



# Ecological Memory In Indigenous American Narratives

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**Abstract:** This research explores how ecological memory functions in Indigenous stories, focusing on Joy Harjo's poetry, *Anchorage*, which serves as a vehicle for expressing environmental knowledge and cultural memory. This paper examines how indigenous oral traditions and literary representations capture a strong connection to the environment by analyzing this poetry. To better understand how Joy Harjo's poetry communicates indigenous ecological knowledge and values, this study will examine how she represents ecological memory in her poems. The study aims to demonstrate how indigenous literature contributes to a more comprehensive comprehension of the interaction between humans and nature. The study focuses on textual analysis and closely reads the poetry *Anchorage* by Harjo. The theoretical framework for this study will draw upon Ecocritical theory, particularly perspectives that emphasize Indigenous epistemologies and critique the colonial and capitalist exploitation of natural resources.

Harjo's poetry also serves as a form of resistance against the marginalization of indigenous voices in mainstream environmental discourse. This study demonstrates that Indigenous literature, through its rich storytelling traditions and cultural expressions, plays a crucial role in advocating for ecological justice and raising awareness about the impacts of climate change.

**Keywords** - Ecocriticism, Memory studies, Climate change

In *Anchorage*, Joy Harjo's evocative language and rich imagery weave a narrative that not only expresses a profound connection to place but also critiques the ongoing violence and marginalization faced by Indigenous peoples and other historically oppressed communities. The poem encapsulates key themes central to Indigenous ecological memory, blending Harjo's observations with collective histories while invoking the powerful forces of nature that shape both the physical landscape and human existence. This city, described as "made of stone, of blood, and fish," becomes a living entity, with layers of history—natural and human—intertwining to form a complex narrative of survival, resistance, and spiritual continuity.

From an Ecocritical perspective, the poem emphasizes the interplay between natural elements and Indigenous knowledge, reflecting Greg Garrard's term "Ecological Entanglement," the idea that human life is inseparable from the environments in which it occurs.

An understanding of natural processes and the profound, cyclical cycles of the world is further reinforced by the poem's references to the "storm of boiling earth" and the "cooking earth" beneath the metropolis. Theorists such as Timothy Morton interpret such images as part of "dark ecology," which highlights the disturbing, frequently violent elements of nature that humans fear and yet depend on. Harjo challenges the idea of environmental stability by evoking the visual of an ever-evolving, ever-active planet, reminding readers of the perpetual change underlying seemingly tranquil places.

Along with criticizing capitalism and colonial structures, Harjo's poetry is in line with postcolonial ecocriticism, which academics like Rob Nixon have dubbed "slow violence." The agony of the grandma, who was "folded up, smelling like 200 years of blood and piss," on the park bench represents the marginalization and erasure of Indigenous peoples. Her body becomes a site of accumulated trauma, a physical manifestation of the historical and ongoing violence inflicted by colonial powers. Harjo's juxtaposition of this woman's profound suffering with the natural elements around her evokes what Nixon refers to as the "slow violence" of environmental degradation and social injustice—forms of violence that unfold gradually over time and disproportionately affect marginalized communities.

Harjo's reflection on "those who were never meant to survive" resonates with Morton's idea that humans are not separate from the "dark," destructive aspects of the environment. In a colonial, capitalist world that has historically marginalized indigenous peoples and others, survival itself becomes a form of resistance. Morton's "dark ecology" pushes us to recognize the ecological systems that both sustain and imperil life, much like Harjo's recognition of survival in a world structured to suppress certain groups. The "fantastic and terrible story" Harjo refers to is both an ecological and social narrative, highlighting the systemic forces—both natural and human-made—that have shaped and constrained the existence of marginalized groups.

By invoking Morton's framework, we can understand Harjo's stanza as a reflection on the entangled, unpredictable nature of survival, where ecological and social forces collide. This survival, while improbable, is also a testament to resilience and the dark, complex realities of both human and environmental existence. In this sense, the stanza embodies the contradictions that Morton's Dark Ecology asks us to confront: the acknowledgment of life's precariousness within systems that seem both life-sustaining and destructive.

*Anchorage* speaks to the broader Indigenous struggle for ecological and social justice, with Harjo's poetry offering a form of resistance against hegemonic narratives of environmental and cultural destruction. Drawing on both Ecocritical and Postcolonial theory, the poem challenges readers to recognize the deep connection between land, memory, and identity, and to reconsider the dominant approaches to climate change and environmental. Harjo's work advocates for a more inclusive and respectful engagement with ecological

issues—one that acknowledges the wisdom of indigenous cultures and the violent histories of colonization that continue to shape contemporary environmental crises.

In conclusion, Joy Harjo's *Anchorage stands* as a profound reflection on the persistence of ecological memory, indigenous knowledge, and the survival of marginalized communities. Through a fusion of personal experience, natural imagery, and historical reflection, the poem calls attention to the interconnectedness of humans and nature, critiquing the forces that threaten both. In doing so, Harjo's poetry offers an alternative vision for how we might engage with the environment, one that honors the past while looking toward a future grounded in justice and sustainability.

## REFERENCES

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