse*. Web. 21 Jan 2011. <<http://muse.jhu.edu>>, pp 1.

role in the survival and adaptation of the native cultures. The oral and performative traditions are naturally overlapping and inter-communicating by nature, hence in the expression of the natives' changed status under colonisation, it comes particularly handy to express the full import of a work, sound and word alike (poetry/music interaction in Harjo's work for example) in the modern context when all other paraphernalia find their place as easily among her diatribes as do her own native impulses behind artistic creation, to incorporate new insights as the tales change over time and play a vital role in the adaptation and survival of the Native nations of America.

While the concept of 'aesthetics' may sound relatively new in respect to the Native American studies and thus may seem somewhat unreliable a scale, what one must try to focus in here are a couple of things and try getting back to the root of these concepts before brushing them away without a glance. The Native Americans had ritualized an invocation and study of beauty, not quite in the sense of the term of analytical Scholastics, but rather, a philosophy that invoked beauty as the guiding principle of life and the reason behind creation by the Breath-Maker. Thus 'beauty', to them, was a 'sentient' thing, in fact it was an expression of an all pervading sentience that was expressed through every song, dance, or ritualistic actions, and it may be interesting to note that the word 'aesthetic' has its roots in the ancient Greek *aisthetikos*²⁹, one of whose meaning was 'sentient'. In this chapter I would try to delineate some of the basic concerns of my thesis, beginning with an analysis of the respect and import the Native Americans had about language, the power of spoken word, and the ritualistic place of music-poetry-dance. It necessarily stands thus, that, the concerns of the oral traditions are essentially of ever-mutable, adaptable and boundary crossing nature, for what is spoken is in ever flux, neither bound nor tied down to the page with fences of definitions and genres erected all around it, thus being able to create new identities with time. Harjo, standing at the end of the twentieth century, harnesses this very power of her oral traditions, to not only bring back those all-encompassing aesthetics, but also by making a space between genres and medias creating a fluid, changing, in-flux ground for the no man's land of her identity and her mixed-blood heritage. We would also try to explain the

²⁹ Derived from Greek "aisthetikos", meaning "aesthetic", "sensitive", "sentient" (< <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aesthetics#Etymology>>). Web. July 19th, 2011.



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basic tenets behind my usage of the terms “Transgeneric”, or “Aesthetic” and finally how these concepts are used in bringing out the musicality of her poetry and the poetics of the music (something that we will come back to time and again throughout the thesis as we proceed with analyzing her works in the following chapters). We would also do well to remember that even if we are studying Native American aesthetics, the idea that poetry and music lead half a life without each other is in no sense relegated to one part of the world alone. Rather, it is to impress our thesis that the two art forms belong together, to many a interesting consequences, that we may see the same idea enforced and traversed time and again from the ancient to the modern ages, though with significant differences and with certain gaping holes in the entire conception that can be filled by a synesthetic concept as Harjo’s.

II. Songs are central to all aspects of Native American ceremonial as well as non-ceremonial literature, and songs and stories indeed continue to cover the greatest portion of Native American literature, oral and written. Even the ceremonial songs can be personal to some extent, as they can be freely composed reflecting, albeit not purely personal though to a very great extent, to embody, articulate and share the personal reality of the singer in order to bring the individual too in the community experience to harmonise and balance the universe. Music thus essentially always functioned as a social and religious instrument with its purposes often overlying onto one another. The music told stories, sometimes spoken, sometimes sung and they had the power that had to be earned, not for trifling purposes but for events of great and abiding importance which have to be called for. The same holds for poetry, as Audre Lorde says in “Poetry is not a luxury” in *Sister/Outsider: Essays and Speeches*: “Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought.”³⁰, for giving of a ‘name’ was equivalent to granting of great power to the object which was being named and thus invoked. In a predominantly oral tradition, the performer and the audience were the basis of all works, even if they were seen as textual. Performativity was easily seen as the basic element of all works, especially poetry, and in a performative

³⁰ Lorde, Audre. “Poetry is Not a Luxury in *Sister/Outsider: Essays and Speeches*” in D. Soyini Madison ed. *The Woman That I Am: The Literature and Culture of Contemporary Women of Color*. NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1994: 19.

context in an oral tradition, the work constantly discovered and re-discovered itself through various artistic means, most often music and dance, which were regularly brought into its employment. In the modern age it is not any longer merely restricted to traditional or strictly ritualistic occasions or pow-wows where words are spoken out in accompaniment of chants, rainsticks or ukuleles, but with the changing times, employing the constantly adaptive nature of oral traditions, it can overflow into multi-medial spaces interacting with each other, each complete in itself yet bringing each other out to complete the whole inter-textual and interdependent endeavour.

Memory of poetry and sound is carried in distinctive rhythms that coalesce song and speech and the living breath which in turn offers the opportunity to foster a wide range of arts which interact and commute with each other thus transcending their individual boundaries of arts and techniques that have separated them in water tight compartments so far, cultivating an extensive assortment of expressive arts from the indigenous communities to this day, particularly the relationship of the native artist with the land which surrounds them and fosters all connections experienced and expressed becoming an intimate part of what Simon Ortiz calls "the land language".³¹ Jeanette C. Armstrong, Salish, says, "Through my language I understand I am being spoken to, I'm not the one speaking. The words are coming from many tongues and mouths of Okanagan people and the land around them. I am a listener to the language's stories, and when my words form I am merely retelling the same stories in different patterns."³² Oliver Wendell Holmes heard the rhythms of the most primary metres in our heartbeat³³, in sounds as rooted to the American landscape and as primary as "a gospel chorus chants, "Amazing grace how sweet the sound."...in Tewa at Alfonso Ortiz's wake, January 1997"³⁴ and one wonders "could there be, at least intuitively, cross-overs of what Austin called an *American rhythm*, buried anciently in the landscape, felt in local native dialects, resurfacing transculturally in the pulse, gait, and speech of

³¹ Quoted in Lincoln, Kenneth. *Native Poetics*, MFS Modern Fiction Studies - Volume 45, Number 1, Spring 1999, pp. 146-184. 156.

³² Ibid

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ ibid

...moving migrants, ... skirting indigenous peoples long settled in the land?”³⁵. Kenneth Lincoln adds, “Consider the timeless ceremonial chants of indigenous tribes, the seasonal winds and cycling waters of a “four corners” landscape...From Yankee woodsmen mending walls, to quilting New England matriarchs, to gossiping southern gentlefolk with Shakespearean inflections, to Navajo women clucking over mutton stew, to Lakota high-plains tremolos, our American cadences vary, and, sadly, native languages are dying.”³⁶.

The quilt of the American poetics and aesthetics is made up primarily of these various sounds that occupy the land, for sound and speech is one of the most basic of our impulses, and the verbal landscape of the continent has woven its warp and woof with speech, song and poetry, specifically among the native tribes in the space that, being far from exclusive nationalistic space some make it out to be, is co-evolutionary and often reciprocal. This is most conspicuous in terms of the aural/oral/performative arts, especially in the age-long intrinsic belief in the conjunction of poetry and music, and the value and importance of oral traditions, of the spoken word in a world of e-zines, where the position and movement of her music moulds and remoulds the static words into breathed songs with an ensuing somatic awareness of one of the basic dimensions of our inhabited spaces in that specific performative span that is very largely ignored in our times specially in the world of academia and literary scholarship-sound. Her work provides a unique window to view performativity in modern poetic functions, which in addition to performing a resistive function on behalf of the slowly dying native traditions, resuscitated the organic connectivity of American literature, poetics, aesthetics, experience and perception, with native American aesthetics. One cannot but realize that this was the reason why a professor of 21st - century American academia would feel the need to sing and bring back to life the sounds which were dead in the printed texts, back to blossom, and thus reach back to her oral traditions while living in the modern American context.

³⁵ Lincoln, Kenneth. *Native Poetics*, MFS Modern Fiction Studies - Volume 45, Number 1, Spring 1999, pp. 146-184. 156

³⁶ Ibid.

America is a hybridized culture, multifariously translative of the centuries of migrations from all over the world that have moved all across the continent, the so-called Old World of Europe interacting with the already extant indigenous population of some five hundred separate tribes speaking as many different tongues, and carrying a tradition more than a millennia old and very significantly different on most terms from the Occidental systems of knowledge. In this cross-hatching knit of cultures, rather than a nationalistic project, these New World Writers especially from the transplanted minority population, create a dialogue across and amidst the arts and the various cultures which produce them, which reflects the inevitable history of colonization and the multicultural history of the nation. "E Pluribus Unum", the maxim articulates a typical expression of singularity that enforces an alleged universal ideology of Americanness but which is really, what Stratton and Ang call, "a persistent invocation of the colour blind universalism of American Principles, which has no room for a serious recognition of its own particularist WASP roots, and the historically real exclusions brought about in its name"³⁷

Questions of cultural fusions in this multicultural context stand tall among others, particularly in the Native American context, especially the importance and possibility of maintaining some sort of semblance of 'identity' in the 'melting pot' psychology, not in a push to erase entirely the indigenous identity but partaking of the elements of that identity in a corrective of the universalist 'colour-blindness' with an interconnection with and a cross-hatching simultaneously through other cultural products, arts, concepts of aesthetics etc existing around, sometimes as a product of colonization, to produce a truly multicultural, possible a transcultural experience that simultaneously negates the Western exclusivist taxonomic and literary assumptions about genres, medias, oral vs. written, poetry vs. music, prose vs. poem etc. with a re-call, a re-cognition of the traditional aesthetics of indigenous cultures which are, surprisingly, sometimes conceptually at par with the latest modernist developments about the futility of exclusivist considerations about genres, medias, aesthetics, taxonomies and nomenclatures. Here is a question about identity of the population of indigenous America that needs us to understand and carefully consider the

³⁷ Stratton, Jon and Ian Ang, Quoted in "Research on Post-Colonialism and Issues of Multiculturalism" by Joel Kuortti, Power Point presentation, < mcnet.utu.fi/media/tiedostot/2011-3-3-kuortti.pdf>, May 19, 2011.

poetics and aesthetics of literary and artistic creations borne out of the 'mixed-blood' impulses of Native America. The Native and the Modern have fused as the worlds of past, present and future interconnect, requiring a fresh re-envisioning of the concerns of both worlds of the years of interactions between Native and Non-Native America. As new generations evolve, mix and grow, it melds and moulds humans from very different backgrounds and cultures and analogous aesthetic impulses and beliefs, making a mixed-blood Mvskoke poet-singer pick up the saxophone and the jazzy tunes backed with chants rainsticks and vocables to being out the all-revered voice, the oral tradition of her tribal aesthetics, from the printed page or a Hopi rapper rapping about the trials of Rez life. Their discourses are part of a larger picture that is more inclusive than ever before, as Kenneth Lincoln proposes: "The discourse might include a southern formalist challenging midwestern plain-style, a free-verse Californian contesting New England privilege, or a young Indian rhymers seeking recognition as an American poet."³⁸ This shift to a celebration of cultural and aesthetic fusions need not seem problematic, for this presents not an oblivious 'colour-blind' Universalist ideology, threatening what are generally seen as different cultural modes of expression into a gooey gruel, but a 'third' space, as in-between split space...based not on exoticism of cultures, but on the articulation of cultures' hybridity".³⁹, something which is repeatedly expressed in the works of Joy Harjo and similar Native American artists. This bridge that they build ensures survival by retaining elements of both worlds, by striking a kaleidoscopic balance between adapting to continuing cultural changes while at the same time maintaining a sense of cultural identity rooting from traditional beliefs.

A project like Harjo's, considers the singing of her poems as taking the frozen words out of the pages, as was believed that poetry should be but aspiring in a condition of music, for these two are the one and same borne from the same impulse. She takes on the various agencies of drums, chants, traditional musical, poetic and conceptual elements from her native aesthetics and fuses it with her jazz grooves, rock and roll guitar strokes into the printed page, to write down the sounds to words which previously had no music to make them live. She builds a bridge that connects the

³⁸ Lincoln, Kenneth, "Native Poetics", *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, Volume 45, Number 1, Spring 1999. 150.

³⁹ Ibid.

various strands her worlds as a mixed blood Mvskoke poet-singer, especially in an effort to re-create the precocious yarn between music and poetry, the spoken /sung and the read, the seen and the heard, among many others. She cobbles her criticism and her art forms from a variety of perspectival possibilities, though largely from the traditional Mvskoke beliefs, the importance of oral traditions and the power and importance of the spoken word, the living breathe to give meaning to anything and everything, especially creation. N. Scott Momaday, in *A Man Made of Words* records the importance of words in the existential act of human beings, especially the Native American, in his struggle to survive and balance his elements in modern American society. For most, if not all Native American artists, creation, especially writing has held a very strong responsivity towards affirming existence in a world where their tale was but “Because who would believe / the fantastic and terrible story of all of our survival / those who were never meant / to survive”⁴⁰

N. Scott Momaday, records a Kiowa legend of an arrowmaker who draws his sense of identity and his actions purely from his speech, and thus it becomes for him an allegory for existence, and how words shape creation with value missing from a printed text sterilized off from the rest of the artistic practices, especially song-making, the peculiar and fascinating power of telling stories old and new, ancient and changed that granting of sound, speech, breath gifts to the text of poetry. The Native American writers, thinkers and philosophers ascribe this complexity of viewpoint to the way they see myth as, something that is not a story or tale told to children and forgotten but tales spoken with truth, stories that hold enormous power when you speak them. According to Paula Gunn Allen in *Something Sacred Going On out There: Myth and Vision in American Indian Literature*: “Myth, then, is an expression of the tendency to make stories of power out of life we live in imagination; from this faculty when it is engaged in ordinary states of consciousness come tales and stories. When it is engaged in non-ordinary states, myth proper—that is mystery mumblings- occur.”⁴¹ This viewpoint is especially important in helping us

⁴⁰ Joy Harjo, “Anchorage”, *She Had Some Horses*, NY: Norton, 2008: 4.

⁴¹ Allen, Paula Gunn. “Something Sacred Going On Out There: Myth and Vision in American Indian Literature” in D. Soyini Madison ed. *The Woman That I Am: The Literature and Culture of Contemporary Women of Color*. NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1994: 547.

understand the way one can situate native American texts in their respective contexts, when she adds, “In the culture and literature of the Indian in America, the meaning of myth maybe discovered, not as speculation about primitive long-dead ancestral societies but in terms of what is real, actual, and viable in living cultures in America.” This is a viewpoint little understood from our position. Their skill and integrity draw to the seemingly conflicting and different points, mythic spaces, and reconciles them to draw us to the power of utterances. The spoken word, according to Momaday is “an indigenous expression, an utterance that proceeds from the very intelligence of the soil: the oral tradition.”⁴², to which one may add what Harjo says in her poem “The Book of myths”- “the stories/ that unglue the talking spirit from the pages”.

“Writing engenders in us certain attitudes toward language”, he says in *A Man Made of Words*, “It encourages us to take words for granted. Writing has enabled us to store vast quantities of words indefinitely. This is advantageous on the one hand but dangerous on the other. The result is that we have developed a kind of false security where language is concerned, and our sensitivity to language has deteriorated. And we have become in proportion insensitive to silence.”⁴³ The language of the written sounds sung through the words not only successfully airs the lost aural/orality of the poetry-music organic connectivity they once shared not only on the level of the artistic impulse but the actual level of performance, but the flexibility of oral traditions to adapt to and incorporate other elements of the changing social scenario. The two impulses that Joy Harjo uses successfully in her art to transcribe the current situation and the rootedness of all Native American aesthetics in traditional beliefs about the nature of arts, interact and work with each other, needing each other to complete each other in the truest sense, working towards her discovering the ‘language’ that lay ‘under’ the layer of the foreignness of the English tongue:

⁴² Momaday, N Scott, “The Man Made of Words”, quoted in *Winter Naming* by James Welch, in “Speak Like Singing: Classics of Native American Literature” ed. By Kenneth Lincoln, UNM Press, 2009. 152. Google Book Search. May 10, 2011.

⁴³ Momaday, N. Scott, quoted in *Columbia Literary History of the United States, Part 1* by Emory Elliot, Columbia University Press, 1988: 6.

My poetry won't inherently be mainstream in the sense that I'm writing from a specific space in the American landscape. There is a different relationship to the land, and to language. The language that I am using to construct poetry is not my original language but a language forced by colonization. Yet, it has become a trade language of sorts, because the many tribes can and do communicate with English in North America.... I was brought up speaking English because my parents both speak English.... To be Indian was something shameful. To speak anything other than English was to be unable to make a living, to provide for yourself and your family. So English became the language of survival. I associate this with the arrival of Christianity... It was something I couldn't own, something I couldn't say belonged to me... though I grew up inside a language, which was English with Muscogee and other added sensibilities... it wasn't until I began writing poetry as a student at the University of New Mexico that I began to find that language that lived just beneath the surface of English. It found a home in poetry, a place to live, to move into, as if poetry were a house it had been waiting to move into.⁴⁴

Joy Harjo uses music along with her poetry, she sings her poems to bring each of them out and complete the 'experience' of the artistic creation, for 'experience' is the most important basis of all oral traditions. She thus not only builds a bridge between two art forms traditionally seen as different in the Western academia, but she also builds a bridge between her native traditions, her roots and the changed and changing conditions around the indigenous world. That's why she picks up the sax to sing jazz with the poetry she speaks and sings accompanied with vocables, chants, rainsticks, ukulele and the occasional drum-set guitar with heavy influences of soft rock. The chief concern here is the artistic process that is sensitive to the different modes of communication and the different levels of audience participation, picked up as they serve the need for her words to blossom in their lost splendour that literature took away, to infuse new life into words long dead and dulled by continuous use. She reflects in her use of word and sounds, what Jorge Luis Borges proposes in *La Rosa Profunda*:

⁴⁴ Harjo, Joy, Interview with Maria Camboni, in "Dialogue with Joy Harjo: Maria Camboni", *RSA Journal* Vol. 11. <www.aisna.net/rsa/ras11/11camboni.pdf>, Web. July 5th, 2011.

The word must have been in the beginning a magic symbol, which the usury of time wore out. The mission of the poet should be to restore to the word, at least in a partial way, its primitive and now secret force. All verse should have two obligations; to communicate a precise instance and to touch us physically, as the presence of the sea does.⁴⁵

In her project, Harjo is thus more concerned with re-cognizing how oral/aural and performance of that aspect of her work centred approaches of her poetry shares a fundamental concern with the un-writtenness and importance of sound in the traditional oral narratives of her tribe, where performance of the words sung into sounds of music served as an enabling tool to explore the unlimited potentialities of the verbal arts. They were, however, very transmedial and transgeneric in nature, as one artistic medium crossed over another, and it is this flexibility of oral narratives that Joy Harjo exploits to bring out her mixed-blood/hybrid philosophy of her works, where the static words in print, under the direction of the sound of music lead us into a world previously unexplored in logocentric linguisticity, or even a traditional pre-conceived notion of a tribal poet-singer and her works. Harjo fulfills the role Paula Gunn Allen writes about in the poem regarding the mythic Thought-Woman or Grandmother Spider who in Navajo traditions created the world by her thought and spinning of the web of life by uttering and wishing it: "Thought-Woman, the spider,/ named things and/ as she named them/ they appeared./ She is sitting in her room/ thinking of a story now/ I'm Telling you the story/ she is thinking."⁴⁶ Harjo, in her own way, like numerous other female Native American artists is telling us the story she is thinking.

III . Apart from the poet and the singer, even a layman can understand the strikingly common features between poetry and music, among them the melodic and the rhythmic component. Poetry and music together performed, give us an idea about the artistic nature of the first verbal

⁴⁵ Quoted in Lincoln, Kenneth, "Tales to Sing", in Kenneth Lincoln ed. *Speak Like Singing: Classics of Native American Literature*, UNM Press, 2009: 24. Google Book Search. May 19, 2011.

⁴⁶ Silko, Leslie Marmon. *Ceremony*. NY: Signet Books, 1977: 1.

art, the first form of that something that was music and poetry at the same time. While some attention has been provided between the interaction of literature and other arts, two vital pitfalls in these criticisms remain. They study the "interaction" between these arts, where the word "interaction" instantly sets of categories of two "separate" fields that *need to interact*, somehow, and secondly while some study has been done between literature and the visual arts, almost none has been done in the fields of poetry and music, a belief held by all the indigenous tribes in one form or other across the world, as singular, generic entities rather than modal and its effects in the fields of music and literature. One of the reasons might be that the fields of musicology, ethnography and ethnomusicology are formidable department with techniques, scope and interpretive claims of their own which is somewhat non-representational in the fields of literature, making aesthetic speculations about the prospects of such introspection of literature and music across these barriers somewhat erratic, if not slightly elusive with sparks of brilliant insights at times in history of music and literature, but mostly remaining only a curious study accorded somewhat to the vague feelings of emotive speculations about the commonality between both aroused by the respective arts. Understanding the context, wherein a piece of work is made, historical or social, is important in understanding the import of that piece of work. Hence, even if the idea of conjunction of poetry and music were repeated time and again in the Western philosophical and aesthetic systems, it acquires a different load in Joy Harjo's context. Not only does it nullify the Western scholastic systems of taxonomy, it provides a speaking ground of all those aspects of native and indigenous lives left unspoken. It is said a performance speaks more than mere words, and in Native American contexts where so much is left unsaid and obliterated, hidden behind cryptic metaphors and alignments, performing them, singing them, creates a new ground of interaction with the reader that enables him or her, especially the outsider to have a better understanding of the viewpoints and voices expressed therein, that mere written words alone cannot. And as it stands, indigenous cultures have been long stolen from and forcibly coerced, and these kinds of cryptic alignments and paradoxes, non-linear images and achronological dreamy narrative texts, may provide a different all the more clearer perspective when put to performance, for as the words may lie, but the body does not.

However, as it happens with most ideas, the most imposing challenge they face, is from ideologies that have been so strongly ingrained in our minds that we scarce stop and question them. These ideas can range from anything, from social and political to the most basic of our concepts of taxonomy in creative or performative arts. What Joy Harjo's work challenges, is one of the greatest difficulties that 20th century criticism in the arts have faced- a tendency towards considering artistic mediums as autonomous fields of development, entirely isolated from other medias. A cultural left over of the Scholastic system that took over learning after the fall of Rome in Continental Europe, the distinctive classification and differentiation systems that existed and still exists and rules the ideologies of our approach towards a text, Canonical and the 'Other', between oral and written modes of transmission, poetic and prose structures, compartmentalizing semantic and medial forms like music and poetry, performative practices from the written or printed corpus, etc. have been, since the late 18th century, realized to be less than corresponding to the realities of individual modes, texts, voices, forms and techniques inside a given corpus that generate an almost infinite possibility of meaning and reading systems than categories of genres and mediums would accommodate. For example, John Hartley defines 'Genres' specifically as "agents of ideological closure" limiting "the meaning potential of the given text"⁴⁷, a mechanism of categorization functioning largely as a "tool of social control that reproduces the dominant ideology"⁴⁸ specifically in relation to the idea of an exclusive and non-encroaching binarity of oral traditions and written texts, after what is called by many the 'Great Divide'⁴⁹, often in political and social favour of 'Literature' (Etymology: Latin: lit(t)era 'letter.' 'learning, writing')⁵⁰ an ideology repeatedly, destructively and vehemently wielded by the Western Civilizations against the oral traditions of knowledge transmission of the indigenous cultures in the New World colonized by Europe, and consequently fenced off as 'separate' from the 'received' notions of knowledge transmission as 'written' or 'printed' word, and

⁴⁷Chandler, Daniel, *An Introduction to Genre Theory*, Web. May 11, 2011. <[http://faculty.washington.edu/farkas/TC510/ChandlerGenre Theory.pdf](http://faculty.washington.edu/farkas/TC510/ChandlerGenre%20Theory.pdf)>. pp6.

⁴⁸Chandler, Daniel, *An Introduction to Genre Theory*, Web. May 11, 2011. <[http://faculty.washington.edu/farkas/TC510/ChandlerGenre Theory.pdf](http://faculty.washington.edu/farkas/TC510/ChandlerGenre%20Theory.pdf)>. pp4.

⁴⁹Chandler, Daniel, " 'Great Divide' Theories", *Biases of the Ear and the Eye*. Web. May 11, 2011. <[http:// www.Aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/litoral/litoral1.html](http://www.Aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/litoral/litoral1.html)>

⁵⁰Referenced from < www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=literature>. Web. May 13th, 2011.

subsequently deemed inferior, or even to the point of denying these indigenous tribes having any culture at all, thus fit to be colonized and obliterated. The account of classificatory systems throughout the history of arts and literatures are strewn with examples of reality that deform what was otherwise till now best regarded as a 'natural' system of classification of texts, mediums, arts and genres into water tight compartments. Derrida refers to Maurice Blanchot's cryptic text *Madness of the Day* and the apparent failure of the order of taxonomic systems in the chaos of the refusal of narrative structure to provide closure and the apparent productiveness of this absence of closure to show the always-already transgressive nature of genres to exceed their definitions and boundaries. One of the most important features of the present day as well as the future is the possibility of perverse crossings between genres, arts, pop culture and high art, something that has been under critical study since the development of popular culture and the interdisciplinary cultural studies departments, but which, nevertheless provide less than satisfactory insight in to the nature of interaction of poetry and music, as employed by the indigenous tribes in spontaneous performative contexts in the twenty-first century.

Such absolutism in classificatory and taxonomic systems ruptured us from the very root-concept of the verbal arts, that they were spoken above all and that poetry was meant to be breathed out, performed and recited, and sung, rather than written or printed on text. The ear was the nurturing ground of poetry, like music, both belonging to the same species, the Celestial Twins as the Greeks called them, crossing over as generic subjects rather than two completely different mediums, that the poet and the singer-be it a Troubadour or a Shaman- was the same person. It was probably, only much later, that the concept of relativity of genres and other degrees of taxonomy and nomenclature, species and mediums came to be critically perceived. The western academia and the school of critical theorists would seriously argue the validity and viability of such compartmentalization that leaves out the majority of meaning potentials of the way the text can be looked at from various angles, social, political or aesthetic, by various social cultural or political groups, communities or even specific individuals. Not only that, such practices warped the realities of the texts, its origin, production and reception across time, class, gender, race, period for concerns and aims which can be as varied as the number of participators in the meaning making process. However, even into the end of the Twentieth century, such a critical

development still does not adequately address its import on the native and indigenous tribes, among other minority and otherised classes of the society. In a way, we can thus say, the instinctive and often primordial impulse of man, still noticeable in the aesthetics of the tribal cultures, to not differentiate between arts very rigidly between the related arts which were often used for each other and were seen as such , atleast among, following what Gotthold Lessing in *Laokoon* terms as temporal arts(such as poetry and music) and spatial arts (painting and sculpture)⁵¹, leaves more exciting space for a more transgeneric, fluid, boundary crossing experience than acknowledged even in recognition of futility of differences in modern critical practices.

Joy Harjo's work-its transgeneric nature, its relative looseness and inclusiveness to a proper diversity of apparently disparate aesthetics: stretching between poetry, Rock and Roll, Jazz, tribal chants etc. operate as a kind of mutational agent, spreading tentacularly between species, making rigid textures of the texts more flexible and accommodating than ever, making it manipulable and seamless like a sonic version of sticky-toffees. In a sense then, Harjo manipulates the boundaries between genres and medias, with new stylistic affectations, taking them back not only to a mutable poetry-performance-music triad, but also gives us a historically revisionist view of the lines that divide poetry and music in the Western consciousness, definitions that divide genres and medias, poetry and music. Tracing back her impulses to produce music along with her poetry to her tribal pre-literate roots, she provides us with a much more definitive understanding of the nature of narration, genre and poetry/performance:

Much like the modernist poets and thinkers musing on the nature and interaction of poetry and music, like Ezra Pound, Joy Harjo stresses on the growth of poetry and music simultaneously in the human consciousness and the need of both for each other to complete the acoustic and aural/oral experience, especially that of poetry, with the difference that her work is not only

⁵¹ Simawe, Saadi, *Black Orpheus: Music in African American Fiction from the Harlem. Renaissance to Toni Morrison*, New York: Garland, 2000, 17.

politically and socially more resistive on behalf of the obliterated indigenous population of the United States, but also majorly draws from the very same indigenous traditions. Harjo says,

The roots of poetry lead to music. Music will often be found yearning for singers. Poetry is a sound art. I happened on the direct relationship between poetry and music when I realized that most of the poetry in my tribe, and with most peoples of the world isn't found in books, it's oral. Then I began to consider how to make that bridge—I didn't do so with a direct plan—it was a natural outgrowth of being a contemporary Mvskoke poet who had picked up a saxophone. Poetic Justice was just a start.⁵²

Poetry, she argues, has a root in music, for poetry, music, dance, and ritual they were the same in the Native American impulse. They came at the same time, together and were meant to be together⁵³, but the invasion of post-Gutenberg Enlightenment aesthetic of the West with its logic of the print capital transformed it from generic categories to intermedial. In the Native American aesthetic, both poetry and performance were same categories, primarily modes of performative articulation. Harjo's work re-infuses poetry with performance bringing it back to where it originally was—not two mediums but two genres of the same medium, two generic species of the same articulation. Like the concept of code-switching in language that is potentially challenging to the boundaries of language and cultures in a single text, Harjo's works, her 'musicisation' of poetry can similarly be called code-switching between two apparently disparate but potentially single acoustic units. While the musicality of Harjo's poetry has changed over time from an overt influence of tribal effects and techniques, the challenge to dominant structures of Western thought, academia, taxonomic systems of control and regulation, and overall the overshadowing of downright extermination of Native American aesthetics by the WASPian predominant ideology inherent in the America of "e Pluribus Unum", has remained persistent, along with performance which is fundamentally intertwined with the challenges it presents.

⁵² Harjo, Joy. Interview by Simmons B. Buntin, "Interview with Joy Harjo Mvskoke Poet and Musician: Terrain. Org", Vol.19, Fall/winter 2006. Web. May 11, 2011. <<http://www.terrain.org/interview/19/>>

⁵³ Ibid.

IV. The example of music, that subtle, intangible, undefinable and abstract yet powerfully resonant aural art, and the way in which poetry has tried so much to emulate it, is an interesting phenomenon that has been variously addressed. Algernon Charles Swinburne, a mostly neglected poet as far as his criticism of poetry based purely on sounds is concerned, and known for the sonoric quality in his poems, judges poetry by its music, especially in his essay, "Notes on the Text of Shelley", reading the poetry of its sound in terms of metre, rhythm, rhyme, and resonances. While one may only tentatively address his concepts of "inner music" and "external music" of poetry, his conceptualization of music as being integral in the cognitive structures of poetry is a concept that surprisingly even being present from the very inception of the oral/aural arts of mankind, has received little critical attention. One reason might be that within the realm of poetry analysis in academic circles, there remain few real attempts to seriously study the musicological angle of poetry and language, about how words and music come to create song and poetry, how music can breathe life into poetry or create a tapestry of sounds on an existing poem, making it a poem in its own right. The sound charges the spatial dimensions of poetry with new imports by forging interesting, fluid indexical and iconic relations different from prose patterns, that connects them to musical meaning-making process, leading to emotional states leading to innovative knowledges, which is both and new at the same time.

The transgression in our habitual thought patterns about how we "see", nay "hear" poetry, was credited to have been created by sound-poetry, performance poetry, jazz-poetry, and the aesthetics of the Beat Poets, as it challenged the limitations of a genre currently dominated by print culture. While poetry is rooted in oral storytelling, the Homeric epic for example, the oral aspect of the genre had diminished with the rise of literacy rates and the invention of the printing press, and had remained dormant. Spoken word poetry of Harjo's project which uses music, more particularly sound to 'free' the words from the frozen page, and is therefore a very distinct transgression to print culture as its integral nature drawn from the oral indigenous practices of speech-art as living breath and music/poetry as the same expression, extends beyond the printed word. In synthesizing the written word with its sound, the poet expresses not only this rebellion

from the tyranny of print culture and the dominance of the eye against the ear, but also an act of resistance against the structures of Anglocentric colonization, for only language and stories and song remain when resistance in all other vistas fail. She ties the audience's experience of the poem to this performance of the art of sound, the sound of words fleshed out, sculpted, literally, from and in air making us more acutely aware of the filled-ness of the space around us, even where only silence reigns aloud.

The experience of Joy Harjo's work is unique in its involvement of all the elements that incorporates the world around her, the synthesizing of her native and western roots and through that bringing out the oral traditions and aesthetics of the indigenous tribes of the America, which was the root impulse that drew her towards the spoken word poetry, to attaching so much importance to performing the written word to bring out the meanings associated with the verbal art as understood in its full import. She says:

I happened on the direct relationship between poetry and music when I realized that most of the poetry in my tribe, and with most peoples of the world isn't found in books, it's oral. Then I began to consider how to make that bridge—I didn't do so with a direct plan—it was a natural outgrowth of being a contemporary Mvskoke poet who had picked up a saxophone. Poetic Justice was just a start.⁵⁴

Her project is critical of studying artistic mediums not in isolation from one another but in correspondence of one another crossing over and beyond the artificial distinctions of genres and medias prescribed by Western rhetoric and aesthetics, specifically keeping an eye on the relativity of the text in the transethnic global world and specially the culturally ethnographically and socially hybrid space the native Americans live in today. The native aesthetics of oral and indigenous traditions have survived into the present day of colonial written aesthetics of the English language by adjusting and even incorporating the disparate art forms to their advantage

⁵⁴ Harjo, Joy. Interview by Simmons B. Buntin, "Interview with Joy Harjo Mvskoke Poet and Musician: Terrain. Org", Vol.19, Fall/Winter 2006. <[http:// www.terrain.org/interview/19/](http://www.terrain.org/interview/19/)>Web. May 11, 2011.

thereby building a bridge, as Harjo does when she invokes her inspiration from all that her native and non-native colonial traditions have given her.

By infusing her works, her poetry and her prose-poems, with musical imageries, terms and techniques, Harjo becomes aligned with some of the most influential poets and writers of modern 20th century America, who have constantly tried to rediscover the nature of language, and the nature of their political, social, economic, and poetico-mythic identities through these efforts, and for far many more who directly or indirectly aimed for and ascribed a certain kind of musical effect in feel or techniques, and terms of their poems. Since the renaissance, no one had seen such a creative duality, such an interest in these interactions and their profound significances than until recently, and Harjo qualifies in this revival as a major participant, by virtue of her having influenced music and poetry both in its turn. Like Swinburne, and Poe, none spoke more strongly of the association of word and music, than Joy Harjo. Music offers a chance of exploring the unthinkably wide field of rhyme, rhythm, metre in so variety of ways that most poets would agree that the employment of two are, but advantageous, albeit one that needs to be done carefully for the adaptation of rhyme of poetry to rhythm of poetry needs to be done very carefully so as not to let the two sit ill at ease with each other, as do so many examples of performance-poetry. Melodic strains and musical references pervade her poems and prose, providing an unusually appropriate figurative language to express various moods across different levels and stages of development, yet what she achieves thus through the symbiosis has not been fully explored yet as a major facet of her musical and poetic genius. The animated and vivacious pulses and sounds that Harjo coordinates, conveys her philosophical, weighty and insightful authority in utilising the components of melody, harmony, tune and song in her poetry as a most effective strategy for expressing most sensitive and provocative thoughts. Examining these strategies form the basis of the next chapters, where she straddles between the worlds she grew up in, and those she came to know. As Louis Owens says:

The descendent of mixed blood sharecroppers and the disposed of two continents, I believe I am the rightful heir of Choctaw and Cherokee story-tellers and of Shakespeare

and Yeats and Cervantes. Finally everything converges and the centre holds in the margins. This, if we are to go on.⁵⁵

A study of Joy Harjo and her works goes beyond the cultural and formal or analytical shoptalk at moments. Specific to the endangered literary and cultural crossings these days, readers and listeners might consider the finer points of the transitions between music and poetry or painting and verse and other performative arts in a similar pattern in a co-evolving graph. These are some of the concerns when most native cultures evolve translatively through a foreign language, and through print mediums, often times where the native authors is often kept at arm's length from the mainstream American academic concerns in literature or music. Harjo provides a point of view that neither privileges the insider nor gives an outsider-objective point of view, but instead she addresses it to all intercultural readers too, trying to understand Native American cultures and aesthetics through fusion song-poetry and prose-poem narratives. Singer and storyteller, in native and indigenous aesthetics cross the models of the genres and the mediums, and Simon Ortiz recalls:

The song was the road from outside...to inside...-which is perception- and from inside... to outside-which is expression. That's the process and the product of the song, the experience and the vision that the song gives you. The words, the language of my experience, come from how I understand, how I relate to the world around me, and how I know language as perception. The language allows me vision to see with, and by which to know myself.⁵⁶

These are all ways, in which we know ourselves. In those surreal leaps and shattering lights.

⁵⁵ Quoted in Lincoln, Kenneth, "Native Dialectics", in Kenneth Lincoln ed. *Speak Like Singing: Classics of Native American Literature*, UNM Press, 2009: 6. Google Book Search. May 13th 2011.

⁵⁶ Lincoln, Kenneth, "Native Dialectics", in Kenneth Lincoln ed. *Speak Like Singing: Classics of Native American Literature*, UNM Press, 2009: 8. Google Book Search. May 13th 2011.

V. Harjo's works may thus remind one faintly of The Beats, or any number of earlier poets or singers, no doubt working on a similar ideology-that to read a poem on a page to be reading something like a musical score, not entirely comprehensible, if not voiced on lines based on the human tone itself, with the difference that Harjo works directly from a Native and tribal origin with an entirely new political and social role in mind for the oppressed minorities. To conclude thus, language is not only inside the poem, but outside the poem, which can only be captured in a whole sum of the performance. It is not the language one might study that is situated inside the text, but the language one should study that is situated *in* the object itself. Performing verbal arts especially in an ever changing context makes it thus even more difficult for there to be a fixed text to 'read' or 'analyse'. These interpretations have to be calculated through studying the performance rather than making a reverse-paradigm of fixing it back with written musical scores or rhetorical brouhaha. Re-cognition, then, rather than pre-cognition, is indispensable in investigating projects like Harjo's that is not just a linguistic lexis that functions on the imperative of fixed diffusion only, but breathing reverberations of the many people that are her, that resounds away from the source in ripples not just in their connotations, but in their consistency, cadence, and colour.

Canto y cuentos es la poesia

Se canta una viva historia,

Contando su melodia.

Poetry is song and telling

A live story sung

Its melody told

-Antonia Marchado

*De Mi Cartera*⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Lincoln, Kenneth, *Speak Like Singing: Classics of Native American Literature*, University of New Mexico Press, 2007. 17. Google Book Search, Web, July 10, 2011.

CHAPTER 2: The many horses of Noni Daylight

It was in song that I first found poetry, or it found me, alone at the breaking of dawn under the huge elm sheltering my childhood house, within range of the radio, of my mother's voice. I used to think that the elm too, was poetry, as it exposed the seasonal shifts and rooted us. - Joy Harjo.⁵⁸

ikewag diibaaji mowag. Ikewag nagamowag. Bizidam, bizidam, bizidam.
Agindaasonnan, agindaasonnan.

The woman are telling stories, the woman are singing, listen,listen,listen. Read, read.⁵⁹

I. In the times of yore, of the troubadours and the minstrels and Homer, Campion or Orpheus, it was possible for the poet and the song-writer to be one singular entity strumming his lyre and his tune to bring his words to life, from two dimensional beings to a living tangible entity like a sculpture or music. The days of the singer-songwriter is long gone, since the industrial revolution and the rise of the logic of the print capital, and with it the memory of

⁵⁸ Lincoln, Kenneth, *Speak Like Singing: Classics of Native American Literature*, University of New Mexico Press, 2007. Pp 228. Google Book Search, Web, July 10, 2011

⁵⁹ Erdrich, Heid Ellen, and Laura Tohe ed., *Sister Nations: Native American Women Writers on Community*, Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2002. Pp xi. Google Book Search, Web, July 10, 2011.

Europe that these two arts were once one entity. The physical tangibility of music cannot simply be traced simply to the vividness or tactility or material presence of the instruments, or the score alone. Nor can the power of poetry to rhyme and the reason of its syllables. A more specific understanding lies in how a singer and the poet, captures for and conveys to the listener something of the experience of those for whom music or poetry is undeniable more than just an printed or scored activity, those who feel the sounds with their body-namely the performers. Surface, weight, and feel are part of the reality of the reality of musical and illocutionary performances. Harjo's achievement is to write music that gives the *feel* of words. The overriding impression is the undeniable immediacy of *sound* in her creations, what she achieves sonically tells us so much more about the inside, the workings of language in her free verse, prose poem structures that sound just slightly paradoxical and abstract, instantly achieving new meanings when the small space of the word is broken apart into lengths of riffs, loops, silences, her sonorous voice and chants and cadences in her song renditions. She holds the sounds in her hands, feeling their potential and then, like fleshing out a live portrait or a still life from a white canvas, she makes alive sounds out of the blank nothingness of air. One should keep in mind, it is this relative tangible-intangibility of sound-silence play that Harjo employs in her poems that acquire new meaning and new life in her music, that also acquires , metaphorically for her to explore the gathering together of the many threads, her many 'horses'.

As is often said, both music and poetry are sculptures in air. Poetry, like its twin music is and was an illocutionary act, set in sound and sound of silence, to make the tactility, the tangibility of its existence alive. Unlike other arts, in it, no other raw materials go into it, no paint no canvas no marble, just sound, silence and air. It is perhaps this magical power of making something out of virtually nothing that provided the Native Americans the belief about the overwhelming power and all-around presence of Word. Linguistic resistance becomes the only means to create meaning when physical resistance fails. No wonder the Native Americans created a relation to language, to the power of words and how they conceive in a way most western academia would not understand. For as the age of the logic of the print capital advanced, we became relationally indifferent to the power of sound in relation to sight, to what we see or read became preeminent to what we hear, especially in relation to poetry. As a result ,

poetry lost an important element-Sound, and music lost its most expressive content-Word. In its essence poetry and music is an act of mutuality, more than symbiotic, they speak to each other calling and responding, like the field hollers and blues of the African American.

II. Where Harjo grew up, the sounds of these old sounds of Native American chants, Navajo beautyway songs, stompdances and pow wow sounds have lived in braids with African American rhythms of call-response, field hollars and most importantly, blues and jazz. As she says:

I've learnt how to listen...that was one of poetry's first lessons, to me, too... and poetry continues to teach meI picked up the saxophone because I wanted to sing. The horn sounds like a human voice, a crying and laughing human voice. Poetry on the page wasn't enough for me. The horn was to allow myself to sing...when I hear our music, I always think of Africa announcing itself as part of the mix. And it goes the other way too...all that's at the root of my sense of music and poetry.⁶⁰

According to Laura Coltelli:

Joy Harjo assigns a central role of the power of word-the mythic embodiment and memory of the Native American world –in shaping the remarkable quality of her writing as a living testimony.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Miles, Tiya and Sharon P. Holland ed., *Crossing Waters, Crossing Worlds: The African Diaspora in Indian Country*, Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2006: 28-29.

⁶¹ Coltelli, Laura, "Joy Harjo's Poetry", in *The Cambridge Companion to Native American Literature*, ed. Joy Porter and Kenneth M. Roemer, NY: CUP, 2005: 291.

At the root of it all, is the belief in transformative power of charged oral expressions, turned into a mode of connection and multifaceted resistance to the basics of the ideology used to rule and dominate. Poetry, when accompanied by music, for the native authors and singers, songwriters, is that which transforms reality, creating a sacred space in time that has the ability to control identities and create destinies.

Harjo, born in Oklahoma country among the sounds of her grandmother's sax, a singer songwriter, and the songs of Nat King Cole, Patsy Cline, Ray Charles, Hank Williams, and the poetic lyrics of Navajo Beautyway songs, Stompdances, reggae jazz musicians 'on and off reservations playing at local radiostations, Cree rhythms in drums and Pueblo Stories and Simon Ortiz, Leslie Silko and other writers of the Native American New Writers age, lists music as her first inspiration to poetry and how it has always influenced her to write her poems, to express herself in the grace of her lyrics of all that lay inside her and outside, that gave expressions to, as she says, all that rooted her and the inevitable change of seasons. She deliberately includes rhythms of chants, pow wow festivals, vocables frequently found in Native American recitals with jazz and tribal poetics brought over to the Mississippi by the African-Americans. she connects both of these traditions, as well as her Irish, French, creek, Cherokee heritage, her Indian and white identities, her straddling between two worlds and two worlds, two mediums and two genres on not only a structural and ontological level but a mytho-poetic one as well. She hybridizes a number of identities and occupied cultural spaces, breaks up the status quo and invents a new unusual yet harmonious road for border-crossing, she is Noni Daylight.

Alive. This music rocks
me. I drive the interstate,
watch faces come and go on either
side. I am free to be sung to;
I am free to sing. This woman
can cross any line. ("Alive", from *She Had Some Horses*)

III. It is often repeated, that a knower does not necessarily create a maker. If we may take advice from this old adage, knowing exactly what Joy Harjo's music and poetry is through her vision does not necessarily mean that it can automatically lead us to show how they actually interact in such complex patterns spreading over such complex webs, but an in-depth consideration of some of the basic metaphors behind most of her oeuvre.

A further study of Harjo's works would necessitate a consideration of the fact that such a movement from historical or philosophical to an entirely performative or structural understanding is not going to be an easy one, for not only aren't there any established musicological practices for the intensive fuzzying-around-the borders Harjo does with her poetry and music, most of tools available for analyzing music are based on 19th-century European tenets that probably do not render themselves as the best paraphernalia for the right understanding. Besides defeating the entire purpose of taking the word out of the page, an analysis based entirely and exclusively on a written bass or treble cleff score, counting measures and determining keys does not really illustrate what Harjo wants to *contain* in those cleffs, keys and measures. It does not help us understand *what* the Native Americans regarded as the breath of life, of word as the animate spirit as demonstrated by the philosophy in Wovoka's vision and Ghost Dance. Also, the aesthetic functions at work in Joy Harjo's song-poetry and her performances and Native American thoughts are very different from the set structures in poetry and music that structurally are preconceived at a level to conform to or rather produce unity in organics, harmony or tonal structures that make it so clear cut.

With popular music too, which is usually hybrid and liable to change or improvised over time, such taken for granted assumptions for putting words and music to a function of musical meaning-making put it in discrepancy and with Harjo it is the sheer disagreement between the ides she is trying to put forth in her works and the continued effort on behalf of western cultural practices to obliterate their voices, as well as established academically valued methods in both poetry and music.

The resonances sounding through her language are those that often connote the extreme possibilities of musical instrument, as expressed in the succession of assonance and alliteration, together with the searing blend of intertwined auditory and visual perceptions, “balancing on a tightrope of sound”(“Bleed Through”). The blending of poetry and music guides poetic art back to its performative power. The setting up of the band “Joy Harjo and Poetic Justice” is part and parcel of this project. But there is also the intention to lead the written text back to its oral dimensions of native tradition.⁶²

Harjo’s work is not merely what we understand as a ‘text’ in structuralist analysis, hence nor are they merely compound of structures that can yield their secrets of musical and poetic meaning-making by a sheer structuralist, or historical analysis. If one has to have a thorough understanding of Harjo’s work, one cannot reduce her poems or her music to a mere three dimensional understanding alone. The ‘essence’ of her work is its genesis, it is her vision regarding both that she re-iterates again and again, the key traits of her organization, and they way she wields and perceives it to work for her musico-poetic functions. It is remarkable in the way it interacts with the other arts, not dependent upon each other, but symbiotic like her heritage, culture, ancestry and the voices she alludes to that dictates her visions of Noni Daylight, to “The Woman Who Hangs from the Thirteenth Floor Window”. What looks like an abstract poem on the paper turns into a complex array of reggae beats, creek drumming, native chants, shouts and vocable, jazz riffs, guitar licks and long drawn chorus and bridges much in the fashion of jazz, which is why probably Harjo refuses to call her work ‘jazz’ but instead, focusing on the fused nature of the works, calls it ‘tribal jazz’. The power of the combined effort is seen as and through what Harjo does to bring out the energy of the sound and the word, to bring poetry and word back together, and to lend to words the visually challenging and fleshed out reality of painting, to bring the spatial and the temporal arts together in these modern times, as was defined by her native and indigenous aesthetics, as is characteristic of the red earth of Oklahoma that is the home of so many cultures, people, races and nations from all across the planet. It is thus why

⁶² Coltelli, Laura, “Joy Harjo’s Poetry”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Native American Literature*, ed. Joy Porter and Kenneth M. Roemer, NY: CUP, 2005: 291.

a purely structuralist analysis, that engages with the intricacies of scores and sonic phonemes, and transcripts fails, the reason why her work looks so differently powerful in her. It is like the many headed creature like the blues or the jazz, a remarkable beast in itself that refuses to be structured or fixed in its entirety.

Like the importance of sounds and words in these, originating in the call-response of the poet-priests, her sounds have a mixed heritage and earthy rhythm, which whispers across ever shadow of her lyricism. No matter how meticulously you note every single detail of her sounds, her words, her lyrics, the next time you hear it, you will hear something else, maybe a different meaning, a different new layer of significance how our senses were united in feeling once, and Harjo's differing versions of same poems in various performances also changes the organic-tonic agreement of harmonic whole as expected by western musical traditions, radically. The performance *is* the object.

However, to say that Harjo's works resemble entirely the improvisational character of the blues is to be misled from her original intention. Most of the works of jazz or blues incorporate a very heavy amount of improvisations, done usually on the spot, which may sometimes leave the listeners or the audience confounded on the nature of the work. Harjo's works, on the other hand are based on improvisations made on a reasonably recognizable skeleton, in that the texts of her music, i.e., the poems are usually recognizable. They hardly differ much, at least textually, though the adaptations vary to various degrees from time to time, and most of them are conscious re-writings of her poems, than a pure blues or jazz-type improvisation, as she herself accepts when she calls her work fusion of different heritages and traditions, 'tribal jazz'.

The texts of such songs adapted from poems like "For Anna Mae Pictou Aquash" are for most part conscious re-writings, adaptations of her poems, and the song doesn't vary much either. There are obviously exceptions to this, for example, she has as many as three different recorded versions of "She Had Some Horses" or her cover of "Wichi Tai To" in her 2008 album *Winding*

Through The Milky Way, reminiscing of the popular rendering of a peyote chant by Jim Peppers, himself from the Plains tribes of the Kaw and the Cree like Harjo, growing up in Oklahoma, and to this day the only authentic native American chant-song to feature in Billboard charts:

Witchy tai to , gimmee ra
whoa rah neeko, whoa ra neeko
hey ney, hey ney, no way

Witchy tai to , gimmee ra
whoa rah neeko, whoa ra neeko
Hey ney, hey ney, no way

Water spirit feelin'
Springing round my head
Makes me feel glad
That I am not dead⁶³

These are, still, nevertheless defined as “work”, even if they resemble one form or another even in their cognitive foundation, like a true hybrid, it is a work in its own right and nature. There is always something preserved something new from all these features, in her works, through all the variations. The song and their poem versions are always recognizable, because through them Harjo is making a statement, the chords and harmonies are mostly recognizable, and whatever variations maybe there, occur within limits. However different maybe the versions of “She Had Some Horses” it is the same poem, same song, not two songs, but two pieces of performances.

⁶³ There are numerous parallels between Jim Peppers and Joy Harjo, both of them chose to introduce a new kind of fusion jazz sound, rock and r&b, into a whole new sound born from the red earths of Oklahoman mixed cultured to the high-styles of Miles Davis, or John Coltrane-both of whom count them as among their influences.

This observation is applicable to her version of poetry as well, straddling between the impromptu cadences of the spoken word and oral speech, prose and structured stylized poetry, free verse and rhyme, song-poems and word paintings, consistently insisting on the power of her transcultural heritage, but still primarily her oral/aural traditions as well as traditions as an ultimately defined 'work'. The aesthetics behind Harjo's poetry is a free movement between the cadence of spoken speech, prose, storytelling and lyric, emphasizing on the timelessness of her visions. Thus although each version or each performance of hers might be successfully considered as an independent work, it is still meaningful to treat her entire oeuvre as relating to one singular vision.

Harjo's project is thus to explore the potentialities of the porous boundary figures to bring the world into balance, through the energy generated by the union of poetry and music into a release of the true potential of the 'word' that creates a sense of identity for her that can incorporate all the disparate elements in her heritage-African American, Irish, French, creek, Cherokee- into a synergistic whole that stretches between the two ends of her native American and white American heritage, oral and written, poetry and music, and in the process speaks for the land that incorporates all of these. Harjo is, thus, not an exclusivist, red-for-red activist, neither a pan-Indian tribalist, but like her trickster figure Noni Daylight, a fusional crosser of boundaries who incorporates all aspects of the different elements that make up the Oklahoma earth, but still retaining its unique and individual identity. "Her's are travelling woman poets, talk-songs of abandoned sisters who find themselves alive and born again as an Albuquerque Sunday sunrise, with her Navajo friend...who see themselves in anchorage through an Athabascan grandmother homeless in the streets. Who identify amorously with a Latin-American cleaning woman in Los Angeles. Who give birth with a Navajo mother in Gallup. Who hangs from the thirteenth floor window in Chicago. Who ride with Noni Daylight."⁶⁴

⁶⁴Harjo, Joy and Greg Harris, "Singing Verse, Talking Prose", in Kenneth Lincoln ed. *Speak Like Singing: Classics of Native American Literature*, UNM Press, 2009. 223. Google Book Search. July 10th 2011.

Harjo's work keeps her grounded-in her past and her present, in the various threads she holds together-Irish, French, creek, Cherokee, African –American-building and re-building fragile webs of connection to the earth on a physical, spiritual and mythical as well as poetic level. She explores the interior and exterior landscapes that half-breeds share between their Indian and white identities , a volatile mix of worlds ranging from creek drumming to the lyricism of old bible tales, that she mixed in her works, into her unique jazzy rhythmic chanting free verse and Reggae Creek inflected beats.

Harjo's own linguistic expansion in her poetry pursued the course her musical style took. She had started learning saxophone when she was a teenager, following her grandmother Naomi Harjo, and to this day she credits music with the mushrooming poetic sensibilities in herself. She stopped after some time, but as late as in her late thirties, she took up the alto sax inspite of everyone's opposing, inspite of the fact that she already had a career in poetry. It is during this time that she brought out her first music album compiled with recordings of her numerous performances and reading sessions of poems with her earlier band *Poetic Justice* from three of her earlier volumes: two from *She Had Some Horses* 1983- "She Had Some Horses" and "I Give you Back", known here as "Fear Poem", one from *Secrets from the Centre of the World* 1989 – "My House is Red Earth", two from *In Mad Love and War* 1990- "For Anna Mae Pictou Aquash", five from *The Woman Who Fell From The Sky* 1994- "The Creation Story"(with which her first album *Letter from the End of the Twentieth Century*, released 1997, opened), "A Postcolonial Tale", "Myth of Blackbirds", "Letter from the End of the Twentieth Century" and "Promise".

The themes of loss of identities, dissolutions of identity and heritage, alcoholism, disintegration of families and yet the tenuous will to survive, all of these represent the main themes of her poems and her songs. Harjo speaks of her first project with her band: "... [I] wanted a music that blended from my musical loves. I also wanted music I could dance to, a blend I haven't heard

before.”⁶⁵ Laura Coltelli comments: “The organizational simplicity of the first compositions achieved by means of sound, images, spoken language, is here replaced first and foremost by traditional Indian – American structures designed to recover the tonal effects of ritual chanting.”⁶⁶ Harjo was captivated by the power of these various musical instruments ranging from creek stomps to African American blues traditions, themselves thought to be hybrid offsprings of different people over different periods of time to create an oddly harmonious melody in the rhythms of her free verse fluid structures that she adapted to the rhythms of her music and she thus recalls in one of her interviews how someone commented on the rhythms of her poetry sounding like that of saxophone because of the pauses⁶⁷.

Even her training as a painter brings out the significant effects on her work. It is the reason why the quality of her images in her poetry is so often so highly evocative and fleshed out even in the minute details fully coloured, but she has herself accepted that music, and the traditional oral/aural arts native to her tribal aesthetics had more influence on her poems, especially on the way she chose her rhythms and her sound structures, than painting, and her choice of saxophone for music and jazz-beats to her poems also provide flesh to her poetry and speaks volumes about the intricacies of her project, the saxophone usually referred to as the musical instrument closest to the human voice. Harjo speaks of her choice of the instrument:

When I hear our music I always think of Africa announcing itself as part of the mix. And it goes the other way. The root of blues, rock, and jazz is around the stomp dance fire too, and it's never, ever mentioned. One day, the saxophone would be a Mvskoke traditional

⁶⁵ Harjo, Joy, from “An Interview with Joy Harjo” by Eugene B. Redmond, in *Crossing Waters, Crossing Worlds: The African Diaspora in the Indian Country* ed. By Tiya Miles et al., Duke University Press, 2006: 29

⁶⁶ Coltelli, Laura, “Joy Harjo’s Poetry”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Native American Literature*, ed. Joy Porter and Kenneth M. Roemer, NY: CUP, 2005: 289.

⁶⁷ Harjo, Joy, from “An Interview with Joy Harjo” by Eugene B. Redmond, in *Crossing Waters, Crossing Worlds: The African Diaspora in the Indian Country* ed. By Tiya Miles et al., Duke University Press, 2006: 29

instrument. That's how these things work! So all that's at the root of my sense of poetry and music. And at the root of that is rhythm.⁶⁸

Speaking of her second album *Native joy for Real* released in 2004, Joy Harjo announces herself and her work a part of this 'mix' even more closely:

...Band-in-the-Box, Garage Band, and my little Bose recorder helped me construct the shape and feel of this next CD. Recently, I premiered some of the new tunes...It was the first band gig where I've felt the music was my soul. I could be inside it, dance around in it, fly. How to describe it? Its hard to categorize, really. That's both positive and negative. There's really no easy place to fit it in when selling it in a music store. I guess it most often gets put in American Indian , Native American, yet it's just not that....this is mostly singing with some poetry. Responses have included [that it] sounds like Sade. That's the horn and voice. Other people have mentioned Suzanne Vega. Again voice. I mix hip-hoppish kind of loops with native rhythms and sounds. People hear the saxophone, and they say jazz...but I know jazz well enough to call myself a jazz player...and there's the native musical influence, from my tribe and others. I've called it in the past, tribal jazz.⁶⁹

"I am a poet and a writer because I am curious about this process called living, the transformational aspect of language."⁷⁰ According to Robert Johnson: "Harjo often has reiterated these same essential attitudes about the role of poetry: the world is a changeful place; spiritual presences, though often over-looked, abound; poetry is a process of breathing that world in and

⁶⁸ Harjo, Joy, from "An Interview with Joy Harjo" by Eugene B. Redmond, in *Crossing Waters, Crossing Worlds: The African Diaspora in the Indian Country* ed. By Tiya Miles et al., Duke University Press, 2006: 29.

⁶⁹ Harjo, Joy, from "An Interview with Joy Harjo" by Eugene B. Redmond, in *Crossing Waters, Crossing Worlds: The African Diaspora in the Indian Country* ed. By Tiya Miles et al., Duke University Press, 2006: 30.

⁷⁰ Harjo, Joy, quoted in the preface to "A 'MELUS' Interview: Joy Harjo", by Helen Jaskoski, in *MELUS*, Vol. 16, No. 1, Folklore and Orature (Spring, 1989 - Spring, 1990), pp. 5-13. 5.

then speaking its truth out. The poet is, then, truly *in-spired*. ”⁷¹ She understands clearly the focus on letters sounds and words and calculates meanings deeply indigenous to the red earth of Oklahoma. Hers are not immovable phrases and base words chosen without hope or urgency but satiated by gentle fingers on her saxophone, flowing through the beats of jazz, drums, guitar, vocals, glides along well-known and little-known places that quickens her internal tornado of death, straddling two worlds, genocide of her people, every attempt at mass extinction and every re-birth that follows. During her entire career, Joy Harjo has steadily intensified her efforts to make language, even the language of poetic-illocution and writing even more musical. Her reading voice, performed in the second album *Native Joy For Real*, without any musical accompaniments- of which she speaks of in passing in one of her interviews about the concept: “the poetry in the last album made it harder to sell, but this is mostly singing, with some poetry...”⁷²- resembles a singing voice, with the sonority, extension of phrases resembling the lyrical chants in Native American ceremonies. They mar silence, break the seeds of memory, fill bodies with soft sounds of different times. Outside her dream box of poetry, music and visions, words sing of cultural places from different parts of the planet rich with drumrolls of earth, worlds inside and outside America or Oklahoma or the heart, illuminating the unbending of the spirit of the Native American woman issued through a voice, cloaked in androgynous souls. This voice penetrates silence, cracks barriers, her memories singing of yesterday’s and tomorrow’s sweet old songs. Words peeled from the poet’s pen shape the bens of her horn.

Hence, one point appears clearly in Harjo’s work- that to sing is not only about singing, but as the poet-priests of early blues and gospels and participants in warpath and beautyways did, its mostly about what you sing and how you use it to express yourself and all that about and around you that make what you are. What makes Harjo ‘s song-poems and musical poetry so special is not only her ability to shape words, but also create new musical styles, especially when she started writing her own music to put to her poems after she left her band Poetic Justice, to do

⁷¹ Johnson, Robert, “Inspired lines, Reading Joy Harjo’s Prose –Poems”, *American Indian Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 3/4 (Summer - Autumn, 1999), pp. 13-23. 19.

⁷² Harjo, Joy, from “An Interview with Joy Harjo” by Eugene B. Redmond, in *Crossing Waters, Crossing Worlds: The African Diaspora in the Indian Country* ed. By Tiya Miles et al., Duke University Press, 2006: 25.

justice to expression in words and lyrics contained in it. What was principally a consign of banishment for the displaced community of the Mississippian tribes, Oklahoma, a place of internment within closed off precincts, was altered as it became one with dreams and expressed through the language, a resource of imagination that makes the borders not frozen and constricted but flowing and creative, offering potential for stability and confrontation.

In “She Had Some Horses”, one of her signature and much discussed poems, first appearing in her 1983 collection *She Had Some Horses* and then in her 1997 album *Letter from the End of the Twentieth Century*, packs a powerful moment of an exploration of womanhood’s closest moments, “their despair, their imprisonment and ruin at the hands of men and society, but also of their awakenings, power and love.”⁷³ N. Scott Momaday says: “*She Had Some Horses* is a literary event of importance. The poetry here is of mythic and timeless character, native and lyrical in its expression, profound in its reflection of a worldview that is at once precise and comprehensive. There is much of the oral tradition here...”⁷⁴ Harjo’s poems abound in visual images, often abstract and paradoxical in its juxtaposition of fear and love or death and life, and when tried to cull a ‘logical’ sense out of his poem has probably created much discussion among the critics for its highly allusive imageries, graphically colourful word-paintings and its steady almost unfaltering rhythms like rhythmic heartbeats that is reflected in the slow 4/4 time signatures of sweet moving reggae and rhyming phrases, repetitive sentences and uniform series of meters where the stressed and unstressed syllables occur at almost the same places, but which is only revealed when it is sounded on music with the steady almost-foot tapping accompaniment of beats in the music accompanied by guitar and saxophone, perfectly copying the sound and beat of hoof-beats of a horse, describing the horses in the speaker’s minds reflecting her different aspects of nature. Harjo talks about the possible meaning of the horses that has culled such long ranged discussion in the critical circles in an answer that pertains to a vision she has had in her poetry as well as music:

⁷³ Quoted from Backcover of *She Had Some Horses*, Joy Harjo, Norton, 2008 rev, edition.

⁷⁴ Momaday, N. Scott, “Review of *She Had Some Horses*”, Quoted from Backcover of *She Had Some Horses*, Joy Harjo, Norton, 2008 rev, edition.

What do the horses mean is the question I've been asked most since the first publication of the book...I usually say, "It's not the poet's work to reduce the poem from poetry to logical sense." Or, "It's not about what the poem means; it's *how* the poem means." Then I ask, "So what do the horses mean to you?"...I am aware of stepping into a force field or dream field of language, of sound...I am engaged by the music, by the deep...Horses, like the rest of us, can transform and be transformed. A horse could be a streak of sunrise, a body of sand, a moment of ecstasy. A horse could be all of this at the same time...⁷⁵

Harjo reads various renditions of this poem, constantly re-arranging it, the music, some even bare voiced, and therein might lie the clue about the different aspects of her personality and her project, the different threads of 'Indian', 'white', 'woman', 'Cherokee', 'Cree', 'poet', 'musician', 'singer', 'professor', 'painter' and the visionary that she tries to bring together.

She had horses who liked Creek Stomp Dance songs.
She had horses who cried in their beer.
She had horses who said they weren't afraid.
She had horses who lied.
She had horses who told the truth, who were stripped
bare of their tongues.

She had some horses.

.....

She had horses who had no names.
She had horses who had books of names.
She had horses who whispered in the dark, who were afraid to speak.
She had horses who screamed out of fear of the silence, who
carried knives to protect themselves from ghosts.
She had horses who waited for destruction.
She had horses who waited for resurrection.

She had some horses.

⁷⁵ Harjo, Joy, "Introduction", *She Had Some Horses*, NY: Norton, 2008: ix.

.....
She had some horses she loved.

She had some horses she hated.

These were the same horses.

It stands as a symbolic effort to tie all these warring bridges together into a single organic harmony: "These were the same horses".

As Icelandic singer-songwriter Bjork says, that "I am at the point where I can let it out for other people, hear them through other people's ears... The album is about voices... I want to see what can be done with the entire emotional range of the human voice -- a single voice, a chorus, trained voices, pop voices, folk voices, strange voices. Not just melodies but everything else, every noise that a throat makes"⁷⁶, then much of Harjo's accomplishments in her works have been to similarly break away from norms and clichés regarding voices, recording and song writing or poetry while preserving the entrancing passion and turncoat skill of her inheritances. She gives us an X-ray vision into the particulars of how language functions beneath the language "English" we are used to see; to construct it into a three-dimensional experience by the reiterations in "She Had Some Horses" that forms the basis of the arrangements of the beats. The variations in the phrasing "same horses" and "some horses" emphasize each other, as well as the difference. The reggae beats and the jazz guitar lead to a repetitive effect, like heartbeat or hoof beats, that reminds one of the steadiness of a horse or the human heart. Each line at 4/4 piece is repeated with the same refrain albeit about the different qualities of the horses for about six lines with a bridge. "She Had Some Horses" repeats, which gives the entire thing a chant-like quality, reminding of the unspoken and silent hard and steady pound of the poem's heart. It forces each

⁷⁶ Bjork, Icelandic singer-songwriter-Poet, Quoted in *New Yorker Article [Archive]* - @forumz
< <http://www.atforumz.com/archive/index.php/t-241782.html>>. Web. July 10, 2011.

moment of language into motion, and Harjo takes advantage of the silences and the spaces captured in the frame of the text of the poem by filling it up with a horn that sounds like a talking, whispering, musing, laughing, crying human voice, qualities of the poem that were till now kept invisible and hidden inside the staticity of the printed text. The reflection of obstructions dictates the verse, whereas tripping that hurdle bring it to a closing of the note "Those were the same horses". This blockade detains the familial domain inside cities, sacred rituals inside modernity, vanished native languages and words inside English. The identity that speaks through the poem is torn apart amid fright and rebelliousness, estrangement and ingenuity, and the horses are aspects of these fighting planes of the personality. All of these semantic contexts are adapted in her music, where she engages the horse metaphor to bring together all these separate aspects of her identity and her project together. Nothing demonstrates the boundary-crossing aspect of her work than this single line with which she ends her first signature poem:

These were the same horses.

“Everything matters. Everything.”

Miles Davis.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Quoted in Joy Harjo's website , in among her works, dreams, poetry and music
<http://www.joyharjo.com/Home.html>>

Chapter 3: “How We Became Human”

Music rots when it gets too far from dance. Poetry atrophies when it gets too far from music. - Ezra Pound⁷⁸

I told my vision through songs. - Black Elk, “The Sixth Grandfather”⁷⁹

I. The finer verses move on page and stage, and while it is true for Joy Harjo, one might add, that the finest ones still work quite as well in music, an opportunity towards an innovative transom into a new foundation. “By four years old,” she says, “I knew the lyrics to most songs I heard from my mother or the radio or school. The qualities that stood out, that entranced me, were rhythm married with sound sense and meaning. Poems connected with my soul, which was a place that made dense sense.”⁸⁰ As mentioned previously, Harjo traces her lines mainly from a line of hereditary chiefs, to say it in other way, speakers and healers and this combined with her variegated lineage, leads to her constant shift into directions of poetry from painting and later into music or theatre etc. She anthologized her poems into poetry books as well as music, in sounds which are resolute and sturdy, occasionally empathetic, with the addition to them being, lighthearted and clever. No wonder she decides to open her first music collection with the poem “Creation Story” which is also one of the opening poems of *The Woman Who Fell From The Sky* listing the belief the native and indigenous tribes had about the power of thoughts and words in creation of life as well as its sustenance.

⁷⁸ Quoted in Davidson, Peter, *Ezra Pound and Roman Poetry: A Preliminary Survey*, New York: Rodopi, 1995:155.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Stampoulos, Linda L., *The Redemption of Black Elk: An Ancient path to Inner Strength Following the Footprints of the Lakota Holy Man*, CBC Publishing, 2010: 74. Google Book Search. Web. July 8, 2011

⁸⁰ Root, William Pitt, “About Joy Harjo”, *Ploughshares*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (Winter, 2004/2005), pp. 180-185.

I'm not afraid of love
or its consequences of light.

It's not easy to say this
or anything when my entrails
dangle between paradise
and fear.

I am ashamed
I never had the words
to carry a friend from her death
to the stars
correctly.

Or the words to keep my people safe from drought
or gunshot.

The stars who were created by words are
circling over this house
formed of calcium, of blood—

this house
in danger of being torn apart
by stones of fear.

If these words can do anything
I say bless this house
with stars

Transfix us with love. ("Creation Story")

She opens the poem with a 4/4 regular beat on a native drum, with rainsticks and chants providing the background and soon the alto sax takes over for a long played riff that provides a silky smooth background for the power of words, the power of sounds that she taps into the story

of beginning of everything from time and words, a belief which is so radically different from the idea of creation in all the Western civilizations. The song-poem is not a straightforward story with direct beginnings and endings, but one which has a synergy as complicated as the fate of these colonized people. It is an attestation of the need to re-cognize the story of how her people began and even dared to begin amidst images of death and destruction. Stories create reality. It is making of new-ness through thoughts. to create poems that include images and sounds that continually overlap, change, re-configure and contrast each other across cuts and versions, the impressionistic paradoxes she often devises being the most illuminating part of her vision to facilitate a combination into new ways of understanding the convoluted bits of life, for as Maxine Hong Kingston writes in her book *The Woman Warrior: Memoir of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* : “I learned to make my mind large, as the universe is large, so that there is room for contradictions”⁸¹. The poem’s imagistically loaded fundamentals of the verses get fleshed out in the sounds, the chants, the rain sticks and hear Harjo’s rich alto sax tenderly pick up from the chorus this intrepid paradox :

I’m not afraid of love
Or it’s consequence of light
It’s not easy to say this
Or anything when my entrails
Dangle between paradise
And fear.....(“Creation Story”)

The striking juxtaposition in her texts and the power of her expression transports across the continents, the wrenching consequence of the incredibly fundamental psychosomatic veracity of genocide and the dread following the centuries of defeat and annihilation. The irony brought out

⁸¹ Kingston, Maxine Hong, *The Woman Warrior: Memoir of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*, New York: Vintage, 1989: 29.

by placing the equally substantial realities of fear and heaven side by side mitigated by her humanly crying-laughing-whispering-oracular-praying-hoping saxophone solos that builds up these iridescences of clarification observes her nation and each and every one of the negations, denials, contradictions, and forgetting of the voices and old ways. Harjo tells us this in the tale of the rabbit and the earless man in *The Rabbit is Up to Tricks* -left-overs from colonialism for the few left behind still, sung in a song-chant that resembles the Saving Grace chants of Navajo and Cree healers. Providing a drastically novel initiative to the notion of poetry understanding, Harjo uses her soprano or alto sax solos at the initial stages of the song-poem and the grand finales, sounds that avow and alleviate, ascend and achromatize, amuses and acuminates according to occasions. According to Neal Ullstead:

Reminiscent at times of Soul II Soul or Kenny G, and at other times Joshua Redman or Pharoah Sanders, Harjo's fervent desire to wed her poetry with reggae music grew from experiences in 1980s London where dub poets such as Lincoln Kwesi Johnson, Mutabaruka, and Oku Onourá were creating an international stir in literary and musical cities alike...Her band Poetic Justice, a six piece ensemble with veteran musicians from various traditional jazz, rhythm and blues, and rock and roll backgrounds, also has East and West Indian influences from reggae to calypso.⁸²

He adds, "Traditional sounds and chanting sometimes offer a counterpoint to rolling rhythms, at other times reinforcement. At a pause in her poetry Harjo weaves her saxophone into the mix, offering balm for the wounded listener or extra swing to promote a cathartic release."⁸³ This modus operandi is most manifest in the extensive sax solos with an indigenous chorus line in the initiation and at the suspensions in the mainly noteworthy pieces of the poem, finishing with a guitar solo by Richard Carbahal, her lead guitarist. In truth, the progression was so flourishing, that Harjo, in her own recognition, began to contour her poetry in writing too in harmony with the music, so that she came to see and write performances and musical beats weaved into the

⁸² Ullstead, Neal, "Native American Rap and Reggae: Dancing 'To the Beat of a Different Drummer' ", ed. Jennifer C. Post, *Ethnomusicology: A Contemporary Reader*, New York: Taylor and Francis, 2007, 331-349. Pp 336.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 337.

rhythms of her poetry exorcising the kind of fear that throughout have crippled generations and whole cultures in the chants in “Fear Poem/I Give You Back” where she uses the power of words, especially that of repetitive recitation to exterminate an evil out of the being of her society- much like the ceremonial use of repetitions in chants for effective healings or spells, in speaking or in the Ghost Dance. Revolution occurs in words becoming materially powerful to be able to modify reality, not through one aspect working over another from a top-below hierarchy, but accepting each other-much in same manner of transformative processes Harjo uses to cross genres and boundaries in her won work, putting fractured lyric texts to lilting bel canto.

“Putting a band together and performing the poetry changed my writing. I...began performing my poems rather than saying them. Performance became a storytelling event around the initial urge for poetry”⁸⁴, she adds. Harjo tells stories distinctively, in cadenced phrasings and line-breaks. These are song stories of “those who were never meant/ to survive”.⁸⁵ The music in so many of the cases, where she adopts from *The Woman Who Fell From the Sky* and *In Mad Love and War*, works in a consistently expository reminder that her annotations provide subsequence to the elegiac stanzas. The contextualizing function that has been provided by her extensive annotations in making meaning out of her verses can be said in this case to have been uttered by the music which provides for some of the textual functions in the performative action. In her song rendering of “For Anna Mae Pictou Aquash”, the urgent melodic rhythm and incorporation of fast riffs with horse hooves and women wailing to the line “the right meaning of your murder” accompany the informational index that this poem commemorated and was written in protest of the murder of the Micmac activist of the same name.

The “Creation Story” is in a sense an invocative poem for her musical endeavour as it was in a sense a companion poem that works as an invocation of sorts to the longer, epic poem “The Woman Who fell From the Sky”, beautiful rendering of a modern contextualizing of the Iroquois creation myth of the heavenly woman who created the world at her behest and word as she fell

⁸⁴ Harjo, Joy. Quoted in Neal Ullestad, “Native American Rap and Reggae: Dancing ‘To the Beat of a Different Drummer’”, ed. Jennifer C. Post, *Ethnomusicology: A Contemporary Reader*, New York: Taylor and Francis, 2007, 331-349. Pp 337.

⁸⁵ Harjo, Joy, “Anchorage”, *She Had Some Horses*, New York: Norton, 2008: 4.

from the sky. What more could serve as a perfect opening song for her first album to elucidate her vision, an invocation of the process of creation and sustenance of all things beautiful, than this song-poem that serves as a proud affirmation of all that has sustained her cultures, the beliefs in beauty and the harmonic faith between all life forms that all native American tribal populations share. The contexts in the text, the feelings running through the whole poem are carried over by her horn and the meditative smooth guitar solo by Richard Carbahal in the end, flanked by chorus of native chants, reminding us of something that is a strong strain uniting her with her identification with that part of the hemisphere as the landbase articulated through the oral tradition and stories of the beginnings. These words expound also the cultural topography that runs through the interior and exterior landscapes in the stories and songs to poems about happenings, people and places handed down from generations, threads of stories that need to be told to make-live identities and memories in difficult times. Tales that have been re-told by modern web-makers of chronicles and traditions, linking it to the web first created by Grandmother Spider, or Thought-woman, that present day poets and singers mend and add their own versions. Paula Gunn Allen writes: "Native writers write out of tribal traditions, and into them. They, like oral storytellers, work within a literary tradition that is at base connected to ritual and beyond that to tribal metaphysics or mysticism. What has been experienced over the ages mystically and communally—with individual experiences fitting within that overarching pattern—forms the basis for tribal aesthetics and therefore of tribal literatures"⁸⁶. She carves in her poem this vision of Grandmother Spider:

....the work of weaving the strands

Of her body, her pain, her vision

Into creation, and the gift of having created,

To disappear...

After her I sit on my laddered rain-bearing rug

⁸⁶ Quoted in Nixon, Angelique V, "Poem and Tale as Double Helix in Joy Harjo's A Map to the Next World", *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, Volume 18, Number 1, Spring 2006, pp. 1-21. Pp 9.

And mend her tear with string⁸⁷.

Harjo does exactly that, she reclaims back the word of the creation, and she does it in favour of and include in it all those who belong to the middle-space, the nowhere-people, the mixed blood, in not only her modern rendition of this age old myth but musically as well in comprising sounds of reggae, jazz and cappella tribal intonations to gutsy blues sounds with native musical traditions in her song and performative renderings. In a word, Harjo communicates her vision of her work, her universe in a nutshell in this effort, for those who can see, and hear. Native American oral cultures have included both written down as well as performed traditions, where flexibility in accordance with changing times and traditions as long as they are true to the spirit and American Indian artists have always created works that reflects their personal experiences and imagination. Hence, even in her seemingly radical treatment of Native American themes and techniques in what many red-on-red exclusivists may see as deviation from the true path, is also a permissible practice, though admittedly the amount of improvisation made on the performance may vary from tribe to tribe and ritual to ritual.

Harjo herself says in one of her interviews that would be so applicable in an understanding not only the nature of her project but the debate between inclusivists and exclusivists in American Indian critical circles: "I feel strongly that I have a responsibility to all the sources that I am: to all past and future ancestors, to my home country, to all places that I touch down on and that are myself, to all voices, all women, all of my tribe, all people, all earth, and beyond that to all beginnings and endings. In a strange kind of sense [writing] frees me to believe in myself, to be able to speak, to have voice, because I have to; it is my survival."⁸⁸ Harjo's creation story is a story that includes everyone of the souls, half breed or full blood, who has been touched by devastation and including their words, their stories in her invocation led slowly away by the soft sound of an earthy acoustic guitar. "My audience," Harjo says, "starts with my tribal nation,

⁸⁷ Allen, Paula, Gunn, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering The Feminine In American Indian Tradition*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1986:11.

⁸⁸ West, Kathleen, *Joy Harjo: The Poetry Foundation*, Web, July 8 2011, <<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/joy-harjo>>

spreads out to include those who are also trying to find a way through this particularly rough layer of the world” adding “I hear from them.”⁸⁹

A fundamental problem for all composed music is the audibility and comprehension of sung words. The poem should be written in simple and precise language with plenty of open vowels, not over-clogged with sibilants or rough consonants, short words in preference to long words to make for easy transition into musical rhythms from poetic metrical rhythms, and short sentences with strong verbs and nouns, repetitions, alliterations, assonance and onomatopoeia, are all helpful as are refrains which are among the oldest and most universal concessions of the poet to the composer in constituting aural imageries.

If these words can do anything

If these songs can do anything

I say bless this house

With stars

Transfix us with love. (“Creation Story”)

Music entails more on the factor of time than poetry, for a song dictates far more focus on the promptness of the continuing progress for its understanding, which is why it becomes imperative to put our focal point on the cadence so as not to constrict the poetic scales to musical ones. Music is proficient in admitting a wider variety of deviations within a basic metrical pattern than a poem, but what remains important is to give the words their breathing space which in a song is generally longer than in a poem. Harjo’s musical arrangements too echo the technique through which she perceives her poetry and the order in which she places them, as well as her textual arrangements fleshing out her verbal art in its choice of language, intonation, repetition, pauses, allusions and numerous other rhetorical or prosodic and rhythmic devices she uses in her text to bring out the singing, talking, crying, blessing, wisdom of the voice and the ears of the listener. The oral/aural importation ensures that the listener or reader or audience is not just a flaccid

⁸⁹ Root, William Pitt, “About Joy Harjo”, *Ploughshares*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (Winter, 2004/2005), pp. 180-185. 181.

recipient of the text, but a participator in the process. In regards to oral and performative cultures in indigenous societies, in *Verbal Art as Performance*, Richard Bauman proposes “[There is a] heightened intensity of communicative interaction which binds the audience to the performer in a way that is specific to performance as a mode of communication.”⁹⁰ Harjo does not bond to only one definition of performing the verbal art, she, especially in her *She Had Some Horses* album released 2006 spanning across her seven important collections of poems, comprises both pure readings of her poems with nothing but her sonorous voice marking poetry as dominating element in the performances as against the same poems cut in musical versions. The contrasts force our ears open up to various kinds of sounds, to the various ways they can be used, and the spaces written text create in our understanding of what is inevitably a verbal art.

Blues sigh and breathe softly at every corners of Harjo’s world. “Been down so long it looks like up to me”, the blues singers sang so often, and her low tones and whispering rhythmic beats speak quietly, as if almost to herself, the tales of fear and loss and regeneration. Her poetry hovers on the never-too-sure perimeter of the Bessie Smiths or Louis Armstrongs, steering between dreams and lost hopes, trying to name the nameless feelings, like the un-definable blues, hanging between trepidation, glee, and phantoms from past, dismay, adoration and pure obsession. This makes Harjo and her characters- her voices, her speakers, the indomitable and intriguing Noni Daylight- a veritable bag of paradoxes, and herself, a professor of a new brand of poetry- music that fits neither the scheme of things in literary academia nor the music departments.

Few have been as fascinated by the power of spoken and unspoken words and the relationship between them and music as Harjo. Her quest lay in finding new words to express the sounds to go beyond words, and sing the words to recreate the emotive power of sound and even create the structures accordingly in a fundamental rejection of the bi-partite division inherent in western

⁹⁰ Quoted in Wiget, Andrew, “Telling the Tale: A Performance Analysis of a Hopi Coyote Story”, Briann Swann and Arnold Krupat ed., *Recovering the word: Essays on Native American literature*, University of California Press, 1987: 316.

academia between poetry and the oral/aural/performed arts. She works with tiny pieces, her verse lines being short and her musical tones being confined to simple 4/4 beats with four to five syllables every line, simple instrumental techniques, juxtaposed, transposed even overlapped, like letters making up words. As in everyday speech, they are repeated; each musical cell overlaps another one. While artists ranging from Picasso, to Michel Duchamp introduced words into their paintings, Harjo creates simultaneous counterpoint of prose poems, music and painting within single compositions. Each melodic line is matched by a distinctly stressed and intoned line of poetry, crooned much in the manner of Native American chant songs.

A careful analysis of the lines of *Creation Story*, from which she moves to promise of birth and rains that will lead creation into productivity, as the music moves from invocative to happy speeded guitar rings and a fast jazz tempo celebrating the birth of a girl who brings in and promises the fulfillment of light and rain, probably Harjo's own daughter Rainy Dawn. It is in this piece, *Promise*, that we see her cleverly manipulating the prose poem taking its stressed and accented syllables to put it up to a musical rhythm of 4/4 tempo. It is characterized by pompous chords, each of the instruments is introduced separately and the prose poems are split into iambic tetrameters to accompany the music and the rhythm. The music rendering of *My House is the Red Earth* is extraordinarily woven, in that she takes vignettes of her poetic musings accompanied by Stephen Storm's photographers and weaves the three pieces *My House is Red Earth*, *If you Look With the Mind of the Swirling Earth*, and *Don't Bother the Earth Spirit* into three stanzas of the song woven and held the horn and her rhythmic recitation.

The collection *Secrets from the Centre of the Earth* is Harjo's interpretation of the Navajo landscape visualized in still-shots of wide empty red earthed arrays which forms the common connecting streak between two-her prose-poems and his stills of the land, the land that encapsulates all within her self. She repopulates the human absence in the enclosing with the music she weaves and her voice, in an evocation of the spirit of the land, and suggesting the musicality of song liberated from unyielding poetic or musical necessities, beckoning innovative ways of continuation instead of only appearance. It rises from this Earth of *Don't Bother the*

Earth Spirit that gives birth to music, words and the swirling vibgyor of visual images. White spaces everywhere opens the lines and words space to breathe, to echo, to muse, to think about what is being said, and just as importantly, what is never being said.

William Pitt Root writes: "To hear Harjo perform is to learn there will be no chitchat, no diversion whatsoever; rather, you find you are attending a spirit so sharply focused that it's as if the words on her page, in her heart, must ignite as she reads them. And it is to recognize that the traditional stance she takes as a poet. That of the truth-teller is assumed without a trace of false modesty."⁹¹ From the narration of the story of the young murdered Igbo man in "Letter from the End of the Twentieth Century" to rhythmic chant of giving back and escaping from the circles of fear and destruction and genocide spanning hundreds of years in "I Give You Back / Fear Poem" the only rendering which doesn't have a sax playing but just drums beating like the heart ("the smallest talking drum is an insistent heart"), to the highly political "The Real Revolution is Love", "A Postcolonial Tale", and "For Anna Mae Pictou Aquash", written in honour of the murdered Micmac activist, Harjo seemingly works with very little change of instruments or variety in sound and music patterns technically, in terms of tempo, beats or tonicity that can be scored down and analyzed, but whatever the staggering power of her utterances, lies beyond the text, it lies in the performance, the performance of the word in the voice *being* the object.

The music never stays put in one place even if you would want it, to, like the many headed beast jazz, it swirls around, changes colours gracefully, slowly infusing and including into itself everything, like the ever evolving structure of human civilizations, making peace with the past, surviving the present and preparing for the future. The sound, like most other sounds or music, is most difficult to describe in one way- it is an urban sound born in the streets of Chicago to Albuquerque, pressed against the cool rhythms of the earthy blues of Mississippi delta and the native chants Oklahoma red earth. It branches out like spanning all that makes up Harjo like her very own personal Yggdrasil, and seamlessly the branches mingles into one another, taking new directions and fonts until you aren't sure anymore where you started, but left to listen without thought or dissection and admire the view from a different angle, as you would a sunset from

⁹¹ Root, William Pitt, "About Joy Harjo", *Ploughshares*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (Winter, 2004/2005), pp. 180-185. 181

various points in a huge and flawlessly cut prism. It is a sound that allows us to temporarily forget the sorrows of the world, the blues that hold us down in despair and desire and delirium, and celebrate the ceremony of life, and the world around us, “they form us in our sleep of exhaustion as we make our way through this world of skewed justice, of songs without singers” (“The Myth of Blackbirds”). It is then, but natural, to try to identify this supple incredible essence made of sound and words, silence and non-living instruments made alive by human thought and creation, to hope to gather it in hands, to create new shapes, portents of dawn driven upward from the centre of the earth, to hear the language stretched thin inside fading chords picking its way along old notes of fine and subtle sounds, to mark the breath tracks speaking of those who have left their imprint on her life, and try to make a weak sense of it in your own words. And the only way to break out of the confused commands of the logical mind is to seek to take note of it with the body, to just listen to the sounds, and observe those potent words. One sees a word painting transposed into music in the title track, speculating on the impact of the event of a “casual murder” on a global scale that crossed cultures and continents:

He gives the young man his favorite name and calls him his brother.

The young killer is then no longer shamed but filled with remorse and cries all the cries he has stored for a thousand years. (“Letter From the End of the Twentieth Century”)

From “Fear Poem” to “For Anna Mae Pictou Aquash”, she presents an adamant citation of European genocide and conquests, and she effectively chants the process of giving back and facing the fears of those terrible times of death and legalized holocaust by the government. The process of making peace and forgiving, but never forgetting :

I release you, my beautiful and terrible
fear. I release you. You were my beloved
and hated twin, but now, I don't know you
as myself. I release you with all the

pain I would know at the death of
my children.

.....

I am not afraid to be angry.
I am not afraid to rejoice.
I am not afraid to be black.
I am not afraid to be white.
I am not afraid to be hungry.
I am not afraid to be full.
I am not afraid to be hated.
I am not afraid to be loved,

to be loved, to be loved, fear

(Printed Version: - "I Give You Back") (Song/Recital Versions: - "Fear Song"/"Fear poem")

She celebrates this urgent rhythmic release without her trademark horn, where fear, pain, despair has been turned the tables against at last- "But come here, fear/I am alive and you are so afraid/of dying"- with a feverous enthusiasm for living and merriment of it even in a world comprised majorly of death and injustice. This notion of setting something beautiful subtly for and against the backdrop of a terrible injustice and a crime, is seen in the poem dedicated by Harjo for the murder of a woman in Pine Ridge Reservation which is a perfect example of Harjo's training in painting erupting in vivid and vibrant and poignant shades of colors of nature, set against the backdrop of "...a sky blurred with mist and wind...violet heads of crocuses erupt from stiff earth"⁹² with long jazzy saxophone solos sounding as cool and strangely comforting as the most musical of jazz numbers with riffs and chants and sounds of horses hoofs fleshing out the picture culled out by her words in front of our eyes. One can see, the hooves tearing apart the layers after layers, and thereon emerges a beautiful painting, half sight half sound as if in a dream, with movements purple, green, violet and gold of the exalting earth singing in all its tormented beauty. And one wonders, this terrible beauty that Harjo, too, might have glimpsed, is what she

⁹² West, Kathleen, *Joy Harjo: The Poetry Foundation*, Web, July 8 2011,
<<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/joy-harjo>.>

was referring to when she chants “I am not afraid to rejoice”. Painting lived in poetry made alive through music. The smoothness of the music does not assuage a violent need for revenge against the killing, but “the right meaning of your murder”, the right meaning of deaths of not just her but millions of women before her, the solution to which never lies in a violent counter-reaction. Creation, destruction, death, recreation. Just new trails cut over and over again from old familiar roads.

Kathleen West ascribes to Harjo’s work, “the power of beauty and prophecy and all the hope of love poised at its passionate beginning. It allows us to enter the place ‘we haven’t imagined’ and allows us to imagine what we will do when we are there.”⁹³ The poet lives in the insides of her tunes, music, and the musician hides inside the poet. The music carries on the expression of the soundless the poet cannot utter, attended by her method of reacting to the experience of the work in the chords and the notes, the expanding and contracting of the rhythms and intonations, the fast or the slow musing tempos, the avant-garde enthusiasm in the Creek drums or the unhurried teasing downy sleek cadence of reggae. Its improvisatory nature, more seen when Harjo performs the same poems onstage, is constructed on the unanticipated; this is what gives it, its accomplishment and electrical energy. Her paradoxical and austere metaphors of “fear and love”, “naked bones”, “brutal city which outlines your limber beauty”, “bag of dreams in his hands dripping with blood”, “tears make river of red stars to an empty moon” are arresting and wrenching and in a restrained fashion, so is her music to the purist ear uninitiated to her fused and striking use of several genre bending techniques in both fueling each other forward to pattern a unique sound. There is an inexplicable pull of our-selves towards her words and her sounds, in a variety of ways sometimes persuading us to excavate profoundly keen understanding in the centre of beings, she pulls it into the center by a swift alteration or a fundamental swing in the pulse or the compositional outlines, or every now and then taking Noni Daylight and meandering casually with us in the order of things in the native space and landscape just on the surface plane, chatting a good number so nonchalantly on the subject of the enormously traumatic accounts and familiarities of nightmares, and then letting them go. “To look life in the face. To always look life in the face. To know it for what it is. At last to know it. To love it for what it is. And then, to

⁹³ West, Kathleen, *Joy Harjo: The Poetry Foundation*, Web, July 8 2011, <<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/joy-harjo>>

put it away.”⁹⁴ Sound is a most incredible thing, opening the ears and the heart with just a breath or just a finger to whole new worlds, something of a more spectacular means to glimpse the duller and commonplace things about us on a daily basis, to exhale a novel existence into words used out by generations of careless use. The music persists on gleaning the tale set along on its crossing by the verse and sets it on its path towards the listener liberated to let her thoughts travel in the wordless space that lies beyond all linguistic determinisms. Her 2004 album *Native Joy for Real* is a strengthening of her labours to generate a cross-over tongue even more thriving in surrounding in it the poetry of music which can parley immediately to the psyche with as little intercession as feasible, with its dynamic concoction of flashing, cross culturing fashions than any of her former footages. In this version of “Fear Song/I Give You Back” Harjo and her band creates a harrowingly effective combination of instruments and styles to be quite unlike anything else before, the music bringing out the fearful, urgent, immediate, aggressive somewhat dark invocation readers can only imagine in the poem:

I release you

I release you

I release you

I release you

This version is sung with accompaniment of powerful drum beats, guitar distortions and the name “Fear Poem” is changed to “Fear Song”, (the name of the poem being “I Give You Back”), with other cuts with a hint of hip –hop as well as jazz, blues or reggae. Her compositions are usually four or five minutes long. She places great care and emphasis on note and accent in the mood setting. The poem is set syllabically with cadences and special rhythms that render them to music. The vocal lines are highly expressive but never with a perfect lyrical charm of a trained singer- in fact Harjo’s voice is rough with the bark and rawness of chants and field hollers or early blues singers. The instruments are always a cautious cohort to her powerful soaring voice, only providing a full presence in codas, preludes and interludes or bridges. When writing music on a piece of poem, her primary concern is the conveyance of the poetic text, not only a fidelity to just note and accent, but also the poem’s structure. Words and music approach each other most closely in lyric poetry and it has always been here that the ancient lieder and art-songs of the

⁹⁴ Quoted from *The Hours*, Motion Picture 2002 , Directed by Stephen Daldry, written by Micheal Cunningham.

wandering minstrels and the troubadours dwelled. Harjo's poems suggests and hints, articulating ideas and stylizing moods through her verses, but only through hints and no direct explanations which can make her verses sometimes appear abstract. But it is this self sufficiency that makes it so much like music. If words are set to music, the music must be equal to its mood and meaning, an independent an entity as the poem. Harjo carefully applies notes to the words-so that no syllable which is short takes recourse to long notes uselessly if the prosody doesn't demand them, or vice versa. She allows breaking up the vocal lines, lines and phrases while re-arranging the lyrics for the songs from her poems to let it filled by music to express what the poet had left unspoken. Harjo's poems mostly consider the problem of covering the distance between physical spaces and mythic spaces that the vision of poetry and word seems to lead her to. In the 'Vision', Noni Daylight is drives to the edges of the Grand Canyon and understands that space to be the origin point of all that the native and indigenous world view and aesthetics risen from it and the only way to cross the current strong contrastive boundaries between physical space and mythic space all Harjo's poems and all her protagonists seems to traverse across, is to move from the realm of mundane world to the world of poetic-mythic space by building a bridge of music across the seemingly disparate sounds to take all of them across. Harjo's poems recognize the difficult and often impossible nature of this crossing this distance especially in a loveless and broken world, but she also identifies the transcendental unity of both and all of them. The lyric part of the song "This Is My Heart" innately asks this question:

My head, is a good head, but it is a hard head
and it whirrs inside with a swarm of worries.
What is the source of this singing, it asks
and if there is a source why can't I see it
right here, right now

To which the chorus answers:

This is my song. It is a good song.
It walked forever the border of fire and water
climbed ribs of desire to my lips to sing to you.
Its new wings quiver with
vulnerability.

While there are diffused understandings of the difficult things that cloud and separate the understandings, that does not allow us to know the source of 'singing', it is through the power of words and music, that not only Harjo but almost all native authors and poets have great reverence for, that such understandings of transcendence occur that leads to an individual finding a personal meaning in the understanding. The entire process is an attempt to find a natural meaning to the many lives of half-blood and to necessarily place it in conjunction with the land. Eventually, it is a poetics of revolution that finds love within abhorrence, perpetual within the earthly, and comprises the overlying corporal and artistic veracities. Harjo spreads out the portrait of a nation, a disjointed and split homeland, powerless to settle out its warring heterogeneous elements and suggests substitute means of comprehending her nation, alternatives that could be understood to be present in the native and indigenous sector of the American community. She develops her metaphors through *She Had Some Horses* to *In Mad Love and War* by developing the ironies and inconsistencies between what the native population has been reduced to, with what original vision was given and promised to them, and to what appears at times to the poet and the visionary, mediating the oppositions in such a way that these very paradoxes could serve to reconfigure the nature of relationships between the beings and spaces and places she explores throughout her work. Noni Daylight is a subject caught between times and spaces, and yet she drives across the edges of the Grand Canyon, signifying her understanding of the necessary boundary crossing by existing in the porous and sometimes twilight edges of things. Harjo's home is in-between places, spaces, homes and hotels, mesas and lounges, white and brown, female and androgynous, poetry and prose, verse and music. She opens "Eagle Song" with the prayer:

We are truly blessed because we
Were born, and die soon, within a
True circle of motion,
Like eagle rounding out the morning
Inside us.
We pray that it will be done
In beauty.
In beauty.

II. Harjo's creations always go back to her native and indigenous roots, beneath everything, not in a native-exclusionist way, but in a way that includes all life forms that covers the horizons from one end to other, always ending in celebration, of memory, oral traditions and all old things, reiterated in the eagle wings spanning the salt river to blue ocean and the song line of the dawn sky in Morning Song encapsulating everything in creation. *Winding Through The Milky Way* realizes her vision in a way that far exceeds the initial patches of her trials and tribulations. Her voice softens into melody of crooning songs to poetry, and the two mix together in such a way as to make distinction between them almost impossible to discern. Whereas in her earlier compositions, there might be signs of compressing the metres of the poems to accommodate the tonicity of music leading to a certain uncomfortable feeling that the poetry juts out from the music (an allegation that can be leveled at most song-poetry performances), Harjo finally smoothens out the textures of her songs which reach even deeper into the heart of the vision that she has been trying to deliver to us for so long. For Harjo, it is ultimately the vision that Harjo is always trying to express, that vision that seeks new ways of expressing itself through music working its magic on poetry freeing it, through painting and theatre or various other performative arts who necessarily belong together working together to lead us to the visionary mythical space of wordlessness, silence and ultimate understanding where all becomes one song. "All poets understand the final uselessness of words. We are chords to other chords to other chords, if we're lucky, to melody". ("Bird")

A little windy flute and guitar sings of the "Evening Song" in "No Huli" , to the jazz interludes in "Winding Through the Milky Way" after her powerful declaration "we were there / when jazz was invented", the flute loop reminding of the refraining chorus from the rabbit song, to "Equinox" and "Morning Song", Harjo crosses many worlds as swiftly and silently as one crosses dreams and the worlds of living, for all life is in a state of change and that motion must necessarily be reflected in the moving, growing quality of her poems and her music and the final growth of both into a kind of ultimate vision, a recovery of energy is what she asks from language, spoken or unspoken. She speaks of this relationship forged between things by the power of Word, in her poem "Songline of Dawn" which is an Australian aboriginal concept of mapping the land and its space by the means of songs and narratives. She adds: "All has been

sung into existence. Every sunrise is sung and makes a continuous dawning all over the world”⁹⁵, reflecting in her song “Morning Song”:

The red dawn is now rearranging the earth

Though by thought, beauty by beauty

Like ‘Morning Song’, it too has become “a song with repeated phrases to accommodate melody”⁹⁶ like Jim Peppers and Billie Holiday and Kenny Roger hooks and spirits living in poems of “Deer Dancer”, “And If I Awaken in Los Angeles” (“I will hear the lost beloved one/sing Billie Holiday in my ear/she lives in a parallel universe”) , “The Place the Musician Became a Bear” a dedication to Jim Peppers, or “Strange Fruit” a dedication to the Billie Holiday number, which have sturdy authority on her works also. Even in *Red Dreams*, her last album, which contains most original compositions, the nature of her vision of transgeneric, transaesthetic, transcultural creations spanning all her lives and that of her ancestors and the vibgyor being of the land, the effects of her poetry is very evident. From the song she made from the speech delivered in honour of the death of Wilma Mankiller to the native chant repeated at the end of ‘Trail Beyond Tears’ taken from “The Rabbit is Upto His Tricks”, she speaks, she sings, of one essential truth time after time, among everything:

Our paths make luminous threads in the web of gravel and water.

The shimmer varies according to emotional tenor.

It is the essential human ability to make songs out of the memories of destruction. In midst of displacement and loss of everything, it is about learning the fact that no matter what or where life and circumstances may lead, one carries her identity in her mind, in her heart, and the flesh and the bone. Poetry, then, must become a way of breathing in that one constant point in the heart amidst the changeful nature of all creation, it is the spiritual presence born from the yearning to be able to speak, change and save, that must grow into that place beyond ordinary speech. It is that place Harjo yearns to reach, that most western academia has either forgotten or refuses to remember. She wishes to include everything in the poem and the sax and the flute- the music of

⁹⁵ Harjo, Joy, “Index”, *How We Became Human*, New York; Norton, 2002: 226.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 232.

the subway hissing like a huge underground snake to the unheard melody of the Pythagorean spheres, the wings of the milky way, the stars singing in the blood, the woman hanging from the thirteenth floor window. It is an essential connection that has been split open between oral and written, poetry and music and all the differences among things we make out to be.

The wings of the Milky Way lad back to the singers.

And there's the saxophone again.

It's about rearranging the song to include the subway hiss

Under your feet in Brooklyn.

And the laugh of a bear who was once human.

As he plays that tune again, the one about the wobble of the earth

Spinning so damned hard. ("The Place the Musician Became a Bear", for Jim Pepper)

Conclusion: "That's what she said"

I. A conclusion is the place where you get tired of thinking, one often quotes. However, one might also do well to remember, that even if there are worlds to think up and more exciting discoveries to be made and realizations to gather in your mind, it needs to stop somewhere, sometime. A writer never forgets the sweet vanity of her blood, the first time she sits down to jot down a few stray thoughts and fleeting ideas, thinking she is creating something entirely new, and not long before you know it, she is scuttling, like a pair of Prufrockian ragged claws across the beds of a vast and limitless ocean. The epilogue of a work can be superfluous, anti-climactic, unworthy of the rest of the work or one can offer various ingenious schemes which conclusively prove its inevitability and necessity. In the rush towards taking sides though, no one normatively discusses the main problem of a conclusion or an epilogue to a work though- if it conclusively says what the rest of the chapters wanted to say and ties up the binds in a neat and close formation, so that when you close it finally, you have no more questions to answer. To that effect, deliberations have been held to decide on the basic question of whether the conclusion or the epilogue is an inseparable part of the story where the themes are brought together and some sort of resolution is offered, or, the less savoury options, an ugly and pointless chapter tacked onto the work for people because the readers would not understand it otherwise! However, as I insisted, time and again, a work that manages to say everything within the fixed and bound span of its pages and leaves it at that when you close the book, with no further questions, no further points to ponder for your mind, is probably a failure. The point is not to make a point, but a point at hat leads to various other directions, right and wrong ones notwithstanding, this work would consider itself fulfilled if it has managed to sit up and stir in a few otherwise untouched on notions and ask questions. And what more, can one say about the communication of these very same ideas through writing, and writing alone, for writing hides and cloaks the sense of how things make sense to us. To quote Joy Harjo:

I believe that written language was, in many ways, a de-evolution of the communication process. You lose human contact, context of time and place, and a sense of relationship. With written communication, you gain the ability to lie more easily. There is separation between the speaker and the reader/listener. There is less accountability.⁹⁷

My aim here, thus, in the conclusionary statements, is not to just make a roundabout of all that I have been attempting to point out. Spoken word, verbal, aural and oral acts are fundamental to the cultural and aesthetic concerns of a group of people, more so when resistance to a hegemonic brand of culture-production is needed and more than once in history this resistance in various forms has been provided by poetry, street theatre and music, basically performative arts oral or verbal in nature.

- II. If we cry more tears we will ruin the land with salt; instead let's
praise ... Make a song for death, a song for yellow teeth and bad
breath - Joy Harjo, ("Mourning Song")

Joy Harjo was a fascinating experience as a singer, for the first time I heard her, it was her song version of her poem "For Anna Mae Pictou Aquash", and I was amazed by how she moulded and remoulded her words to fit not only in the breath groups, but also the silences that lie between and beyond the words. Her voice rings out among the sax solos and the chorus of the wailing women and horse hooves in a distance provide the ultimate searing intensity to those elastic

⁹⁷ Bryson, J. Scott, "Finding the Way Back: Place and Space in the Ecological Poetry of Joy Harjo", *MELUS*. Vol. 27, No. 3, Native American Literature (Autumn, 2002), pp. 169-196, 174.

spaces of words, stretching them out for time so long one might think it would snap. She urges the listeners to understand the music of the words, rocks them gently and urgently in turns, and then with the fading hooves she finally resolves the tension with the single words, (“Crazily (stop)// Beautifully(stop)”), or a simple 4/4 tempo with twelve or eight fixedly patterned bars of three chord music, but not as the one never changing cliché, but providing numerous interesting twists and turns within the movement. Sometimes, it can be as equally seen as a way of speaking more than a way of singing, for she employs the unimaginable large range of nuances that speaking provides us to understand and be understood. The use of her jazz styles provides her this freedom from the confines of a fixed notation, granting its peculiar power through her combination of expressiveness of speech with the chromatic bass descent of her music. She takes snippets, small pieces of highly standardized formulaic sets and keeps on balancing it with new styles and innovative techniques. The brilliance of all this lies in the way she uses a jazz, blues, R&R pattern as a template for her music to the poems, where these various patterns of text and the sounds contribute to the expressive forces of the song, but where this force is not limited to the pattern, but draws on sources lying way beyond the simple pattern. This is to say it is not just ‘this’ or ‘that’ that is telling all the stories in here, but a complex web of all of these woven through all the potentials, chronologies and equivalences to the text.

The concerns I have tried to delineate here admittedly traverse various fields simultaneously, and though my main consequence was to bring to fore how Harjo uses music and poetry and how she brings this relationship forth to put to an effect the essentiality of the way the Native Americans view language, memory and landscape. The United States’ expansionism towards west marked an end of the freedom of the tribal cultures of these lands, and as these Plains tribes and those of Southeastern regions as well as the Mississippian cultures and people from east of the Great Lakes were displaced, it resulted in deaths of thousands, hundreds of treaties and promises broken, fenced off into barren reservation lands. But these people, especially those of the Mississippian cultures, made rapid acculturation with the new lands and the European practices, adapting themselves in a manner that the place of confinement within constructed boundaries became a landscape for making new memories, continuing stories, a source of power borne from the subversion of language and the tools of oppression. “Our words begin inside of the dream

and become a way of revealing ourselves within this land...living voices surround us and speak from diverse and many histories that we have been, the ones we have become and most of all, how we will continue".⁹⁸ It provides a solution to one of most severe problems for the Native Americans today in trying to preserve a sense of equilibrium and exist with edifying veracity in a situate that places a lofty worth on sightless absorption and fails to recognize tribal cultures.

I have explored the possibilities of perverse crossings of the kind Harjo practices in critical and theoretical premises and weighed their respective veracities not limited to one part of the world but drawing from all other sources as well, expounding a significant gap in the manner Western scholastic system has closed off boundaries in various fields, and often by implicit ideologies contained in the same, to various cultures and peoples and practices via canonization and otherisation of such. I have also tried to explore what the premises thus drawn might mean specifically in interaction of the sonic and visual mediums, especially poetry and music, and the resultant melee that all of these would signify when juxtaposed over the similar ventures of a Native American woman of colour, an artist of a mixed heritage living in a necessarily hybrid space in a multicultural community practicing these perverse crossings to revivify her own identity as a Mvskoke and a Native American, while simultaneously covering all the varied other heritages the hybrid holds in her hands and uses to further mollify boundaries between subjects, places and concerns. The results, only some of which have been explored in this limited space, has exciting implications for the future of not only arts and the resistive functions of verbal arts and Native American aesthetic, cultural and social concerns, but more so to strike a chord to our very basic ideology of what actually makes up and differentiates between species, genres, mediums, words, and by inference, people.

⁹⁸ Harjo, Joy, "Oklahoma: The Prairie of Words", Geary Hobson ed. *The Remembered Earth: An Anthology of Contemporary Native American Literature*, University of New Mexico Press, 1981: 44.

III. Whenever I listen to Joy Harjo's poetry or glance through her music, I feel the powerful assertion of the everlastingness yet regular everydayness of the experiences she talks about, of all the people she talks about, the young murdered Igbo cabbie, the woman trying to commit suicide, the mother trying to make ends meet, the Hopi silversmith, her father, her life, the singers poets and musicians who have etched across the landscape of the Oklahoma and the deltas, lost loves, single mothers, pain, unfulfilled love, alcoholism, absent fathers and all the squalid galore of drunken rez life. But even among all these, there is still a hope of trying to make life out of all, hanging on the spoken words, powwow dances and a rhythm of songs dances and everyday life that dangles from every phrase of some word, stretched out longer and longer as the going gets harder and harder. And then all the sounds shatter unfastened and free in an ostensibly immeasurable delineate, that takes a beaming to your face, or a drop to your eyes and the somewhat absurd yet strapping assurance that one can take wings after all. Joy Harjo is about melody, about sounds, about songs and about poetry everywhere, because everything she does and everywhere she goes is music. It is in the life of it all, that she tries to express, this ambiguity we live between fixities of all definitions, names and identities and the continuous nature of progression that changes everything as well.

In her short story "The Warriors", Anne Lee Walters articulates the importance and function of knowing and understanding beauty, of fighting for beauty amidst the squalor and humdrum of everyday life through the struggles of Uncle Ralph and what he teaches the two young kids even when he loses everything: "To live beautifully from day to day is a battle that warriors have to plot for as long as they can. It's a battle all the way. And to feel and know that kind of beauty is the reason we should live at all..."⁹⁹ All in all, Harjo's battle is the same, a struggle to keep certain things alive in a world that has ceased to believe in it, carrying them over to us, and giving the people strength and courage they need to make a way for themselves in contemporary America.

It is everything about the journey, crossing over and into every boundary every definition that holds you in. This is not the end, but just another beginning:

⁹⁹ Waters, Anne Lee, "The Warriors", Patricia Riley ed. *Growing up Native American: An Anthology*, NY: William Morrow and co., 1993: 52.

We're in a story that will always include the ancient while riding to the outer edge. We'll get there with music, poetry, lyrics, stories, sheer sorrow and joy. Start with a voice. Let it fly free. Bring in a saxophone to touch those places the words can't reach. Add an insatiable guitar, some heavy philosophical bass, a little piano and Mvskoke and other tribal rhythms to take us back to Congo Square and before, back up into the Milky Way. Add the good thoughts of those we've met along the way. We've got it and we're traveling now.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Harjo, Joy, "Interview About *Winding Through the Milky Way*", Web, July 8, 2011, <www.joyharjo.com/JoyHarjoHome.html>

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