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“Hello. We are Here. Listen”: Marginalized Memories and Silenced Stories in Literature of the U.S. South

by

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Abstract

Recent controversy over the removal of Confederate monuments and flags has illuminated different understandings of the South's history and memory. While critics of removing Confederate memorabilia view statues and flags as benign, others recognize what type of history Confederate nostalgia represents: an exclusively white, oppressive history and memory. This thesis examines how similar conversations about memory play out in literature of the U.S. South, specifically in memoirs, poetry, and novels.

Using six texts, namely works by Sarah M. Broom, Matthew Griffin, Natasha Trethewey, and Jesmyn Ward, this thesis explores two categories of memory: personal and cultural/historical. Personal memory examines the way writers deal with memory on an individual basis in their families, daily choices, and interactions. Cultural and historical memory confronts continued Confederate nostalgia, and how that nostalgia has oppressed memories and stories of the African-American and LGBTQ communities. Writers of the U.S. South use personal memory to explore feelings of familial loss, grief, and trauma; these writers use cultural memory to rewrite the history of the U.S. South, reclaiming marginalized memories and silenced stories and resituating them in a central position in the region's memory.

Introduction

On Friday, October 23, 2020, history took place in Huntsville, Alabama in darkness. It was around 1:20 a.m., and the approximately thirty people gathered in front of the Madison County Courthouse cheered as a crane lifted the statue of an unnamed Confederate soldier off its base. By 3 a.m., when crews removed part of the monument's base, the crowd had dwindled. By the morning hours, when most Huntsville residents began waking up, crews had moved the statue to Maple Hill Cemetery, where they erected it (Gattis, "Confederate").

Interestingly, the statue is not the original. First erected in 1905 by the Daughters of the Confederacy, the statue was destroyed in 1966 when a wall fell on it during the demolition of old Cotton Row buildings. *The Huntsville Times* article from that day includes a picture of a woman bent over, touching the destroyed statue. This was Mrs. R.D. Moore, president of the Virginia Clay Clopton chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. In a lawsuit against the demolition company, the United Daughters of the Confederacy were paid \$10,000, a new statue was carved, and in 1968, the statue was rededicated (Roop, "Huntsville's"). History restored.

On Madison County, Alabama's website, after clicking on the tab "History," one finds this description:

Soon Huntsville became a frontier metropolis - a flourishing cultural, commercial, and social center of "King Cotton's" realm. One thousand pounds of cotton per acre could be consistently harvested by the farmers of Madison County. The high cotton price was the financial backbone of a prospering city. The streets of Huntsville were dotted with the small offices of cotton merchants, lawyers, and bankers, most of which were located on the west side of the square facing the Courthouse. This area became known as "Cotton Row". Farmers brought cotton by wagon and cart to these merchants to be classified for

staple and grade, and would then sell to the highest bidder. The town's economy was so dependent on cotton that the entire west side of the square was reserved for cotton wagons and carts (Richter-Haaser, "History").

The repetition of "cotton" in this description feels almost stifling. A legacy of cotton and the Confederacy: what could be more quintessentially, nostalgically, and oppressively Southern?

The story of this statue, erected by the Daughters of the Confederacy in a "social center of 'King Cotton's' realm," is, without question, a story of the South. The statue, as opponents of the removal of Confederate monuments often point out, is history. But such responses miss a crucial question: Whose history? Whose story? The statue answers with its inscription: "in memory of the heroes who fell in defense ... of the principles that gave birth to the Confederacy" (Gattis, "Confederate"). The statue, then, tells a story, history, and memory, but it is an exclusive, oppressive, and white one.

Steven Hoelscher, in a study of Natchez, Mississippi, uses the term "white cultural memory" to refer to this type of memory in the South (657). "White cultural memory" is not confined to statues; recent controversy has erupted over the displaying of Confederate flags outside of courthouses and other public places. While some promote these statues and flags as "history," Margaret Bauer points out how problematic this history is: the Confederate flag "cannot be separated from the history of slavery" (71): a history of oppression.

In the middle of the night in Huntsville, Alabama, however, a different sort of history was made. While the removal of Confederate statues from prominent places does not immediately solve the South's problems, it suggests a recognition of them and a refusal to accept symbols of an oppressive and racist history. It is the removal of an exclusively white historical memory from a public place; it is, on the surface level at least, a hint of progress.

The question remains, though, of what will take the statue's place: a symbol of racism and the oppression of the black community has been removed, but what will be erected instead? This question is crucial not only for politics and social justice, but for literature of the American South: how can representations of the South respond to the region's oppressive history? How can Southern writers, in their own act of memorialization, with their own monument, carve out a place for a more inclusive history? Jennifer Rae Greeson and Scott Romine point out other problems in their introduction to *Keywords for Southern Studies*, such as the difficulty of navigating "between the idea of the South and the social reality" of the South (2). In other words, in a region where Confederate nostalgia, moonlight and magnolia, persist, how does one look past such ideas and find the reality: poverty and white supremacy?

To answer these questions, this thesis will examine how writers of the American South utilize "memory" in their works. The thesis looks at six texts, all set in the American South, that deal with memory. These texts represent a variety of genres: namely the memoir, novel and poetry. To distinguish between different uses of memory, the thesis is divided into two chapters: personal memory and cultural/historical memory.

The first chapter on personal memory is divided into two sections: one on memoirs, and the other on a person/character's loss of their mother. Starting with memoirs, the thesis explores memory in Sarah M. Broom's 2019 memoir *The Yellow House*, set in New Orleans, Louisiana, which deals with themes like familial loss, poverty, and environmental racism. Many of these themes are continued in Jesmyn Ward's 2013 memoir *Men We Reaped*, which describes the loss of five young Black men in Ward's DeLisle, Mississippi community, including her brother Joshua. Transitioning to poetry and a novel, the chapter on Personal Memory examines Natasha Trethewey's 2006 poetry collection *Native Guard*, focusing on the poems about the death of

Trethewey's mother. Building on the theme of loss, and also confronting themes of poverty and marginalization, the thesis considers Ward's 2011 novel *Salvage the Bones*, set in the fictional, rural Mississippi town called Bois Sauvage. The novel's protagonist, Esch Batiste, lost her mother years earlier, and her mother's memory affects how Esch views motherhood and love.

The purpose of this chapter on personal memory, and the diverse genres included in it, is to examine the ways memory functions on a very individual level for these writers: in other words, rather than focusing on the South's memory, this chapter looks at memory in individual writers/characters' everyday choices and interactions. It is important to note, however, that focusing on the personal does not mean the cultural and historical are not considered as well. Many of these authors, specifically in the memoir section, use personal memory to question the South as a whole's exclusively white and oppressive history.

That being said, themes of exclusion, oppression, and whiteness are dealt with most directly in the second chapter on Cultural or Historical Memory. Prejudice, as well, is a key theme in this chapter, and it is explored in Matthew Griffin's 2016 novel *Hide*, which tells the story of a gay couple living in North Carolina from the day they meet at the end of WWII to the present-day, 2016. This novel shows how the South's memory is not only white, but heterosexual: this couple lives in fear of the South's prejudicial laws, making memorialization, such as photographs, a risk. The thesis then revisits Trethewey's *Native Guard*, this time focusing on poems about the Civil War, segregation, and growing up biracial. The thesis ends with Ward's 2017 novel *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, which confronts themes present throughout all of the texts, such as marginalization, but also introduces themes of drug abuse and police brutality.

Of these six works discussed, five of them are written by African-American women. The other, *Hide*, is written by a male member of the LGBTQ community. Clearly, the thesis focuses

primarily on the African-American experience, and considers the LGBTQ experience only briefly, meaning much research still needs to be done for queer studies in the South. Nonetheless, using all of these texts, the thesis argues that writers of the American South use personal memory to explore feelings of loss, trauma, and the power of home; these writers use cultural memory to rewrite the history of the American South, this time including marginalized experiences.

Borrowing a term from Destiny O. Birdsong, these writers bridge the categories of “Personal” and “Cultural” by using literature to grant “inscriptive authority” (107) to those historically denied it: all of these texts speak to the centrality of marginalized memories and silenced stories to the American South’s past, present, and future.

Memory and Personal Trauma

The Memoir and Contemporary Southern Studies

Recent publications in literature of the American South include meditations on personal forms of memory, specifically those dealing with loss and grief. One such literary form that focuses on personal trauma is the memoir. As a traditional definition, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “memoir” as “autobiographical observations” and “a biography or autobiography” (2b, c), meaning the story of a person’s life. Judith Barrington, however, in a handbook on creative writing, describes the memoir in terms of its difference from autobiography: “autobiography is a story *of* a life ... memoir is a story *from* a life” (109). In other words, Barrington says, memoir “makes no pretense of capturing the whole span from birth to the time of writing,” but rather narrows “on one aspect of a life and offers the reader an in-depth exploration” (109). While it is important to recognize memoir’s autobiographical nature, memoir does not always promise a detailed account of every moment of a person’s life but often a specific theme or event that provides a focused lens into a person’s experiences.

Autobiography and memoir seem reserved for those of special status, “important” people, whether “importance” is defined by fame or power. In examining memoirs about Hurricane Katrina, Joseph Donica notes that “the lives of kings and saints have long been considered worthwhile to spend time writing about, but it is only in the twentieth and twenty-first century, and especially in the past few decades, that autobiography has become an acceptable genre for the public to take up.” Donica continues: “The question of who has the right to publish his or her story has implications for the question of who has a right to memory” (42). For southern studies, then, examining memoirs raises questions about whose story is being told, who is telling the story, and what is missing from the story.

Memoirs raise questions with broader connections to history and the United States' current sociopolitical climate; whose story is missing from mainstream media, or needs further exploring, and thus must be told in the form of memoir? Donica hints at these questions when describing memoir's distinctness: "No genre has the ability that memoir does to move us from the experience of privately reading personal recollections to considering the public context and social implications of these memories" (43). As Barrington suggested, then, memoir can transform from traditional autobiography to confront issues of broader, more public concern.

The issues of public concern in the United States recently have come out of the Black Lives Matter movement that brought worldwide attention to police brutality and racial inequality in the nation. Published in 2019 and 2013, respectively, the memoirs *The Yellow House*, written by Sarah M. Broom, and *Men We Reaped*, written by Jesmyn Ward, address themes of race, inequality, and representation, and as such are in direct tandem with the Black Lives Matter movement. These memoirs are set in the American South, and their exploration of feelings of loss, trauma, and grief speaks to larger issues of inequality and the marginalization of African-American experiences across America.

The Yellow House combines themes of personal memory with a history of New Orleans to produce a profound and intimate story of family, neglect, and representation. The memoir, told in four movements, details the history of Broom's African-American family, the effects of Hurricane Katrina, and the overall inequality of New Orleans. The book's title refers to the family's home, a shotgun house at 4121 Wilson Avenue in New Orleans East that was demolished after Hurricane Katrina.

Geography, such as the memoir's setting in New Orleans East, becomes a central theme for the text. While Broom begins the memoir by mentioning her brother Carl, the book's

prologue, tellingly titled “Map,” focuses on the inequality and neglect present in New Orleans’ geography and history. Broom searches a dozen histories of New Orleans for New Orleans East but to little success. In Broom’s words, “mentions are rare and spare, afterthoughts. There are no guided tours to this part of the city, except for the disaster bus tours that became an industry after Hurricane Katrina” (4). New Orleans’ French Quarter and tourism overshadow those areas of lower socioeconomic status and, significantly, those that are primarily African-American.

Additionally, Broom’s mention of “disaster bus tours” related to Hurricane Katrina shows how disaster, and the memories of disaster for residents of New Orleans East, have been commodified for the tourist industry, making memories of disaster available for consumption for a certain price. However, this commodification raises questions about memoir: is a memoir, published and sold, not also a commodification, making memories available for a certain price? To a degree, yes, but the differences between the two are ownership, voice, and intent. “Disaster bus tours” suggest profits and showcase disaster without giving voice to those individuals of New Orleans East. By contrast, Broom’s memoir takes ownership over her voice and experience, “selling” memory as a way to shed light on the experiences of New Orleans East more broadly.

Broom’s memoir continues to use geography as a site for inequality through a specific city map, one given to her by Avis Rent-a-Car. This map, which Broom describes as “detailed,” shows the French Quarter but not New Orleans East (5). This choice, Broom says, “is perhaps a practical matter. New Orleans East is fifty times the size of the French Quarter, one-fourth of the city’s developed surface. Properly mapped, it might swallow the page whole” (5). A key aspect of this mapping is distance, or separation from the actual event; a map attempts to give guidance from a distanced, yet detailed, view. But, as the Avis map shows, this “detailed” view fails to show, to represent, the whole picture: an important region, New Orleans East, is neglected. As

Broom notes, “distance lends perspective, but it can also shade, misinterpret” (3). Broom makes a similar connection between distance/separation and perspective in her prologue with her brother Carl. Broom mentions aerial photographs and how, from such a separation, the Yellow House “would appear to sit in the Gulf of Mexico.” Significantly, “from these great heights, [Broom’s] brother Carl would not be seen” (Broom 3). In beginning her memoir with these themes of distortion, maps, and geography, Broom reflects the inability of New Orleans’ history, specifically the mass packaged kind that Avis relies on, to accurately represent New Orleans East or, more personally, the life and character of her brother.

The prologue’s focus on the racial inequalities of New Orleans introduces a key theme of the text: environmental racism. Robert D. Bullard states that “communities consisting of people of color continue to bear a disproportionate burden of this nation’s air, water, and waste problems” (23). Broom’s memoir echoes this quote when questioning the French Quarter’s central place in the history of New Orleans: “how had one square mile come to stand in for an entire city?” A city whose greatness, Broom argues, “comes at the expense of its native black people, who are, more often than not, underemployed, underpaid, sometimes suffocated by the mythology that hides the city’s dysfunction and hopelessness” (301). Rather than accept the “mythology” or mystique of New Orleans’ French Quarter, Broom wants her reader to see the inequality such myth obscures. In other words, Broom’s memoir wants to transform myth into reality.

Broom cites specific examples of environmental racism to enhance her memoir’s confrontation of New Orleans’ mythology versus its reality. Broom mentions the North Claiborne Overpass, which was part of a development boom in the mid-to-late 1900s in New Orleans East. According to Broom, this overpass decimated “much of the cultural and economic

life of historic black neighborhoods” (74). Broom’s example is reinforced by Bullard, who states that “people of color are more likely than their white counterparts to live near freeways, sewage treatment plants, municipal and hazardous waste landfills, incinerators, and other noxious facilities” (23). Speaking directly about regions like New Orleans in the American South, Bullard references “cancer alley” in South Louisiana which is “an eighty-five-mile stretch along the Mississippi River from Baton Rouge to New Orleans” (25). This environmental racism both Bullard and Broom describe paints a different picture than New Orleans’ website; dedicated to tourism, the website describes New Orleans as “the best city to visit for fun, parties, events and culture” (“Home”). Yet Broom’s memoir asks: whose culture? And, these parties and events come at what price? New Orleans’ culture marginalizes African-American voices and bodies which are, as Broom says, overworked and underpaid. In a New Orleans riddled with the mythology of its French Quarter and disaster bus tours, Broom wants her reader to go outside the French Quarter, step down off the bus, and view the reality of her community and the injustices it faces, including environmental racism.

Within this broader story of environmental racism and call for awareness of African-American experiences within New Orleans, Broom weaves an intimate story of personal loss, memory, and family. These feelings coexist in the house itself, meaning the house becomes a symbol or embodiment of personal memory. One such instance of personal memory involves Broom’s father, Simon, who died six months after she was born. Broom says of the yellow house, “the house held my father inside of it, preserved; it bore his traces” (232). For Broom, then, the house becomes more than a structure but a living embodiment of her father and her father’s memory.

Broom travels all over, including taking a job in Burundi, to find meaning, but her father's memory, embodied in the yellow house, is stronger, and Broom cannot escape this memory. Broom writes: "More and more I craved forgetting. I tried and failed" (237). In a letter to a friend, she decides that "I've got to go back to that raggedy falling-down thing and talk about my father. My father, the raggedy falling-down thing of my imagination" (253). Forgetting proved impossible: Broom writes that "distance only clarified; it could not induce forgetting," and that "remembering hurts, but forgetting is Herculean" (259, 237). In writing about the yellow house, Broom speaks to the power of loss and memory: no matter how far she traveled, the pull of the yellow house and the memory of her father it embodied was stronger.

Broom questions the importance or power of memory when the house, the keeper of her father's memory, is demolished. As Broom says of the house, "as long as the house stood, containing these remnants, my father was not yet gone. And then suddenly, he was" (232). For Broom, however, the demolition of the house did not mean the demolition of memory; rather, it reads more like a transfer. In the absence of the "physical structure" of the house, Broom says, "we are the house that bears itself up. I was now the house" (232). By extension, Broom is also now her father or the vessel of her father's memory. Broom expresses similar sentiments about her brother Carl, even describing Carl as "the keeper of memory" and his actions as "protecting it [the house] from dismemory" (366). Like houses, then, bodies as structures can become sites and embodiments of memory.

In writing this text of familial loss, feelings embodied in her family's home, Broom points to the importance of personal memory and, more broadly, themes of disempowerment and racial inequality. Broom's memories of New Orleans East bring awareness to a group neglected by New Orleans' history or, more broadly, America's history: an African-American family of

lower socioeconomic status. Broom herself describes her examination of New Orleans' history as "a yearning for centrality, a leading role, so to speak, in the story of New Orleans, which is to say, the story of America" (301). Broom thus illustrates the relevance of memoir and its purpose for southern studies: to not only explore personal feelings of loss and family, but to cast light on the marginalization of African-American voices and stories within the broader story of America, and to bring awareness to themes like environmental racism among the African-American community.

Broom's memoir confronts memories of her father and examples of racial injustice in her community; similarly, in her 2013 memoir *Men We Reaped*, Jesmyn Ward uses memoir to confront the loss of five young Black men within four years in her DeLisle, Mississippi community, including her brother Joshua. As Ward puts it: "From 2000 to 2004, five Black young men I grew up with died, all violently, in seemingly unrelated deaths" (7). Because of these violent deaths, Ward often speaks of these men as ghosts, saying of these men, "the pain of the women they left behind pulls them from the beyond, makes them appear as ghosts" (14). However, Ward ensures that in viewing these men as ghosts, she does not overlook the most important part: "my ghosts were once people, and I cannot forget that" (7). Ward uses memoir to bring these ghosts back to life, allowing them to, as Ward says, "live and speak and breathe again for a few paltry pages" (8). Ward thus confronts not only their lives but the reason for their deaths, particularly "the history of racism and economic inequality and lapsed public and personal responsibility" (8). Memoir, what was traditionally a story of a person's life, becomes a broader critique of the South's discrimination.

Ward manifests much of the conflict and tension over racial injustice and the marginalization of African-American experiences in the dichotomy of Black/White, categories

that Ward capitalizes throughout the text. Such capitalization emphasizes the power of these categories; a young man in the American South is not black but Black, a characteristic that marks him as different from White. Ward remembers feeling this oppressive dichotomy with statements like, “*You’re Black. You’re less than White*” (195). Perhaps no instance illustrates the difference between Black and White as the death of Joshua, Ward’s brother. In the summer of 2000, Joshua was killed by a drunk driver. Rather than vehicular manslaughter, the judge sentenced the drunk driver to five years in prison for leaving the scene of an accident. The driver was also ordered to pay Ward’s mother \$14,252.27. As Ward says, “the man served three years and two months of his sentence before he was released, and he never paid my mother anything” (235). Such injustice seems unbelievable, but Ward breaks it down to Black/White: “The drunk driver was in his forties and White. My brother was nineteen and Black” (234). For Ward, then, the decision to capitalize Black/White in her memoir becomes more than a stylistic one; it is a profound illustration of the importance behind each category when living in the rural South: Black/White could literally mean death or life.

The combination of injustice and grief represented by Joshua’s death, in addition to those of other young Black men Ward lost, produces a dichotomous relationship with home in Ward’s memoir. Ward describes her DeLisle, Mississippi community as “this place that I love and hate all at once” with its antebellum mansions “our mother cleaned and whose beauty we admired and hated” (14, 231). Ward thus expresses this relationship in binaries or dichotomies like Black/White: DeLisle is a place Ward feels love/hate towards, admires/hates; DeLisle is a place of beauty/poverty or beauty/inequality. Ward also says of DeLisle, “I knew there was much to hate about home, the racism and inequality and poverty, which is why I’d left, yet I loved it” (22). Ward elaborates on this complex relationship with home when she writes of “yearning to

leave the South and doing so again and again, but perpetually called back to home by a love so thick it choked me” (195). Ward’s language here echoes Broom, who similarly traveled outside the American South to find herself, yet discovered that her father’s memory and the yellow house were simply too strong. For both authors, then, the word “home,” a place often associated with comfort and security, instead produces tension between a desire to escape the South and the pull of family and memory. In other words, both authors have a love/hate relationship with home and the American South more broadly.

Tied into Ward’s feelings of love/hate towards her community and home is another binary: forgetting/remembering. A specific form of remembering in the text is the memorial shirt, which Ward describes as “most common at funerals for young people” (40). Ward also states that the memorial shirt, in the South at least, “has become as traditional as the repast” (40). The memorial shirt is first introduced early in the text, which begins in 2004 and works backwards, with the death of Rog, one of Ward’s friends, who died of a heart attack. On Rog’s memorial shirt, in addition to a picture of him, “there are pictures of the other dead young men: Ronald, C.J., Demond, Joshua,” and two young men Ward was not close to (40). The wearing of these shirts, Ward says, is a way “the young memorialize the young” (40). Often, a “memorial” or the act of “memorialization” seems reserved for the very old or the very prominent. Scott Stroud and Jonathan Henson define memorials as “a cultural method of remembering those individuals and events that we think worthy of recollection” (282). When thinking of a “memorial,” one often thinks of a statue or some public display. These memorial shirts, then, challenge the traditional idea of who/what is “worthy” of memorialization: these shirts memorialize young Black men of low socioeconomic status living in the American South, meaning individuals not typically given exposure.

Such memorialization casts light on recent calls for the removal of Confederate monuments. In a *Time* article, James Grossman, executive director of the American Historical Association, states that “it’s not just that the statues represent white supremacy, but the purpose of building the statues was the perpetuation of white supremacy” (Aguilera, “Confederate”). Ward also writes of her brother Joshua and his friends going to school and fighting “white kids who wore rebel flag T-shirts” (186). Memorialization, then, is a powerful and contentious thing. The removal of those monuments suggests a nationwide, if not worldwide, refusal to memorialize a society of racism and inequality; on a more local level, the use of memorial shirts suggests a desire to celebrate the memory of young Black men, gone too soon, victims of violence and systemic racism.

The memorialization represented by the shirts is echoed in Ward’s use of the memoir genre: memoir becomes a vehicle for remembering and ultimately memorializing these young Black men, but especially her brother Joshua. According to Ward, her purpose in writing this memoir is “to find Joshua” (249). Ward frequently expresses her grief towards Joshua’s death and the fear of forgetting him: “As the years pass, I find my memory shrinking and adhering to photos” (241). Ward also feels “terror that I will forget who he [Joshua] was” (242). Ward not only tells the story of her life but searches for a form in which to memorialize Joshua’s.

In describing the day Joshua died, Ward writes of “the last memory” her sisters Nerissa and Charine have of Joshua, and that “we grasp at minutes, seconds, milliseconds” (230). Ward’s grief thus speaks to the inability of forms of memory such as photographs to encompass Joshua’s life and the power of ordinary memories. Ward describes “the last real memory of Joshua,” meeting him in the hallway of their house right before Ward left for New York for a job interview, and his disappointment at her leaving: “My brother did not want me to leave again, to

lead” (226). Ward says of this memory: “I hate it. I cannot remember the last time I actually saw him. I only remember this” (225-26). Memory, then, is ephemeral; it fades. By contrast, Ward uses memoir to make permanent these fading memories, to conquer their loss, in a way, by writing them down.

In memorializing Joshua’s life, *Men We Reaped* speaks to a broader memorialization of Black lives in the American South and their worth. Ward says of her community: “Most of the men in my life thought their stories, whether they were drug dealers or straight-laced, were worthy of being written about. Then I laughed it off. Now, as I write these stories, I see the truth in their claims” (69). In writing to find Joshua, then, Ward also “write[s] the narrative that remembers, write[s] the narrative that says: *Hello. We are here. Listen*” (251). Ward expresses similar sentiments about the power of and need for these stories in a recent essay, published after the death of her husband from a respiratory illness, likely COVID, a few months before the COVID-19 pandemic gained national attention. Ward, despite her grief, felt compelled to continue writing her next novel, which is about an enslaved woman who undergoes multiple losses and “who herself is sold south and descends into the hell of chattel slavery in the mid-1800s.” Ward writes, “even in a pandemic, even in grief, I found myself commanded to amplify the voices of the dead that sing to me, from their boat to my boat, on the sea of time” (“On Witness”). Despite the grief that literary forms like memoir produce and confront, then, the story such memorialization represents becomes, for Ward, too important not to tell.

What is traditionally considered a story of someone’s life, the memoir, becomes for Ward and Broom a confrontation of a society that has ignored and systematically oppressed the African-American community. Memoir counters a society that has repeatedly refused the memorialization of African-American lives in favor of Confederate monuments or flags. Both

Broom and Ward thus transform the traditional meaning of the memoir, its focus on autobiography, and use the genre not only as a retelling of their lives but as a cry for awareness and an assertion of the central role African-American experiences should have in the story of the South and, by extension, America. For southern studies, then, the memoir illustrates the power of memory in exploring themes such as family, community, and feelings of loss, but also in raising questions about Confederate memorialization and racial inequality in the American South.

The Loss of the Mother in Contemporary Southern Studies

A key theme for memoirs and contemporary southern studies is the loss of family members, whether that be Broom's father Simon in *The Yellow House* or Ward's brother Joshua in *Men We Reaped*. Beyond memoir, other works of contemporary southern studies confront a similar loss: the loss of the mother. In Natasha Trethewey's 2006 poetry collection *Native Guard* and Ward's 2011 novel *Salvage the Bones*, a daughter's loss of her mother, and the subsequent memories of her mother, become significant for each woman/character's understanding of her life in the American South.

Trethewey's *Native Guard* is divided into three parts: one about her deceased mother, the next about Mississippi and the Native Guards, a division of African-American soldiers during the Civil War, and ending with a section about her own experiences as a biracial child in Mississippi. While Parts Two and Three become significant for a later discussion of cultural memory, Part One is significant for a discussion of personal memory with Trethewey's memories of her mother.

Trethewey questions, even critiques, forms of memory like photographs. "Photograph: Ice Storm, 1971" details one such photograph, which includes both her mother and stepfather. In this poem, Trethewey describes "the tired face of a woman, suffering, / made luminous by the

camera's eye" (10). Trethewey, then, highlights the limitations of a photograph; the camera fails to capture the exhaustion of the woman and instead gives her a false sense of life. Giorgia de Cenzo describes how "the camera's eye can give only a limited perspective of what was captured in an ephemeral moment" (26), meaning a photo speaks without words, giving only a split-second glimpse into a person's life. Trethewey asks of the photograph, "why on the back has someone made a list / of our names, the date, the event: nothing / of what's inside—mother, stepfather's fist?" (10). Trethewey describes how the photograph, and the writing on the back of it, fails to embody an accurate memory; the photograph is a distortion, a manipulation of memory into something false. De Cenzo says that this photograph "tells nothing about what was hidden behind this representation of happiness" (26). By contrast, writing this poem allows Trethewey to uncover what is hidden; while the photograph cannot represent "the storm that drives us inside / for days, power lines down, food rotting / in the refrigerator" (Trethewey 10), Trethewey can in her poem. In a way, "Photograph" becomes a different representation of memory, a way for Trethewey to speak truth into the inadequacies of a photo.

Trethewey adds to memory's complexity in "What is Evidence" by including her mother's trauma and artifacts different from photographs. A striking part of this poem is the title, which does not include a question mark. By not posing "What is Evidence" as a question, Trethewey seems to already know the answer or, perhaps, the answer is unknowable. The poem focuses on acts of hiding and covering up evidence. Speaking of her mother, Trethewey describes "the fleeting bruises she'd cover / with makeup" and "the quiver / in the voice she'd steady" (11). These are not the true evidence of her mother's suffering, nor is "the official document" or "the tiny marker / with its dates, her name, abstract as history" the evidence of her death (Trethewey 11). Rather, the evidence is "only the landscape of her body—splintered /

clavicle, pierced temporal—her thin bones / settling a bit each day, the way all things do” (Trethewey 11). Thus, forms of memory that supposedly tell the story of her mother’s trauma and, ultimately, her mother’s death, are ephemeral: the bruises are covered, the quiver is steadied, the official document is “fading already,” and the grave marker is “abstract” (Trethewey 11). In addition to photographs, these external forms of evidence, of memory, fail to tell the whole story.

Instead, her mother’s body, with its broken bones, becomes the site of memory in which the evidence cannot be covered up, cannot fade. Tellingly, though, these forms of evidence are internal—only her mother’s bones are concrete. De Cenzo claims that in focusing the reader on “the landscape” of her mother’s body, “Trethewey is here evoking the image of her mother’s tortured and defaced body as a touchable representation of all the century-long humiliations, tortures, whipping, lynching suffered by black Americans. Even if the memory of their names had been lost in the Middle Passage, their history was actually written on their bodies” (27). In De Cenzo’s words, “the poet’s mother becomes a sort of spiritual manifestation of history” (27). These connections add to memory’s complexity: what were once thought pieces of evidence, forms of memory without bias, such as “the official document,” “the tiny marker,” or the physical evidence of trauma, “the fleeting bruises,” are just that: fleeting. What is not fleeting, not ephemeral, is the internal: the parts of Trethewey’s mother underneath the skin like her bones, the places no one can reach. Such conclusions have implications for the power of memory and stories. While external forms of “evidence” may not speak truth, memories can be locked away internally until one wishes to write them down as Broom and Ward have done in memoirs.

Part of the trauma for Trethewey regarding her mother's death comes not only from memories but the absence of memory, something Trethewey explores in "Myth." As Trethewey writes of her mother, "I was asleep while you were dying" (14). De Cenzo describes the implications of this absence of memory for Trethewey: "she could not witness that moment of passage from life to death" (28). Because she did not witness her mother's death, Trethewey writes of her mother as being in-between life and death: "it's as if you slipped through some rift, a hollow / I make between my slumber and my waking" (14). Trethewey writes that "in dreams" her mother lives, but when Trethewey tries "taking / [her] back into morning" (14), Trethewey's mother is not there. In place of memory, then, is the constant cycle of grief and the attempt to bring her mother back to life.

The poem's structure reinforces this constant cycle of grief, in addition to its ultimate futility. The poem is, according to De Cenzo, "a palindrome sequence: the same lines of the first stanza are repeated backwards in the second one, as in a mirrored image" (28). The structure of the poem, then, reflects the cycle of grief Trethewey experiences and how the absence of memory as witness to her mother's death produces and enhances such feelings. In an interview with *The New Yorker*, Trethewey describes the poems of *Native Guard* as "not about how she [her mother] died or our lives. They were elegy. They were about my grief. They were about me living with a loss and not how it came to be" (Chotiner, "How Natasha Trethewey Remembers"). Ultimately, then, "Myth" is a description of grief and its relentlessness.

Scholars often connect "Myth," this story of grief and its relentless cycle, to mythology, suggested by Trethewey's "Erebus" (14), which the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines as "a place of darkness, between Earth and Hades" ("Erebus"). Specifically, De Cenzo writes that "Trethewey recreates the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice" (28). However, the connection of

“Myth” to dreams, and the connection between dreams and memory, has not been explored as extensively. Trethewey writes of her mother, “in dreams you live” (14). In a study on dreams, Katherine Macduffie and George A. Mashour state that “in waking ... We are restricted to formulating projections based on events and rules of logic derived from previous experience. In the unique neurobiological environment of sleep, however, this restriction on cognition falls, creating the possibility for more novel thought” (195). In referencing “the Erebus I keep you in” (14), or the place between Earth and Hades, in relation to her mother, Trethewey could also be talking about the time between sleep and waking when illogical, novel thought conforms to “rules of logic”: the freedom of dreams allows Trethewey’s mother a possibility of life that waking, with its reality and logic, does not.

The importance of dreams for understanding “Myth” also comes from a dream’s ability to bridge three states: “experiencing the present, processing the past, and preparing for the future” (Macduffie and Mashour 195). Macduffie and Mashour state that “a dream serves as a temporal bridge across these three domains, which appear as overlapping windows, not as a continuous time line” (195). A dream allows Trethewey to experience the present loss of her mother intertwined with memories of her mother and the future uncertainty of what life will look like without her. However, such experiences overlap; they are not continuous, allowing Trethewey to experience the evidence of her mother’s life in memories simultaneously with the uncertain reality of her passing. Such possibilities shed light on why Trethewey’s grief and this dream sequence is cyclical: the possibilities of interweaving past and present, the novel, radical forms of cognition available in dreams, give Trethewey a witness to her mother’s life unlike anything afforded in reality.

With Part One of *Native Guard*, then, Trethewey explores how personal memories of her mother, whether they come in photographs or dreams, interact with trauma and grief. “Photograph: Ice Storm, 1971,” “What is Evidence,” and “Myth” all speak to different forms of memory and, ultimately, their inability to provide a true witness to her mother’s life. A photograph does not tell the whole story; types of evidence once thought reliable, like official documents or physical marks, can be covered up; the radical possibilities offered in dreams fade in reality. Thinking of memoir and memorialization, *Native Guard* becomes a different way, a new form, for Trethewey to provide a witness to her grief and her mother’s life. *Native Guard* thus, like *The Yellow House* and *Men We Reaped*, is a personal testament to trauma and grief interwoven with a tangible, permanent embodiment of memory.

Trethewey’s loss of her mother and her relationship to her mother’s memory become important for understanding *Native Guard* and how Trethewey experiences grief; the importance of a mother’s death and her daughter’s memory for contemporary southern studies continues in Jesmyn Ward’s novel *Salvage the Bones*. Set in the fictional town of Bois Sauvage in rural Mississippi, *Salvage the Bones* tells the story of the Batiste family in the twelve days leading up to and after Hurricane Katrina. The protagonist, Esch Batiste, is fifteen years old, a literature-lover, and pregnant. She is surrounded by her older brothers Randall, a basketball player, and Skeetah, a dog-lover, her younger brother Junior, and her drunk and abusive father Claude (“Daddy”) Batiste. Esch, after the death of her mother while giving birth to Junior, lives with no female companionship with her family in the Pit.

Esch’s memories of her mother are related to food and comfort. Esch remembers: “Mama taught me how to find eggs” (Ward 22). Later, Esch observes Skeetah placing his hand on China “as careful as Mama used to take biscuits from the oven” (Ward 110). Esch also remembers her

mother “pulling greens in the small garden plot she kept behind the house” (Ward 110). Mary Ruth Marotte describes these scenes as memories of Esch’s mother “fortifying and guiding” the family (209). To reinforce this image of Esch’s mother as provider/sustainer/comforter, Esch often positions her memories of her mother as before/after her mother’s death or, as Marotte terms it, “what was and what is, between memory and reality” (210). For example, Esch remembers how “when we were younger and Mama had to get us up in the morning for school, she would touch us on our backs first ... she would softly tell us to wake up, that it was time for school. When she died and Daddy had to wake us up, he wouldn’t touch us. He’d knock on the wall next to our door, hard: shout, *Wake up*” (Ward 115). When her dad begins knocking down the chicken coop, Esch remembers how “it used to have Mama’s clothesline tied to it with the other end fixed to a pine tree. After Mama died, Daddy moved the clothesline to a closer tree, but he didn’t tie it tight enough, so when Randall and I wash clothes and hang them out with wooden clothespins, the line sags, and our pants dangle in the dirt” (Ward 108). Marotte points out that these before/after memories such as the clothesline show how “without Mama, they [the Batiste family] are ineffectual and stymied, unable to care for themselves or one another in any satisfying manner” (209). Perhaps most importantly, though, these before/after memories show how Esch continues to grieve her mother’s loss and her mother’s absence in the day-to-day.

These before/after memories and the loss of comfort from her mother produce complicated understandings of maternity for Esch, who often questions what motherhood or even love looks like in the face of her mother’s loss. Esch’s understanding of motherhood and love is complicated by China, Skeetah’s dog, who has just given birth. After China kills one of her puppies, Esch thinks: “China is bloody-mouthed and bright-eyed as Medea. If she could speak, this is what I would ask her: *Is this what motherhood is?*” (Ward 130). Near the end of the

novel, Esch also likens motherhood to disaster when she describes Hurricane Katrina as “the mother that swept into the Gulf and slaughtered” (Ward 255). While this comparison could speak to rebirth after Katrina, what becomes significant for memory is how, in the absence of her mother, Esch’s understandings of motherhood become associated with violence: Esch’s mother died giving birth to Junior; China killed her own puppy; Esch discovers she is pregnant days before a hurricane, impending disaster.

Esch’s complex and often violent understanding of motherhood or love is lived out in her relationship with Manny. In the absence of her mother’s comfort, Esch seeks comfort with Manny, her brother Randall’s friend and the father of her baby. However, Manny is abusive and does not show Esch the kind of love and comfort she seeks. Esch thinks, “this is love, and it hurts. Manny never looks at me” (Ward 94). Manny’s continual dismissal of Esch and refusal to see her, in addition to his physical and verbal abuse, starkly contrasts the tenderness shown between Skeetah and China. Esch’s inability or refusal to see Manny as he is connects to her inability to—or refusal to—initially recognize her pregnancy. Marotte writes that “the absence of a maternal figure, the distance Esch has from her body, and the lack of education she has received by community experts all explain Esch’s inability to recognize her pregnancy earlier” (212). The same, especially her mother’s loss, could be said for Esch’s inability to recognize earlier that Manny does not provide the love and comfort she seeks. Left with only memories of her mother, and living without any female influence in the Pit, Esch seeks out love and comfort in the only place she understands it to be: violence. Manny’s abusive behavior likely does not strike Esch as odd because she associates love/motherhood with violence, as seen in China’s killing of her puppy and Esch’s likening of Hurricane Katrina to a mother. However, faced with

the reality of her pregnancy, memories of her mother's comfort, and Skeetah's affection for China, Esch begins to realize that Manny does not offer her the love she wants.

Ultimately, Esch's recognition of Manny's inadequacy and abusive behavior leads to her acceptance of her role as a mother. Manny follows Esch into the girls' bathroom at the high school. During intercourse, Esch becomes determined to make Manny look at her, to really see her. She repeats: "He will look at me... He will look at me ... He will look at me" (Ward 145-46). When Manny notices Esch's stomach, he begins "looking ... seeing" Esch, and "he knows" that Esch will be a mother (Ward 146). However, once Manny knows the truth, he turns away from Esch and runs out of the bathroom: he rejects her. During this scene, Ward describes how one of Esch's mother's hair clips fell into the toilet, which Esch flushes (146). Such an action could represent the impermanence of her mother's memory, its fragility, or perhaps Esch's transition into her mother's role as provider and comforter. Whatever the case, in this scene, Esch confronts Manny's inability to meet her needs. Esch is becoming a mother, and she wants Manny to love and accept her on this journey. Christopher W. Clark says of this scene: "By 'making them know,' Esch desires to assume the role that she sees occupied by other females ... Her violent outburst becomes a stark declaration of who and what she wishes to be seen as, and by whom" (351). Who/what Esch wishes to be seen as is a young woman worthy of love and support who is becoming a mother. As Manny sees Esch for who she really is, the opposite also seems true; Esch realizes that Manny does not and will never show her the love she hopes for, allowing Esch to step into her role as mother, finding comfort in herself.

In her mother's absence, Esch's journey to this acceptance of who she is is long and complex. She and her family find comfort only in memories of her mother, and in reality, Esch seeks comfort in Manny, who is abusive. The fact that Esch stays in this relationship speaks to

her mother's absence and the desire for comfort and love that absence produces. Ultimately, however, Esch finds comfort, love, and acceptance not in Manny but in herself and the role as mother she will fulfill. In portraying Esch's story this way, Ward also details the racial injustice woven into the life Esch lives, specifically the poverty and isolation of Esch's family. Esch is left with memories of her mother because her mother gave birth to every child in her bedroom, not in a hospital; Esch has no other source of comfort because the family lives in the Pit, surrounded by junk and isolated from others. In other words, Esch does not have access to the social structures that would provide her with information about birth control, abusive relationships, or simply give her support and answers. Like with her memoir *Men We Reaped*, Ward uses memory in *Salvage the Bones* not only to explore personal trauma and grief but racial injustice.

Understanding personal memory for southern studies, then, is an understanding of grief, trauma, and loss. For all of these texts, memory and memorialization become the sites for confronting trauma and exploring how such trauma has affected individuals/characters on a personal and local level. However, these texts, in addressing personal memory, also analyze how such memories highlight racial injustice in the South and the need for African-American stories. Thus, memoir, poetry, and fiction all have one central purpose: to memorialize the experiences of African-American families.

Disrupting White, Heterosexual Cultural Memory in the American South

Rewriting History

In their confrontation of personal memory, Broom, Ward, and Trethewey's works also address historical and cultural memory through themes of disempowerment and the marginalization of African-American voices. Specifically, all three cite the absence of African-American experiences within the larger story of America and the nation's history. As Patricia G. Davis puts it: "southern memory shares another key feature with national memory: the marginalization of the historical experiences and contributions of non-whites, with the corresponding valorization of whiteness as essential to American identity" (17). Thinking of the American South, this marginalization has clear connections to the region's remembrances of the Civil War: the representation of a romantic, pre-Civil War South and its plantation lifestyle continues to be influential today, whether that be in plantation tours or *Gone With the Wind*. As mentioned in the introduction, Steven Hoelscher uses the term "white cultural memory" to refer to memories of the Civil War in the South (657).

Going a step further, "heterosexual" can also be added to "white cultural memory" to emphasize the exclusionary nature of the South's cultural, historical, and public memory. The need for defining memory this way becomes obvious considering that, in discussing memory within the contexts of the Civil War and race, memory's relationship to queer studies in the South has not been explored as extensively. This thesis, then, while drawing on earlier work about white cultural memory and the Civil War, also explores memory's relationship to the LGBTQ community of the American South. *NBC News* reported in 2018 on the Invisible Histories Project, which documents the history of the LGBTQ community in the Deep South

(“New project”). The project reflects the importance of memory and queer studies for contemporary southern literature and for countering the region’s dominant history/narrative.

While homophobia has been pervasive throughout the United States, “the South’s history of ... religious fundamentalism,” as E. Patrick Johnson puts it (2), makes it an especially important, even unique, region for examining attitudes towards the LGBTQ community. As an example, Kenneth D. Wald and Allison Calhoun-Brown describe how religious conservatives “defeated the proposed equal rights amendment to the Constitution” in the early 1970s (207). This amendment prohibited “sexual discrimination by the states and the federal government.” Significantly, “all southern states except Texas and Tennessee,” states where there was a high concentration of evangelical Protestants, refused to ratify the amendment (Wald and Brown 207).

Thus, while it is important to recognize that discrimination based on sexual orientation is not exclusive to the South, the importance of religion produces a distinct opposition to the LGBTQ community in the South based on conservative views or traditionalism. Wald and Calhoun-Brown elaborate: “the politics of gay rights also highlights the impact of religion as a societal institution and the influence that it has on the social order. Opposition to gay rights is primarily rooted in moral and social traditionalism ... Religion is a major source of this traditionalism” (326). That being said, the South is not the only place where traditional or conservative religion exists in the United States, and all religious people in the South are not and have not been conservatives. Nonetheless, a region where, according to the Pew Research Center’s Religious Landscape Study, 76% of adults identify as Christian means religion has and still plays a key role in understanding the South’s history in relation to the LGBTQ community (“Adults in the South”).

As an example of the relationship between memory and queer studies for the South, Matthew Griffin's 2016 novel *Hide* explores memory's complexity for a gay couple who wants to be remembered in a time when it is illegal for them to exist. *Hide* tells the story of Wendell and Frank, who meet in North Carolina at the end of World War II. Wendell is a taxidermist and Frank is a WWII veteran who later finds work at a denim plant. *Hide* tells their story from the moment they meet until present day, in 2016, as older men, when Frank gets sick and starts losing his memory.

Hide tells the story of two men who pursue a relationship in a region and nation that calls it illegal. Wendell remembers stories "of men being arrested, sometimes in parks, in seedy bars, in public restrooms, sometimes behind the closed doors of homes, behind hotel curtains" (Griffin 121). Wendell also recalls newspaper stories about these men, with the *New York Times* using language like "*perverts*" and "*unnatural relations*" (Griffin 121). But in the South, Wendell says, "even that was too specific, too close to describing some actual thing. When those men were arrested, it was for *crimes against nature*, as though they'd been caught kicking up a public flower bed. That's how truly unspeakable it was: we didn't have the words" (Griffin 122). This language ultimately influences how the men view each other and their relationship, with Frank telling Wendell, "They could lock us away for sixty years. It's a crime. We're criminals." Wendell responds, "We're not criminals" (Griffin 113), but Frank sees this response as naïve, "blissfully ignorant of the laws of our state" (Griffin 113). The region's prejudice connects to Wendell's descriptions of his town, comparing it to "a museum, something fragile and important that had to be preserved, kept from all the grubby hands that would want to touch it" (Griffin 19). Later, Wendell mentions that Frank worked in "Confederate Mills" (Griffin 24). Diction like "preserved" and "Confederate" suggest Frank and Wendell's town, and the South more broadly,

is stuck in the past, stuck in its prejudice, producing fear and uncertainty about their future for Frank and Wendell.

This fear and uncertainty becomes obvious in Frank and Wendell's day-to-day lives, specifically in their peril at being seen together in public or even private, at their home. Wendell comments that "any time we had a repairman over, I had to close the shop and pretend to be a neighbor who'd come to let him in while Frank was at work ... you never knew if the air-conditioning man might turn out to be a second cousin Frank had forgot about, or if the plumber was an old classmate who might snoop around a little" (Griffin 32). Even the privacy of their home, then, does not offer them much security. A similar situation occurs at the grocery store. Wendell says of Frank: "at least he lets us take the same car now. We used to have to drive separate, and not stray from our own designated territory of vendor stalls" (Griffin 43). Wendell's descriptions of their lives, then, both private and public, suggest an undercurrent of anxiety; what is an everyday, simple task like calling a repairman or getting groceries becomes for the two a potential threat.

Even after the LGBTQ community becomes more "accepted" in the South, and Frank and Wendell do not face the same threat from the law, the memories of prejudice and threats are simply too strong for Frank and Wendell to socialize openly in the present-day of 2016. Like Esch's before/after memories of her mother's death in Ward's *Salvage the Bones*, Frank and Wendell have before/after memories of "change" or "progress" in attitudes towards the LGBTQ community. Such "progress," however, is not reflected in Frank and Wendell's behavior. In the present-day, as older men, Frank collapses and Wendell calls an ambulance. While in the ambulance together, Wendell notes that "Frank and I are careful not to look at each other too much" (Griffin 4); at the hospital, Wendell tells the desk attendant that he is Frank's brother

because it “saves us all the ugliness of some kind of scene” (Griffin 4). Later, Wendell comments that when Frank dies, “and left me the house and all his money, the story to anyone who asks is that we were very dear friends” (Griffin 107). Such descriptions question what “change” or “progress” means or looks like on a personal level. While acceptance may have come politically, or nationally, meaning their relationship is no longer illegal, clearly Frank and Wendell do not experience these feelings of “acceptance” in their everyday lives. Rather, memories of prejudice and danger are simply too powerful to forget.

Perhaps the most striking example of memory’s power comes when Wendell, in the present-day, hires two young men to mow their lawn without Frank’s knowledge. Frank panics at seeing the two boys on their lawn, telling the boys to leave. Frank desperately says of Wendell: “He’s my brother, in town for a visit. He don’t even live here, he’s just—,” to which Wendell replies, “Frank ... They don’t care. Nobody cares. It doesn’t matter anymore.” But Wendell’s response does not faze Frank, who continues to insist that Wendell “don’t live here ... He don’t” (Griffin 239). Later, after Frank frantically asks who the boys were, who they knew, and tells Wendell it is dangerous, Wendell says: “It’s okay. We’re safe” (Griffin 243), but the reassurance is not reflected in Frank’s behavior, or even Wendell’s at times. Frank and Wendell’s story, then, challenges the meaning/experience of “acceptance” or “change”; clearly, for Frank and Wendell, memories of prejudice and threats from the law prove stronger than any form of progress, meaning the two rarely feel safe, even in the present-day.

Despite not feeling safe, in both past and present-day, Frank and Wendell took a beach trip early in their relationship, a trip that ultimately heightens the significance of memory for the two. They took pictures of each other but ensured that “we’re not together in any of the photographs” (Griffin 75). Wendell continues: “It was reckless enough just to walk out in the

open and the sun like that without going and asking some stranger, who might not turn out to be one after all when you got close enough, to take our picture” (Griffin 75). Griffin’s use of photographs as a representation of memory here echoes the importance of photographs for Trethewey; the photographs depict a brief, fleeting glimpse of an experience but leave out important details. A photograph of Trethewey’s family did not show her mother’s trauma; these photographs of Frank and Wendell, never together in any of them, do not show the depth of their relationship.

Griffin, like Trethewey, also raises questions about evidence. Wendell says of these photographs, which they still have in a cedar box: “they’re the only real evidence that any of it ever happened, that we were ever even in the same vicinity. The rest we got rid of, if it ever existed at all. We never wrote each other love letters, anything someone might find, and he never came to my shop at the same time two days in a row, or by the same path through the downtown streets and alleys” (Griffin 76). In “What is Evidence,” Trethewey suggests the flimsy nature of forms like official documents; in this case, photographs similarly are not strong evidence. None of these photographs have Frank and Wendell in the same frame, meaning none show them embracing. In other words, the photographs could just as easily have been of two friends; they’re not evidence or proof of Frank and Wendell’s love/relationship. Additionally, Griffin’s use of “evidence,” diction suggesting a crime, highlights how dangerous tangible, physical representations of memory like these photographs are for Frank and Wendell. Typical forms of memory, then, keepsakes like photographs or love letters, are denied to Frank and Wendell by laws and prejudice in the South, or the nation as a whole, calling their relationship a crime.

The importance of memory in *Hide* is enhanced by Frank’s loss of it. In losing his memory, Frank becomes obsessed with fruitcake and leaves fruitcake wrappers everywhere.

When Wendell retrieves the cedar box full of photographs from the beach and other memorabilia, the only physical embodiment of memory Frank and Wendell have, he realizes that Frank has replaced everything in it with fruitcake wrappers. Wendell says, “all I find is fruitcake wrappers, as if they were pushing themselves through every little gap in his [Frank’s] memory” (Griffin 224). In having Frank presumably throw the photographs away, destroying the cedar box, Griffin thus denies Frank and Wendell any form of tangible memory, emphasizing how outside interests silence Frank and Wendell’s ability to memorialize their relationship.

In losing his memory, Frank not only destroys the cedar box, the only physical “evidence” of their relationship, but begins inventing new memories of the life Frank and Wendell could have led. One such memory is that of Frank’s mother, who died early in their relationship and who Wendell never met. As Frank is losing his memory, he begins speaking of his mother as if she is both alive and familiar with Wendell. Frank says that his mother “already thinks you’re [Wendell’s] a heathen.” When Wendell states that Frank’s mother has been dead for decades, Frank replies: “What an awful thing to say. My mother adores you” (Griffin 181). The creation of these memories is heartbreaking and revealing: Frank imagines a time in which he and Wendell do not have to, as the title of the novel reflects, hide, but can openly and safely interact not only with the public but with Frank’s family.

In addition to his mother, Frank also invents memories of the couple’s child, which they never had. Frank keeps talking to a person named Lorraine, and when Wendell asks him who that is, Frank replies, “Our daughter” (Griffin 222), who Frank says is six. Such creations/inventions are a product of getting older, yet they likely reveal Frank’s inner thoughts or desires. Frank, in creating these memories, vocalizes his wish for experiences he and Wendell never had access to: interacting with his family with Wendell as a couple, or having children.

Losing his memory, then, allows Frank to find memories that his reality as a gay man in the South has denied him.

Something different, however, happens for Wendell, who becomes frustrated and hurt at the life Frank “remembers.” Wendell tells Frank: “whatever life it is you think you remember ... whatever life it is you think you had, I don’t want to hear one more word about it” (Griffin 227). Wendell immediately apologizes, but the reader wonders what he is apologizing for: the harsh statement, or the pain behind it from not being able to give/experience the life that Frank, to some degree, wanted.

Frank’s creation of these imaginary “counter memories” is an extension of the novel’s own broad and general countermemory to the South’s historical and cultural memory. Claire Whitlinger notes the relationship between countermemory and silence, and describes “memory’s inverse—silence, denial, and social forgetting” (650). *Hide* speaks into the South’s, or the nation’s, history, giving voice or a countermemory to those silenced. However, Frank’s countermemory is more local, almost; these are feelings or desires that Frank has silenced within his relationship with Wendell, perhaps out of guilt. It seems logical that Frank silences those desires out of love for Wendell and a wish not to hurt Wendell’s feelings.

These “counter memories” are similar to Trethewey’s “Myth,” where dreams offer Trethewey the possibility of a radical, impossible reality, including one where Trethewey’s mother is still alive. Here, Frank’s memory loss leads to the formation of an alternate, imagined reality where he and Wendell are an integral part of Frank’s mother’s life, and where they have a child. These counter memories are distinct from Trethewey in that Frank’s imaginary memories bleed into reality; Frank talks to Lorraine, the couple’s imaginary six-year-old daughter. In other words, while Trethewey leaves her mother in the dreamscape, and cannot take her into

morning/reality, Frank's memories come alive in a sense, asserting themselves as ghosts, almost: as apparitions of Frank's deepest, most silenced, wishes.

The destruction of the cedar box, of any physical "evidence" of Frank and Wendell's relationship, becomes part of a broader absence of memory of the two. Prejudice, fear, and uncertainty deny the two any possibility of memorializing their lives. Wendell comments: "And when we're gone, nobody will remember any of it. Nobody will see our photos and marvel that we, too, were young once; nobody will wonder about the things we never told them. It will be as if none of it ever happened" (Griffin 114). Wendell also posits inheritance as a representation of memory: "We've got plenty of money and nobody to leave it to when we go" (Griffin 126). No one, then, will carry on what Frank and Wendell leave behind, whether that be memories of them through photographs, memories of them as family members or friends, since they live in such isolation, or memories that live on through inheritance or children.

Griffin's *Hide* thus speaks to questions of who and what a culture remembers. Griffin denies Frank and Wendell any hope of memorializing each other by the end of the novel, going so far as to destroy the cedar box, the only physical form of memory the two had left, and by having Frank lose his memory. This denial seems brutal, yet it becomes symbolic of the South's prejudice and its refusal to memorialize the experiences of the LGBTQ community living there. Writing *Hide*, then, allows Griffin to, in essence, rewrite the history of the American South, this time including the experiences of a gay couple.

The need for Frank and Wendell's story, and its connection to the American South, is seen not only in the past, however, but in the region's present and future. *GLAAD* reports that "across the board people in the South showed more discomfort with LGBT people than those in the U.S. overall" ("LGBT Life in the South"). Meanwhile, a study cited by *The Atlantic* in an

article about LGBTQ rights in the U.S. finds “that lesbian, gay, and bisexual people reported much higher rates of being bullied, fired, or denied a job, promotion, or lease compared with heterosexual people” (Green, “America Moved On”). Such reports reinforce Frank and Wendell’s uncertainty about openly sharing their relationship, even in the wake of “progress” or “change” in their present-day: 2016. Those reports also suggest that for southern studies, understanding how a region’s, and nation’s, memory and history has marginalized the experiences of the LGBTQ community, and seeking to resituate those experiences and stories at the forefront of southern history and literature, is paramount.

Griffin rewrites the history of the American South, this time including the experiences of the LGBTQ community; similarly, Natasha Trethewey’s *Native Guard*, also discussed under Personal Memory, becomes central for reinterpreting and ultimately rewriting the history of the American South or the United States broadly, this time including the experiences of African-Americans. A key theme of *Native Guard* is photography: the implications of a photo, including what is not captured by the camera, as seen earlier in Trethewey’s “Photograph: Ice Storm, 1976” or even in *Hide*’s erasure of Wendell and Frank’s relationship in photographs.

In “Scenes From a Documentary History of Mississippi,” told in four parts, Trethewey examines the relationship between photographs and southern history. The poem’s first part, “King Cotton, 1907,” describes a photograph of a parade on the main street in Vicksburg. The town, including black children, is waiting for the arrival of President Roosevelt. The emphasis in this poem, however, is the presence of flags and cotton. Trethewey writes of “words on a banner, *Cotton, America’s King*” and continuously repeats two lines: “flags wave down” and “great bales of cotton rise up from the ground” (21). In an essay on why she writes about the South, Trethewey specifically mentions cotton as a motif that is “intertwined with that constant desire to

circle back” (237), a circling or cycle of revisiting history echoed in Trethewey’s description of the cotton in relation to black children: “cotton surrounds them, a swell, a great mound / bearing them up, back towards us” (21). For Trethewey, then, repetition of symbols like cotton and flags, presumably made of cotton, serve as oppressors of those black children, limiting their space and ability to function. Additionally, the repetition of “flags wave down” and “bales of cotton rise up” evoke images of enclosure, even suffocation; the flags coming down and the bales rising up leave these children with nowhere else to go, trapping them in these oppressive symbols.

Simultaneously, however, these symbols become reasons for Trethewey to circle back to these children and their stories. Trethewey writes that the banner proclaiming “*Cotton, America’s King*” has “the sound of progress” (21). Key, though, is the word “sound”; a sound is ephemeral, fleeting, meaning whatever progress King Cotton represents is flimsy. Trethewey here echoes Griffin’s *Hide* and its investigation of the flimsy nature of words like “change.” Official representations of progress like laws do not reach Wendell and Frank on an individual level in their personal lives; similarly, any promises of change are not felt by these black children or their families. Further, it is the black children who “stare out at us” (Trethewey 21), presumably through the photograph, although it could as easily be history. Rather than give Roosevelt the prime place in this photograph and narrative, it is the black children who stare out at its viewers, who demand the viewer’s attention.

Trethewey similarly uses a photograph as a site for reexamining history in the fourth part of “Documentary History”: “You are Late.” In this poem, a young black girl wants to enter the “*Greenwood Public Library for Negroes*,” but she is locked out (Trethewey 24). The poem’s diction describes the girl as separate, with limited access; the library door is “just out of reach” (Trethewey 24). Trethewey wants to tell the girl to wait, “but this is history: she can’t linger. /

She'll read the sign that I read: *You are Late*" (24): late not just for the library, however, but history more generally and symbolically. As Jill Goad writes, "the closed library, indicative of the lack of resources allocated to black-only establishments, also predicts a future where her academic pursuits ... will be frustrated because she was born black and female in the South" (279). The poem thus centers on segregation, equal opportunity, and silenced voices/experiences.

Beyond "Documentary Scenes," photographs as mediums or symbols of memory become significant in "Pastoral" as well. In "Pastoral," which takes place in a dream, Trethewey poses for a photo with the Fugitive Poets, a group of poets that included John Crowe Ransom and Robert Penn Warren. Four of them, including Ransom and Warren, later became known as the Agrarians, and they promoted the Old South's rural lifestyle and past. Jennifer Ritterhouse characterizes Agrarianism as "an all-male as well as all-white movement" (106). The photo in "Pastoral" distorts reality in favor of this agrarian past: rather than the Atlanta skyline, the photographer uses a backdrop of "a lush pasture, green, full of soft-eyed cows" (Trethewey 35). Further, the photograph cannot represent the cows "lowing, a chant that sounds like *no, no*"; its viewer cannot hear "Robert Penn Warren, / his voice just audible above the drone / of bulldozers" (Trethewey 35). This photo, then, depicting an agrarian, pastoral landscape, hides signs of industrial progress like Atlanta's skyline and noise from bulldozers, reflecting the Fugitive Poets' understanding of a mythic South and its Confederate, rural past. Like Trethewey's "Photograph: Ice Storm, 1976" and even *Hide*, "Pastoral" explores a photograph's shortcomings: these emblems of memory rarely tell the whole story.

Additionally, "Pastoral" examines the poet's role or place in the photograph as a biracial woman among a group of white men. Trethewey writes: "*Say 'race,'* the photographer croons. I'm in / blackface again when the flash freezes us" (35). Rather than biracial, these men

automatically view and depict Trethewey in “blackface”; she cannot be in the middle, in a chasm between black and white. As Goad puts it: “the photograph ... reflects the ingrained belief in southern culture that a person can be white or black but not both” (275). In accordance with this racial ambiguity Trethewey represents, the poet’s presence among these prominent, white male writers raises questions about her ambiguous status in southern literature; her attendance suggests she is accepted, yet in the photograph, she is not seen as an equal but instead depicted in blackface, a choice, Goad argues, that “makes her a prop, comic relief not to be taken seriously or the result of a half-hearted gesture to make southern literature’s prominent voices more racially diverse” (275). While examining how a photograph can distort, then, “Pastoral” also sends a warning regarding diversity as a half-hearted gesture rather than a full-fledged desire for inclusivity.

Trethewey continues to show in “Blond” how being biracial in the American South has implications for photographs and the region’s history. In this poem, Trethewey receives “a blond wig, a pink sequined tutu, / and a blond ballerina doll” as a child for Christmas (39). Her mother takes a photograph of Trethewey wearing her gifts. What’s striking about this photograph, however, is its whiteness; Trethewey’s black mother takes the picture, excluded from the scene, while Trethewey’s white father is in it, although “almost / out of the frame” (39). The picture, with Trethewey in her blond wig, white doll, and white father, reflects only her whiteness, meaning her biracial identity is obscured in this memory. As a child, Trethewey did not notice this misrepresentation. She writes of her doll: “I didn’t know to ask, not that it mattered, / if there’d been a brown version” (39). Trethewey’s use of “not that it mattered” suggests that, given the choice between white and black, she would have chosen white, just as her parents had. Goad contends that “what the brown version represents does not matter in the social order. That

Trethewey's parents selected this costume shows their understanding of a culture centered on white privilege that their daughter cannot enjoy but can at least try on" (275). Significantly, however, it seems as if Trethewey, as a young girl, would also have chosen this snapshot of white privilege, perhaps sensing even as a child the higher place on the social order it gave her.

Trethewey's childhood as a biracial girl in Mississippi, and the exclusion of stories like hers from southern history, becomes part of the broader marginalization of black stories in favor of dominant narratives of "King Cotton" and whiteness. Extending her analysis, Trethewey examines a specific period of southern history and the absence of black experiences in it: the Civil War. A prominent example comes in "Southern History," in which a history teacher tells one narrative of the Civil War South: "*Before the war, they were happy ... / The slaves were clothed, fed, / and better off under a master's care*" (38). The class watched *Gone with the Wind*, which the teacher says is "*History ... of the old South*" (38). Trethewey also evokes in this poem the blackface mentioned in "Pastoral," that of the black figure as comic-relief or a prop: "On screen a slave stood big as life: big mouth, / bucked eyes, our textbook's grinning proof" (38). Diction like "textbook" and "proof" echoes "official" forms of evidence explored in Trethewey's "What is Evidence." Just like "official" forms of evidence like headstones or documents do not tell the whole story, here, "official" forms of history like textbooks have their own narratives and their own motives.

Interestingly, as well, "Southern History" focuses the reader not only on the history teacher pushing this narrative, but the poet, Trethewey. The textbook is "a lie / my teacher guarded. Silent, so did I" (Trethewey 38). Earlier in the poem, Trethewey writes that, rather than contradict their teacher, "No one raised a hand, disagreed. Not even me" (38). In this way, "Southern History" convicts not only the history teacher but Trethewey, complicit in the

teacher's crime. As Destiny O. Birdsong states: "the speaker's failure to confront [the teacher's] fictions ultimately authenticates them" (104). Thus, "Southern History" speaks not only to how the region's history marginalizes and distorts the role of black individuals in the Civil War, but warns of how silent complicity in these narratives can be equally as damaging.

In "Native Guard," Trethewey challenges the narrative of "Southern History" by rewriting it, this time including the experiences of black individuals, specifically black soldiers. The titular poem, "Native Guard," references an "all black Civil War regiment." Although these soldiers "had been ordered to protect Ship Island, a fort just off the coast of ... Mississippi, there were no monuments there to commemorate their presence" (Birdsong 105). "Native Guard," then, becomes its own monument to these men. A primary way Trethewey does this is by writing the poem in first-person. Birdsong describes this choice as "ceding the narrative voice to the soldier," an act that "transfers the power of the record-keeper back to the previously silenced historical subject. Even more important, [Trethewey] enacts a powerful interrogation of silence" (105). Through this soldier's voice, the reader learns of his decision to write down his experiences: "I now use ink / to keep record, a closed book, not the lure / of memory—flawed, changeful—that dulls the lash / for the master, sharpens it for the slave" (Trethewey 25). By describing memory as "flawed, changeful," the soldier recognizes memory's injustice and even foreshadows his eventual erasure from the South's memory of the Civil War, or the transformation of his role in the Civil War from courageous soldier to slave, perhaps a caricature in blackface.

In transferring the narrative voice of the poem to the soldier, Trethewey goes further by performing a role-reversal: the black soldier/narrator begins writing letters for illiterate Confederate soldiers. This choice places the black soldier in a position of power to write history.

Birdsong states that this choice “models a reconceptualization of history by granting inscriptive authority to one of their own” (107). Significantly, however, the black soldier/narrator does not place his version of history above the white soldier’s; rather, the two coexist. The narrator took the journal he uses to write his story from a Confederate’s home, continuing where the white man left off. In this way, the two’s words become “overlapped ... / crosshatched ... On every page, / his story intersecting with my own” (Trethewey 26). Black and white histories, memories, of the Civil War can thus interact with each other and function side-by-side. Birdsong echoes: “the soldier’s decision to leave the story of the first diary’s owner intact illustrates the fact that history can—and should—be inclusive” (107). Through this black soldier, then, Trethewey advocates not necessarily for the rewriting of history, but the reclaiming of black stories and experiences and their central place in the South’s history.

Through this black soldier’s voice, the reader hears of the injustices experienced by the Native Guards, specifically the changing of their name. Rather than “Native Guards,” the regiment is given a “new name, / the Corps d’Afrique—words that take the *native* / from our claim; mossbacks and freedmen—exiles / in their own homeland” (Trethewey 29). The use of “exiles” and the removal of “native” foreshadow the soldiers’ exclusion from the South’s memory of the Civil War: these soldiers do not belong to the South or even the United States. As Birdsong puts it: “the Union army slowly alienates the black soldiers, first by misdirected violence, and then by replacing their title with a moniker that identifies them with an entirely different continent. The renaming of the troops so near the end of the war also foreshadows the legal, economic, historical, and other forms of disenfranchisement that will soon befall African Americans after Reconstruction” (106-07). Due to this disenfranchisement and alienation, African-Americans are denied access to the broader story of America, much like the little girl in

“You are Late” or the characters in Broom and Ward’s texts, that both use memoir to argue for the central presence of black stories in the narrative of America.

In “Elegy for the Native Guards,” Trethewey links the erasure of the Native Guards, or black stories in general, to a site of memorialization: Ship Island. As mentioned previously, the Native Guards was an all-black Civil War regiment ordered to protect Ship Island off the coast of Mississippi (Birdsong 105). “Elegy” details a visit to Ship Island, but Trethewey describes it as a “half reminder of the men who served there – / a weathered monument to some of the dead” (44). Trethewey’s use of “half reminder” and “some” reflects the Native Guards’ absence from this monument, this memorialization. Trethewey goes on: “The Daughters of the Confederacy / has placed a plaque here, at the fort’s entrance – / each Confederate soldier’s name raised hard / in bronze; no names carved for the Native Guards” (44). The monument, like the history pages and often photographs, is silent regarding African-American experiences. De Cenzo writes of “Elegy”: “this closing poem is Trethewey’s attempt to show how monuments spread all around the South commemorating the Confederates’ heroic enterprises and historical value serve to inscribe a particular version of history into public memory while at the same time subjugating or erasing another” (42). While the actual monument had no references to the Native Guards, Trethewey’s influence has been felt; on the Ship Island website, in a tab about its history, the site describes “the 2nd Louisiana Native Guard Volunteers, one of the first black U.S. combat units to fight in the Civil War,” and links to a podcast with Natasha Trethewey (“Ship Island History”).

Trethewey also uses “Elegy” to interrogate forms of evidence or proof; Hurricane Camille hit the monument and washed away “all the grave markers, all the crude headstones” (44), thus washing away any evidence that the Native Guards existed. Here, Trethewey’s use of grave markers echoes “What is Evidence,” in which “the tiny marker” the proof of her mother’s

death is “abstract” (11). In a similar vein, the markers supposed to memorialize the Native Guards, supposed to prove they existed, simply disappear. Neither are concrete enough to be a true monument, or even “true” proof. Writing *Native Guard* in its entirety, then, becomes a different form of evidence and memorialization. As De Cenzo puts it: Trethewey “wants to build [the Native Guards] a metaphoric monument, as the monument she would like to build in memory of her lost mother” (43). Thus, while this thesis separated the text into categories, personal and cultural memory, the concept of absence bridges those distinctions. Trethewey’s absent mother produces grief; the absence of black stories in the Civil War or America’s remembrances is also a loss. Rather than “personal” or “cultural,” then, Trethewey speaks to memory’s power and the stories that can be silenced within it.

Griffin’s *Hide* and Trethewey’s *Native Guard* have shown how a region’s memory is closely linked with its forgetting: with both works, forgetting is an intentional choice to silence a group’s voice from historical/cultural memory. Both writers stress the idea of a monument; for both, photographs are small monuments or artifacts that fail to tell the whole story. Trethewey looks at a historical monument, Ship Island, and similarly shows its failure. Their texts, by contrast, become a different kind of monument: a way for each to reclaim, and even rewrite, the history of the American South, this time including the experiences of the LGBTQ community and African-Americans.

The Importance of Ghosts

Themes of representation, disempowerment, and the need for marginalized voices are seen in Jesmyn Ward’s 2017 novel *Sing, Unburied, Sing*; however, Ward’s novel can be seen as distinct from *Hide* and *Native Guard*, and the texts discussed under Personal Memory, in its inclusion of ghosts. Ward’s novel takes place in the same fictional town as *Salvage the Bones*

does: Bois Sauvage, Mississippi. It tells the story of two biracial children, Jojo and Kayla, who live with their grandparents Mam and Pop. Jojo and Kayla go on a road trip with their mom, Leonie, to pick up their father Michael from jail.

Ward's ghosts are not alone in the field of southern studies. For example, in studying the work of William Faulkner, Lee Anne Fennell notes that in Faulkner's novel *Flags in the Dust*, the living are held captive by "ghosts that memory conjures in the minds of the living" (41). Fennell also highlights the power of ghosts in other of Faulkner's works, specifically "the power wielded by the dead through the force of memory" (43). Patricia Yaeger similarly speaks to the presence of ghosts in southern literature. Yaeger states that southern writers, in using ghosts, "want the reader to feel that within the humdrum world (in the midst of racial violence, unjust labor laws, and a habitus founded on the hard facts of discrimination) a haunting is taking place" (100). Additionally, while not calling them "ghosts," *Hide and Native Guard* include ghosts in a figurative or metaphorical sense, especially the figures that "haunt" characters due to grief, such as Trethewey's loss of her mother, or the racism that "haunts" the South that Broom describes. What sets Ward's ghosts and their relation to memory apart, however, is that her ghosts are literal, physical manifestations; they are not metaphorical ghosts, but characters: they communicate, they desire, and they move. Ward's ghosts are attached to memories but also act of their own accord. They are powerful beings who refuse to be forgotten.

As in *Men We Reaped*, Ward capitalizes Black and White in *Sing, Unburied, Sing*. This dichotomy, Black/White, becomes central regarding the death of Leonie's brother, Given. One winter, Given went hunting with "White Boys," including Michael's cousin (Ward 48). After Given beat Michael's cousin in a bet, the cousin shot and killed Given. The sheriff, Big Joseph, who was also Michael's father, called it a "hunting accident." The cousin was given a plea deal

and three years in prison (Ward 50). The dichotomy Black/White is implicit; Michael's cousin is White and protected by the sheriff; Given is Black. Given's death reminds the reader of Ward's *Men We Reaped*, when she discusses the death of her own brother, Joshua, who was killed by a White drunk driver.

This dichotomy Black/White also becomes significant for relationships in the novel, including family and friendships. Leonie and Michael's children, Jojo and Kayla, are biracial. Jojo recounts: "Big Joseph is my White grandpa, Pop my Black one. I've lived with Pop since I was born; I've seen my White grandpa twice" (Ward 4). Jojo also identifies Big Joseph as "the man who ain't never once said my name" (Ward 10). Black/White thus separates this family; because Michael had children with Leonie, a Black woman, his family has little to do with him or their children, to the extent that Big Joseph does not say Jojo's name. This refusal is a form of denial: to say "Jojo" would be to acknowledge or recognize his grandson's existence.

Tension also exists in the novel's friendships, such as Leonie and Missy's. Leonie notes: "But I knew this was [Missy's] cottage, and when it all came down to it, I'm Black and she's White, and if someone heard us tussling and decided to call the cops, I'd be the one going to jail. Not her. Best friend and all" (Ward 36). The separation exists here, as well; whatever bond Leonie and Missy share, their closeness cannot overcome the dichotomy Black/White and its implications: that Missy, White, is automatically innocent, while Leonie, Black, is assumed guilty.

Another dichotomy significant in this novel, as with *Salvage the Bones*, is before/after, especially regarding memories. Esch remembers her mother as a comfort-giver; after her mother's death, Esch looks for that comfort in others like Manny. Here, Jojo situates the majority of his memories before/after his mother's serious drug problems. Jojo remembers: "Back when I

was younger, back when I still called Leonie *Mama*, she told me flies eat shit. That was when there was more good than bad ... Before she was more gone than here. Before she started snorting crushed pills” (Ward 7). Jojo continues later in the novel: “it was a new thing, to look at her rubbing hands and her crooked teeth in her chattering mouth and not hear *Mama* in my head, but her name: *Leonie*” (Ward 16). With both Esch and Jojo, then, maternal absence, whether through death or drug addiction, shapes their relationships and childhoods.

Jojo’s before/after memories revolve around Leonie’s drug addiction; yet this addiction has another connection to memory: Leonie uses drugs, at least in part, to forget. In Leonie’s words: “I bent to the table. Sniffed. A clean burning shot through my bones, and then I forgot. The shoes I didn’t buy, the melted cake, the phone call. The toddler sleeping in my bed at home while my son slept on the floor, just in case I’d come home and make him get on the floor when I stumbled in” (Ward 33). The cake Leonie references is Jojo’s birthday cake; Leonie says they were out of birthday cakes at the grocery store, so she bought what they had: a baby shower cake. Drugs, then, offer Leonie an escape from her shortcomings as a mother; they allow her to, simply, forget.

Simultaneously, however, drugs produce hallucinations, allowing Leonie to remember; Given appears when Leonie is high. Leonie calls this apparition “Given-not-Given,” “a hollow figment,” and a “phantom” (Ward 150). Given-not-Given first appears when Leonie is high at a party: “my brother walked through there with no bullet holes in his chest or in his neck, whole and long-limbed, like always” (Ward 51). Given’s ghost appears as Leonie remembers him, then. He is also mad: “Given looked at me like he did when we were little and I broke the new fishing pole Pop got him: murderous” (Ward 52). Given appears as a warning, almost: as if he sees Leonie’s addiction and the effect it will have on her family life. He also appears after Michael is

released from prison; the two get high, and Leonie loses herself in Michael: “losing language, losing words. Losing myself in that feeling, that feeling of being wanted and needed and touched and cradled, all the while marveling that the one doing it is the one that wants, that needs, that touches, that sees” (Ward 149-50). Leonie’s language here describes a reciprocal, mutual desire for closeness that she and her children do not share. Michael serves as an outlet for Leonie to express not only sexual but loving, comforting, even nurturing feelings that she struggles to express as a mother: Leonie wonders during this interaction if they “could get it right” if they had another child (Ward 150). Given’s ghost observes the two’s interaction, and he sits “with a sad look on his face, mouth in a soft frown” (Ward 150). Given’s ghost, then, this embodiment of Given’s memory, is connected to guilt; Leonie knows he does not, and would not, approve of her drug use. Additionally, this guilt could connect to who Michael is: the cousin of Given’s murderer. After Leonie begins their relationship, she says: “[a]nd then I remembered Given. And the guilt I felt when I realized it” (Ward 154). Given’s ghost and memory become associated with the trauma of his death and Leonie’s guilt at her addiction not only to drugs but, seemingly, to Michael, or at least the feeling of being needed and wanted she experiences with Michael.

Perhaps the most striking example of drugs as an escape comes near the end of the novel, after Mam’s death. Leonie wants to go get high, and Michael says, “the kids.” Leonie replies: “I can’t, ... *I can’t be a mother right now. I can’t be a daughter. I can’t remember. I can’t see. I can’t breathe*” (Ward 274). As the two drive away, Leonie concludes the chapter: “We hold hands and pretend at forgetting” (Ward 275). By saying they “pretend” to forget, Leonie suggests she is aware of the futile nature of drugs, or even forgetting; they offer her a temporary escape from memory, grief, guilt, and her responsibilities as a mother, but this escape fades.

Interestingly, Leonie's use of drugs connects to Trethewey's "Myth," where dreams offer Trethewey radical thoughts and possibilities, such as that her mother is alive, that reality denies. Similarly, drugs offer Leonie the radical removal of all grief, guilt, and memory: they offer her the possibility of forgetting, but that forgetting is only a pretense that does not prove true once Leonie is no longer high. It is important, then, to understand Leonie not as a "drug addict" or "bad mother"; rather, she experiences grief, especially regarding her brother's death. Leonie is suffering, and while she no doubt seeks solace in the wrong way, through drugs, that makes her experience no less understandable or even sympathetic.

Mam sees Given alive in a dream, which also echoes Trethewey's "Myth." Leonie recounts a conversation she had with her mom, in which Mam said: "*I dream about it. I can see Given again, walking through the door in his boots. But then I wake up. And I don't.*" (Ward 50-51). Mam sees Given alive in a dream-state, but Given is not there when she wakes up, much like Trethewey's "Myth," in which Trethewey describes seeing her mother alive in her dreams, only to find her mother does not follow her into morning. As with Trethewey, then, memory and dreams are connected here; dreams offer Mam the possibility of Given being alive that waking reality denies.

Beyond Given, memory comes alive in the form of Richie, who was in Parchman Prison with Pop when Richie was a child, only twelve, and Pop only fifteen. Pop protects Richie as best he can, but Richie ends up trying to escape and gets trapped by a mob looking to lynch him, so Pop kills him out of mercy. Richie appears halfway through the novel, when the group arrives at Parchman Prison. He has his own chapters, and thus his own voice; the reader experiences him as any other character, even though he is a ghost. That being said, Richie's story is told primarily through Pop's memories or stories. Jojo says: "This is what Pop does when we are alone, sitting

up late at night in the living room or out in the yard or woods. He tells me stories” (Ward 17). However, every time Pop tells Jojo the story of Richie, Pop leaves out the end. When Pop finishes the end of the story and tells Jojo how he killed Richie out of mercy, Pop says: “I washed my hands every day, Jojo. But that damn blood ain’t never come out. Hold my hands up to my face, I can smell it under my skin ... Smelled it the day they let me out on account I’d led the dogs that caught and killed Richie” (Ward 256). Here, then, stains and smells function as memories, especially traumatic ones; guilt and grief over Richie’s death haunts Pop.

Richie also expresses his memories directly, especially memories about his death. Richie says, “I remembered before. I remembered being spread-eagle in the dirt, surrounded by hunched, milling men, and a teenage boy [Pop] at my shoulder who stood tall under the long shadows.” Richie continues: “I dropped from my flight, the memory pulling me to earth ... I landed in a field of endless rows of cotton, saw men bent and scuttling along like hermit crabs, bending and picking ... This is where I was worked. This is where I was whipped” (Ward 135-36). Richie’s use of “endless rows of cotton” sounds similar to Trethewey’s “King Cotton,” where bales of cotton surround and oppress black children. In the face of these memories, Richie needs “to be held by the dark hand of the earth. To be blind to the men above. To memory. It came anyway” (Ward 136). Richie’s ghost, then, is directly tied to his memories of Parchman, his death, and Pop. Those memories speak to Richie’s unique power. While both Richie and Given are ghosts, the reader does not hear Given’s thoughts or memories. Given is an apparition; Richie functions like another human character.

By portraying these two characters, Given and Richie, with such traumatic deaths as ghosts, Ward highlights the power of their stories, the injustice of their deaths, and their refusal to be forgotten. Significantly, both are from different time periods; Richie from years ago, Given

from contemporary America. By resurrecting Given, then, Ward highlights how Given's experience and the racial injustice it represents have not changed. Given's refusal to be forgotten, refusal to stay only in memory, represents a need for his presence, a need for his story, as a testament to racial injustice and to a story that the public's memory too often represses. Richie's ghost also functions as a reminder. Richie, in ghost form, says of Parchman: "[s]ometimes I think it done changed. And then I sleep and wake up, and it ain't changed none" (Ward 171). The discrimination and brutality Richie and Pop suffered from at Parchman, which the reader sees through their memories, has, like Richie himself, not disappeared.

Ward highlights this continued racial injustice and violence with Jojo, who, as a young African-American boy, represents a continuation of Richie and Given. One of the most brutal scenes of the novel comes when the group is stopped by the police on the way back from Parchman. The family is made to get out of the car. The officer walks towards Jojo with handcuffs, and Jojo reaches in his pocket. Ward describes the scene: "and the officer draws his gun on [Jojo], points it at his face ... Jojo raises his arms to a cross. The officer barks at him, ... kicks his legs apart, the gun a little lower now ... Now on his knees, the gun pointing at his head" (163-64). Years after Richie and Given, Jojo experiences racial injustice; this scene clearly rejects notions of "progress" or "change."

The reader views this scene twice: once from Leonie's perspective, once from Jojo's, suggesting the scene's importance. Jojo describes the police officer's gun as "black as rot, as pregnant with dread" (Ward 170). This language of pregnancy is interesting. A pregnancy brings life into the world, while a gun takes life away, reflected in placing pregnancy beside the word "rot." Perhaps, however, Ward is illustrating the possibilities of police work. A police officer

should promote life, rather than threaten it, Jojo seems to say. However, as this scene, and police brutality across the nation, has shown, such life is not always the reality.

In *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, memory manifests itself as ghosts, which speak to the trauma felt by Leonie and Pop but, more broadly, to racial injustice and violence. The novel's epigraph includes a quote from Eudora Welty: "the memory is a living thing—it too is in transit. But during its moment, all that is remembered joins, and lives—the old and the young, the past and the present, the living and the dead." Richie, Given, and Jojo speak to this "joining of old and young, past and present, the living and the dead"; Richie and Given's memory lives on in Jojo, but also Pop, Mam, and Leonie. Ghosts make memory "a living thing"; Given-not-Given is Leonie's memory come to life; Richie is Pop's, yet Richie has his own memories as well. Memories, then, have power, not only in illustrating deep, personal grief but continued discrimination and disempowerment.

Conclusion

In the final chapter of her recent memoir *Memorial Drive*, Natasha Trethewey writes: “To survive trauma, one must be able to tell a story about it” (208). If there is one theme/experience all of these works include, it is trauma. Sarah M. Broom, in her memoir *The Yellow House*, describes the trauma of familial loss, a trauma also experienced in Jesmyn Ward’s memoir *Men We Reaped*. Familial loss becomes important as well in *Native Guard*, with the death of Trethewey’s mother, and *Salvage the Bones*, in which the protagonist, Esch, experiences grief and trauma over the death of her mother. Matthew Griffin’s *Hide* details Frank and Wendell’s trauma, their fear, in having to hide their relationship, and Wendell’s trauma at Frank’s memory loss. In *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, Ward revisits trauma in the face of Leonie and Michael’s drug abuse and its effects on their children, Jojo and Kayla.

A trauma that encompasses all of these works is the loss of memory. For Frank, in *Hide*, his old age makes him lose his memory, but Griffin suggests that the true culprit of memory loss, the real perpetrator, is the South itself: a South that denies Frank and Wendell any form of memorialization of their love for one another, such as photographs. Their story, their place in the South’s cultural and historical memory, is lost. While Griffin describes how gay experiences in the South have been lost in the history books, the five African-American writers considered in this thesis chronicle how white supremacy and nostalgia for the Confederacy oppress the overall experiences of the South’s black community. What these writers have done, however, is recognize, and refuse to be silenced by, the South’s exclusively white, oppressive, and prejudicial memory. Rather, these writers have carved a place for themselves and the marginalized experiences they represent. These texts confront not only personal traumas but cultural and historical ones: the trauma of lost voices, of lost stories, of lost memories. Their

writing becomes a reclamation of those memories, a resituating of periphery to center: of marginalized to the forefront.

In all of these works, there is a sense that revisiting marginalized histories, memories, and traumas produces some sort of healing, or at least some sort of meaning. In her memoir *Memorial Drive*, in which Trethewey revisits her mother's death, there exists a need to confront loss in order to move on, to understand one's purpose. Trethewey ends her memoir in this way:

In the narrative of my life, which is the look backward rather than forward into the unknown and unstoried future, I emerged from the pool as from a baptismal font—changed, reborn—as if I had been shown what would be my calling then. This is how the past fits into the narrative of our lives, gives meaning and purpose. Even my mother's death is redeemed in the story of my calling, made meaningful rather than merely senseless. It is the story I tell myself to survive (211).

Revisiting memory, then, even memories of trauma, produced redemption and meaning for Trethewey. This is a very personal and individual example, but it is possible to make parallels; in a region with past memories of horrific trauma, oppression, prejudice, and white supremacy, in a region where present reality is rarely different, where is redemption to be found? Can meaning be found in revisiting and recognizing the South's senseless injustice and prejudice? These are meaty questions, but literature at least offers an avenue to an alternative South: a more inclusive South, one that acknowledges and celebrates the voices it too often marginalizes. What remains is how to translate representations of inclusivity to reality: the removal of a Confederate monument in Huntsville, Alabama is a start, but where do we go from here?

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