

Reveries of the Past and the Unattainable Moments: Fragments of Forgotten Shadows in Selected Poems of Charles Wright

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Abstract:

Charles Wright (1935-) is a postmodern poet who embarks on his spiritual pilgrimage toward the unseen through his poetry. He begins this pilgrimage by visiting his past to reflect on the nature of his memories. The present research examines selected poems by Wright to trace his spiritual pilgrimage into the past depending on Sigmund Freud's concept of screen memories. His pilgrimage through his poetry shows his nostalgic feelings toward the past and how nostalgia changes the accurate picture of his memories. Moreover, Wright explores the true essence of memory and its ambiguous nature with the help of the natural world and his poetic writings, his poems examine how this ambiguity of memory changes the poet's perspective toward his own memories. However, the study shows how the past is a part of the unseen world, indicating the impossibility of having a full reach toward it, and how memory, in the end, is deceitful by its own nature.

Keywords: Charles Wright, the past, screen memories, unseen realm, ambiguity.

أحلام الماضي واللحظات التي لا تُنال: شذرات من ظلال منسية في قصائد مختارة لتشارلز رايت

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(مُلَخَّصُ البَحْث)

يُعدّ تشارلز رايت من شعراء ما بعد الحداثة، الذي ينطلق في رحلته الروحية عبر شعره لاستكشاف العالم غير المرئي. يبدأ رايت هذه الرحلة من خلال العودة إلى ماضيه والتأمل في طبيعة ذكرياته. يتناول هذا البحث مجموعة مختارة من قصائد رايت بهدف تتبّع رحلته الروحية إلى الماضي، بالاعتماد على مفهوم "ذكريات الشاشة" لسيغموند فرويد. تكشف هذه الرحلة في شعره عن مشاعر الحنين تجاه الماضي، وكيف تقوم هذه المشاعر بتغيير الصورة الحقيقية للذكريات. علاوة على ذلك، يستكشف الشاعر الجوهر الحقيقي للذاكرة وطبيعتها الغامضة، مستعيناً بعالم الطبيعة وكتابات الشعرية، حيث تفحص قصائده كيف تؤثر هذه الضبابية في الذاكرة على نظريته حول ذكرياته الخاصة. ومع ذلك، تُظهر الدراسة كيف يُعدّ الماضي جزءاً من العالم غير مرئي، مما يشير إلى استحالة الوصول الكامل إليه، وأن الذاكرة، في نهاية المطاف، خادعة بطبيعتها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تشارلز رايت، الماضي، ذكريات الشاشة، العالم غير المرئي،

التباس

“The past is never dead. It's not even past.”

—William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun*

Introduction

Wright embarks on a personal quest to discover the essence of the unseen world through poetry. He started his personal pilgrimage in Italy with the help of the poetic works of great poets like Ezra Pound (1885-1972). His early poetic writing is deeply influenced by his past, both by his memories in Italy and by his youth time from his hometown in Tennessee, in addition to other places. Wright is just like Dante; he uses his poetry to understand, in some way or another, his pilgrimage toward the unseen. Despite his belief in the limitations of the human capacity to fully comprehend the existence of the unseen world, he finds himself constantly trying. Furthermore, Kirsch (1999) states that Wright rejects spiritual and poetic completeness, like many serious contemporary poets. He aspires for poetry to embody consciousness and reflect the inner workings of the mind. For him, poems resist reduction to

mere objects, retaining their beauty in their entirety. They are incomplete, like the mind itself, and this is what makes Wright's poetry such a profound and accurate portrayal of modern times.

The subject of the past is deeply rooted in Wright's poetry, which he investigates through several angles, including memory, history, and personal reflection, among others. His work frequently explores the ways in which the experiences of the past influence and make sense of the current time, thereby producing a complex and multifaceted tapestry of temporal layers. However, those experiences from the past carry with them Wright's longing for the desire of meaning and understanding towards life. The link that Wright has with the past is frequently mediated by the landscapes and locations that he often visits. The natural world, particularly the landscapes of the South and Italy, works as a background for his reflections on the past. Such settings become symbolic spaces where memory and history combine.

Furthermore, Freud's use of the concept of "Screen Memories" is to identify any memory which serves to hide (and to derivatively express) another, naturally unconscious, mental content. However, he defined three types of screen memory: those in which a memory from childhood screens or hides some event contemporary with it, those in which a later memory stands for a recollection of a childhood event, and those in which a childhood recollection represents a later concern. Freud called the last one "retrogressive screen memories." (Smith, 2000, para. 1) That means the first type is when childhood memories screen contemporary events. It is a memory that hides an event that happened around the same time. The second type is when later memories in life conceal an important event from childhood. And the last type is when a childhood memory hides or screens an uncomfortable event from later in life.

Moreover, Wright gives a "quasi-Dantean" structure to his poetry. Its sections, then, address first the past— his

ancestry and family; the second section, and most elegant one, deals with the present time, the beauty of his talent, as a poet, and the world around him, the combination of flesh and spirit; and the last section has focused on the future of his poetic journey. It has progressed through three stages: it begins with the autobiographical, to the mythic, and then to the spiritual. Hence, his great poems are about the establishment of a spiritual city, and Wright has taken the duty to rebuild it, depending on the remains of his memories to build the unseen city of the soul. (Mcclatchy, 2006, p. 110) Moreover, Wright believes that the past, with its intangible nature, plays a crucial role in his personal pilgrimage, as he also perceives it as a part of the unseen world. The memories of it deeply affect the shaping of the persona of the pilgrimage man in his poetry. A person who finds comfort in his repeated attempts to comprehend and recall his past. However, remembering is a process of revision, leading to the creation of one's own unique journey. His poetry is an exploration that often leads him

to the shadowy past to evoke memories. (Gitzen, 1994) It is an attempt to recall what is hidden behind consciousness and behind what memories can recall. Eventually, this paper aims to investigate the realm of memories of Wright and whether they reflect the true reality of the past or not.

Discussion

Wright accepts that the past is alive and vulnerable to change. With its multiple forms and shapes, the past of the human self is created. Moreover, he is a Southern poet, and Southern poets take the past seriously. According to Ismail (2017), they believe it binds them together with their values. Philosophically, the past and the human memory are obscured by the present and the current state of the mind. It is only clear when one sheds light on it to get its true, luminous form:

The past is a stained glass window. We see it through the door of our monk's cell, so brilliant, so out of reach on the church wall. Behind it, in the dark, when the light comes through at the proper angles, the colors are unimaginably luminous,

the scenes of our various selves unspeakably clear, evocative and unbroken. (Wright, 1995, p. 82)

Wright and through his spiritual journey, tries to get into his memories using the light of his poetry. His attempts to create connections between the past and the present are influenced by the Southern tradition that shaped him as a man and a poet. In addition to his feeling of nostalgia and longing for the past's untouchable moments. Through his poetry, he tries to meditate on the fleeting nature of life and the way to find connections between different times and places through his reflection on landscape. However, the ambiguous nature of memory gives Wright a feeling of insecurity and unbelief about the real nature of the past. Eventually, it becomes part of what is invisible. Since then, Wright's pilgrimage toward what is unseen started, depending on what is available to him, like his memories, the places around him, and his poetic writings.

The idea of the journey, whether inside the self or outside it, is a main technique

in Wright's poetry. (Wright, 1995) Though the end of the journey is the ultimate goal that has to be achieved, Wright believes in the importance of the road itself, with the ups and downs that he faces through it. These obstacles are what define his journey. One of those obstacles is doubt and uncertainty, as Wright (1995) confirms, "Without a beginning in doubt, there is no faith." (p. 167) However, he defines himself as a visionary poet, "the ultimate duty and fate of the poet is visionary." (Conte, 1998, p. 268) Hence, Wright's responsibility, as a poet, is to have a journey that is shaped by his exploration of the past to make sense of the present and the future, and vice versa.

However, one can glimpse the first traces of Wright's journey towards the past which begins with his prose-poem "The Poet Grows Older," from *The Grave of The Right Hand* (1991), as he reflects on his childhood time and how he is unable to remember clearly any imaginative adventures from his early years. However, now he is a grown man, he sits alone in his room, and tries to recall his past, but fails again.

Through this, his attention turns to the things that he is reading about, ancient kingdoms, and "old dynasties," and their adventurous life. Through his deep fascination with these imaginary adventures, the poet's heart and soul are revived by his own inner adventures. (Denham, 2009) Moreover, Wright is known for his fascination with the spirit of the old Chinese poets, as he read about their poetry and their unique spirit before starting to recognize his poetic talent. Nevertheless, the poet only remembers "nothing" but at the same time, he tries to beautify this deceitfulness of memories, as he covers his failure to remember the past as it is, by using his "imagination" to represent it as the reality of the past:

It seemed, at the time, so indifferent an age that I recall nothing of it except an infinite tedium to be endured. ... I enveloped myself in all of the various disguises of a decent childhood. Nothing now comes to mind of ever embarking upon famous voyages to the usual continents; of making, from the dark rooms and empty houses of my

imagination, brilliant escapes from unnatural enemies; or, on rainy winter afternoons in an attic, of inventing one plot or counterplot against a prince or a beast. . . . Instead, it must have been otherwise. ... I try to remember, nevertheless, something of all that time and place, (Wright, 1991, para. 1-2)

His current fantasies about the glory of the past shape the poet's memories of his past adventures. As according to Sprengnether (2012), in his work on Freud's "Screen Memories", he believes that childhood memories that are vividly recalled in adulthood have nothing to do with past events. Instead, adults' desires and fantasies modify and recreate them.

Through this poem, Wright tries to go back in time and search for what is hidden between the moments of the past. He finds himself in a continuous search for something lost in his childhood. According to Giannelli (2006), "Wright has always turned inward towards his own losses and obsessions." (p. 3) However, through those journeys, Wright recognizes his

own adventurous spirit; his spiritual journey towards the unknown starts with his beginnings in writing poetry. In addition to that, Wright's poetic imagination works as a powerful tool to glimpse his childhood adventurous spirit. The poet believes in the presence of his joyous soul from the past, though he is uncertain if it is real or not, as it can only be reached through poetry. However, Freud confirms in his paper on "Screen Memories," that fantasies from the past or the present might emerge together and turn into a childhood memory:

You projected the two fantasies on to one another and turned them into a childhood memory. So the feature of the Alpine flowers is, so to speak, the date-mark for its construction. I can assure you that such things are very often constructed

unconsciously – almost like works of fiction. 'But then it wouldn't be a childhood memory at all, but a fantasy that I've transposed into my childhood. (Freud, 2003, p. 63)

This act happens as a reaction to different unknown

conditions. Moreover, this process happens within the unconscious, as the one who goes through it cannot know about this distorting memory, but believes that it is part of his past:

It is at times such as this, and without thinking, really, clothed in my goat's- wool robes, that I steal a camel from an outlying Arabian stable, gather together my clansmen, and gallop for days along the miraculous caravan trails to Asia. (Wright, 1991, para. 2)

Furthermore, Wright believes that his real journey into the past first started with his poem titled "Dog Greek Mainline" from his volume *Hard Freight* (2019). The poet confirms in an interview that the idea of a journey appeared to him through his writing of this poem. He realizes that he has a subject matter and a personal story that he has to tell. (Suarez et al, 1999) Consequently, he has to go back to his memories. According to Garrison (as cited in Young, 1983) states that such a poem is "about memory and how we change memory, how memory changes and memory becomes imagination. And imagination becomes language"

(p. 239) Memory is in a continuous changing throughout time; therefore, one cannot be sure about the accuracy of it.

Moreover, what is remembered is only fragmented pieces from the past; hence, imagination takes a role in filling the gaps in those memories. (Groarke, 2020) However, the journey to the past first starts within the poet's body, he feels it in his "blood" as those memories are part of his upbringing, though he cannot fully remember them, but they are essential in the development of his character as a poet and a pilgrim to the unseen. He then starts to recall his time from "1941" When the poet was only six years old. What he recalls from that time are image-fragmentations. (Denham, 2009) He only remembers the "names" of people from his past. It is essential to acknowledge that the structure of the poem is fragmented as well, which represents the fragmentation of Wright's memories. His journey into his memories first started with the help of the natural world around him, with the presence of "the leaf" that

runs into “the blood” of the poet. However, memory in the poet’s practice becomes a different device. (Young, 1983) It becomes an image that he uses as a way to reformulate the past by writing it as visualized by him. Though those memories are part of the poet, he feels incapable of representing them the way they are. According to St. John (2006), “Wright should feel the need to gather his past, in some sense to write-and rewrite not only that past, but also the self (the poetic self and voice).” (p. 4) A style that he tries to perfect most particularly in this poem:

Starts in the leaf reach and
shoal run of the blood;
Starts in the falling light just
back Of the fingertips; starts
Forever in the black throat
You ask redemption of, in
wants ...

Against the American twilight;
the year Is 1941; remembered
names

-Rosendale, Perry and Smith-
(Wright, 2019, Lines 7-22)

The poet continues the poem with a reflection on the landscape in an attempt to recapture the past through it, “The lake in its cradle hums /

The old songs: out of its ooze, their heads”. (Wright, 2019, Lines 31-32) The poem is connected to Wright's past, which draws on his childhood experiences and the landscapes that shaped him and his memories. However, the poet concludes the poem with his feeling of difficulty in recapturing his childhood memories. Physically, he cannot recapture the past, as neither his “ear” nor his “eye” helps him to face the “absence” of some of his memories. His body failed him and left him alone with his “tongue” only, referring to his poetic talent to evoke “the light” of what is unseen. However, it is still vague whether Wright’s poetry will help him to fully recapture what he is looking for, the unseen world. Eventually, Garrison (1983) confirms, it is nearly impossible to express in words what is hidden behind the physical world.

Wright himself admits the impossibility of remembering the past accurately: “Nothing remembered is as good as the actual moment because you change it so much. Or it’s better, but it’s not the same thing; it’s not the same

electricity,” despite that, Wright finds himself depending on memory to recall his childhood. (Suarez, 1999, p. 42) Furthermore, according to LaFarge (2015):

[A]ll childhood memories were likely screen memories: “It may indeed be questioned whether we have any memories at all *from* our childhood:

memories *relating to* our childhood may be all that we possess” (Freud, 1899a, p. 322, original italics). ... Blending historical memory and fantasy, screen memories promised access to unconscious elements of both. (p. 37-38)

Memories from childhood are in fact a combination of real events and fantasy, they are not fully accurate. Because of the fragmented nature of childhood memories, one cannot differentiate between what is real and what is not:

The ear, cold cave, is an absence,
Tapping its own thin wires;
The eye turns in on itself.
The tongue is a white water.
In its slick ceremonies the light
Gathers, and is refracted, and
moves
Outward, over the lips,

Over the dry skin of the world.

The tongue is a white water.)

(Wright, 2019, Lines 46-53)

Wright’s poetry is known for its nostalgic nature. Whether for the things that one cannot reach or for his past, most particularly. Furthermore, nostalgia plays a crucial role in shaping his poems on memory. Those feelings towards the past are formed by his current spiritual journey to seek an understanding of the unseen realm. The past is part of this realm, and understanding its nature is essential for him to achieve his journey's goal. Through his poetry, Wright uses various ways to represent the past. Sometimes by representing the lives of people from his past, and sometimes by recalling his memories about himself.

Furthermore, one of the distinguished techniques that Wright uses to recall the past is by representing it through flashbacks. Whether for places or a particular experience. In his “Self Portrait” poem, from *The Southern Cross* (2019). Wright goes back in time to Venice. His memories are “earmarked” by two photographs. (Denham, 2008,

p. 92) However, those memories arose as a reaction to the poet's current examination of his past. His anxiety about the intangible nature of the past made him reflect on those old moments that came into his mind through the photographs he held. (Smith, 2000) Wright refers to the past as a part of an "infinite" world with a different "alphabet" in an indication that the past is a part of a different world. The poet, referring to himself in the third person, "Charles on the Trevisan, night bridge" (Wright, 2019, Line 1), gazes at the photographs of himself from his time in Italy. Nevertheless, according to Guilford, Wright titles five poems of his by "Self-Portrait," each one is different from the others, sometimes it is about him, and sometimes it is about a third person. "Taken individually, each poem presents a complex but apparently complete and finished portrait, yet taken together, each poem is merely a glimpse--partial, fragmented, isolated--of the whole self, which remains elusive." (Guilford, n.d., p.12) Wright believes that his former self is different than his current one.

He then mentions how "the water" of Venice shapes his persona. As Dowling (2014) states, Wright and the city of Venice persist unchanged in memory, but the water continues to flow through Venice. The repeated use of water throughout Wright's memory poems, and notably his comparison of memory to water, underscores the futility of accurately tracing one's past. In addition to that, water represents the process of memory, though both the poet and the city are the same, memories from that time keep changing.

In his early years in Italy, Wright would follow Pound everywhere, through the streets of Venice and into other sites (Wright, 1988). Through this poem, Wright recalls his days in Italy and how those memories have shaped him now. He relives Italian nights in memory. (Spiegelman, 2005) The impact of Venice and its historical places changed Wright into a mystical person; he was "earmarked" by the city. The poet is now more into his journey, with the help of Pound's traces. He is deeply concerned about "the pages of a

thrown-away book” (similar to his concern about the snapshot) as if he wants to last like this book. However, the book was kept under everlasting pine trees, in a boat with the color of golden ripeness. This is a reference to Pound, who was worried and then thought better about throwing the proof sheets of *A Lume Spento* (1908), a collection of poems written by him, into the same canal that Wright is referring to. (Bedient, 1995) However, this book could be a metaphor for the poet himself. He seems to seek recognition from Pound and the city of Venice. The poet has been revived by the mystique of them, which holds an impact on his past. This “his” might be a reference to both Wright and Pound and how their identities fuse into an interconnected poetic spirit. (Denham, 2008) For the poet, he believes in the “wind” in recapturing his past. This indicates the power of the natural world in shaping the persona of Wright. He is in an ongoing rejuvenation with the help of his memories and nature. However, the poem as a whole represents the Italian imprint on Wright's character as a poet and person. Not only the

imprint of memories, but of the present too. According to LaFarge (2015) in her essay entitled “The screen memory and the act of remembering,” when a person recalls a memory, it might be affected by current concerns or by the person with whom the one shares his memories. Eventually, screen memories are an actual blend between reality and fantasy, past and present:

Charles on the Trevisan,
night bridge

To the crystal, infinite
alphabet of his past.

Charles on the San Trovaso,
earmarked,

Holding the pages of a
thrown-away book, dinghy the
color of honey

Under the pine boughs, the
water east-flowing.

The wind will edit him soon
enough, (Wright, 2019, Lines
1-6)

Wright, in his other poem titled “Virginia Reel,” from *The Southern Cross* (2019), also deals with the past of the poet, as he approaches it in many different ways. The poet revisits the homeland of his ancestors to place himself within the “reel” of his

generations. (Dowling, 2014) The poet's memories are recalled by his visit to his mother's home in "Clarke County," in Virginia. As Dowling (2014) states, the past is not only old events from the poet's life, but it is a representation of a variety of influences:

The past in Wright's poems is thus more than just what has gone before; it represents family, ancestry, inheritance and identity and so can be best understood as synonymous with origins. Origins are defined in hindsight, in association with whatever it is that they originate. They embody not only beginnings but an awareness of outcomes; origins thus imply a link between the past and the present and a consciousness of the ongoing importance of past events. The past's influence is omnipresent in Wright's poetry, with the past inhabiting present-day landscapes. (p. 115)

However, "When I write to myself," Wright told an interviewer, "I'm writing to the landscape, and the landscape is a personification of the people on the other side." It is, in

essence, a map of recollections and a pathway to the dead, specifically his mother. (Mcclatchy, 2006, p. 145) Wright represents his memories as "sand" indicating their changeable nature. He comes to his childhood place with the same "wind" that he used to sense at that time. The past is just like "wind" in its nature; for the poet, it is never catchable in the way it is.

The poet feels nostalgic about the people who used to live in this place; Wright sees himself going back in time through all the memories that emerged in his mind in this particular moment, though it seems that nobody pays any attention to his past. Still, for him, it is important to go back to it from time to time:

Who cares? Well, I do. It's worth my sighs

To walk here, on the wrong road, tracking a picture back

To its bricks and its point of view.

It's worth my while to be here, crumbling this dirt through my bare hands.

I've come back for the first time in twenty years,

Sand in my shoes, my pockets full of the same wind

That brought me before, my flesh (Wright, 2019, Lines 14-20)

He recalls the place by different names, circulates over the county, and appears to be connected with relatives and other people. As his “Aunt Roberta” his mother's sister, is living nearby, but the rest of the family has left, they have disappeared with the passage of time. “Though Aunt Roberta is still in town,” (Wright, 2019, Line 10) several memories of the past arise, as the poet is meditating on the front porch of the “Wickliffe Church,” he imagines the spirits of the family servant “Hampton” and the servant of his great grandfather “Jaq” appearing from the cemetery to offer “toasts to our health.” (Denham, 2009) The poet recalls those memories as real events, full of life and feelings. His yearning for the past makes them look like the present “transparent and animate,” however, the landscape takes a crucial role in recreating those memories, as the poet wishes to stop at this moment forever. He senses the presence of his past life, through the “glittering air,” he

feels nostalgic but at the same time, he knows that he cannot reach the past.

Wright has clearly said that he intends dead people in his poetry to symbolize the impact of the afterlife. (Dowling, 2014) However, when one dedicates his writing to the other world, like the dead, and the things that are beyond the physical world. One realizes the intangibility of those things; they are imaginary and mythical, but at the same time, they still live at the center of the universe. (Wright, 1988) Whether this universe is the real universe or the personal one that exists within the poet's mind. In particular, the dead that the poet remembers through his reflection on the landscape symbolize the continuous influence of the past on the present, which is identical to the unseen world. (Dowling, 2014) Wright believes that while people from the past are now on the other side of the world, they are still part of the universe that contains him and his memories. Concerning that, those memories shape his current persona. The poet admits the intangible nature of the past, so

he decides to continue his journey, as he acknowledges that the past is a part of a different life and a different world.

The poem concludes with a feeling of acceptance, with the help of his people from the past, who support him from the other side of the world to continue his journey. At the same time, the poet acknowledges the deceitfulness of “memory” and how it continuously creates “new shadows” every time he recalls his past. Nevertheless, at the end of the poem, the poet senses a touch on his “shoulder” from a mysterious “hand” leading him to admit he would like to be buried in the same place as his past generations. (Denham, 2009) Furthermore, it is essential to acknowledge, however, that in this poem, Wright may have intentionally recalled memories by revisiting places from his past to regain his memories. Although dependent on memory, Wright acknowledges its limitations. As time progresses, events and emotions inevitably diminish. (Gitzen, 1994) Wright admits that memories are changeable, and

they are not objective. Memories are influenced by personal feelings or some historical events, and as the poet is currently feeling nostalgic about the past, that makes his memories somehow untruthful. (Groarke, 2020) As Freud (2003) confirms: “a number of motives that were far removed from the aim of historical fidelity had a hand in influencing both the formation and the selection of the memories.” (p. 69) Memories are not solid, but in fact they are affected by different events and emotions:

I stand on the porch of
Wickliffe Church,

My kinfolk out back in the
bee-stitched vines and
weeds, ...

In the new shadows, memory
starts to shake out its dark
cloth.

Everyone settles down,
transparent and animate,

Under the oak trees.

Hampton passes the wine
around, Jaq toasts to our health.

And when, from the blear
and glittering air,

A hand touches my shoulder,
I want to fall to my knees,
and keep on falling, here,

Laid down by the articles
that bear my names,

The limestone and marble
and locust wood.

But that's for another life.

(Wright, 2019, Lines 25- 40)

Wright's feelings of nostalgia towards the past continue to appear throughout his poetry, his spiritual journey is shaped by an ongoing return to the past. In "Nostalgia" a poem found in his volume titled *A Short History of the Shadow* (2019). The poet in this poem describes his nostalgic feeling as "a wave," that comes to him without expectation. And sometimes all of those feelings come at once, "Always it comes when we least expect it, like a wave, / Or like the shadow of several waves, / one after the next," (Wright, 2019, Lines 1-3) However, the poet accepts that those memories from the past what form him. They are dazzling just like "sea- white," but what worries him is that those memories always go away in a moment. The poet's nostalgic feelings make the past always better than the present moment. Though it might not, the past, for Wright, is always deceitful. It is full of continuous changes; whenever the poet

tries hard to glimpse its true reality, he finds himself lost. The poem centers on "an extended metaphysical conceit: nostalgia as a wave". It strikes one unexpectedly, it deconstructs and reshapes memories continually, with its "dog-teeth" which grasped the poet and threw him on the shore. (Denham, 2008, p. 151) And as Dowling (2014) states, a specific trigger that is associated with the difficulty of remembering is the continuous motion of water. However, Wright describes the nature of nostalgia or the essence of the past in an overly lengthy manner. If it doesn't succeed as outstanding writing, it somehow provides a mature and direct distillation of any reflection of the past. (Wilson, 2007) The natural world surrounding the poet serves as a metaphor for the unseen moments of the past:

Brilliant and sea-white, then
sinks away.

Memory's dog-teeth,
lovely detritus smoothed out
and laid up.

And always the feeling
comes that it was better then,

Whatever *it* was—

people and places, the sweet taste of things—

And this one, wave-borne and wave-washed, was part of all that. (Wright, 2019, Lines 8-14)

On the other hand, one finds pleasure in moments of nostalgia because they give the impression that events from the past were much better than those in the present. (Denham, 2008) A sense of nostalgia and longing for the past arises when one makes an effort to move away from the present moment. There are various reasons why this happens, but Wright's nostalgia derives from his belief that the past is invisible. Hence, the past is reformed by Wright's current concern for the unseen world and his attempts to recapture the essence of the other world through his ongoing personal pilgrimage. (Sprengnether, 2012) What is comfortable about the feeling of nostalgia is the pleasure one can sense. It is a feeling that outweighs any "living existence". However, this is only a temporary feeling for the poet, as he believes in the accuracy of the present more than the idealizing nature of the past. It is a "time" he

knows will never return. "Nostalgia" is in fact, a motivator for memories, which for Wright, he will always be grateful for. Memory is a mental storage for past events, though fragmented. And because of the unknown nature of the future and the present transient, one only has flashbacks of the past. (Denham, 2008) The "wave" of those memories keeps appearing, and sometimes it is only the "shadow" of them. Through that, the poet is anxious; he admits that he cannot control his memories and how they keep changing inside, just like a "wave". Moreover, those waves of memories only leave "sand" inside the heart of the poet; they are flashbacks from the past, and whenever he tries to catch them, he finds himself unable.

Furthermore, according to Freud, when one cannot go back to the past or cannot remember it, one will take an action for it. Nostalgia can be this action of repeating the same moments of the past. Freud (1958) confirms that "[one] does not *remember* anything of what he has forgotten and repressed, but

acts it out. He reproduces it not as a memory but as an action; he *repeats* it, without, of course, knowing that he is repeating it.” (p. 149-150) Memories drive one to act according to the feelings and emotions that they bring:

And yet, when that wave
appears, or that wave's shadow,
we like it,

Or say we do,

and hope the next time

We'll be surprised again, and
returned again, despite the fact

The time will come, they say,
when the weight of nostalgia,
that ten-foot spread

Of sand in the heart,
outweighs

Whatever living existence we
drop on the scales. (Wright,
2019, Lines 17-24)

The nature of memory is changeable in Wright's poetry. His concerns for life and the unseen world, which he is constantly searching for, shape it. He believes that the past has an impact on the present and the future, consequently, on his spiritual journey to the unseen. Dowling states, “The past's influence is omnipresent in Wright's poetry, with the past inhabiting present-day landscapes.” (Dowling, 2014, p.

115) To comprehend the present, one must first comprehend the past by recalling the events that occurred in it. Moreover, Wright's personality as a Southern poet includes being influenced by his past. As Dave Smith (1942-), a Southern poet, states that the past is a characteristic feature of Southern poetry. (Humphries, et al, 1996)

Through memory, Wright deconstructs his past. Just like Augustine did by using his memory. He goes back to his past in search of the grace of God and to figure out how God's mercy entered his life. Both Wright and Augustine used their spiritual journeys to trace the divine, whether by going back to the past or in other ways. (Jarman, 2006) Furthermore, memory for Wright also works as a device to trace one's connection not only with the unseen realm but with its people. As in “Arkansas Traveller,” from his volume *The Other Side of the River* (2019). Wright goes back to the time of his “great-grandfather” and his journey to “Arkansas.” However, the poem works as a recording of

the daily life of Wright's ancestors. Through landscape, the poet can recall the historical events of his great-grandfather, as his emigration at a young age, and how he fought as "a volunteer captain" during the Civil War at the battle of "Chickamauga":

suddenly on a steamboat

*Stuck fast on a sandbar unable
to get to Little Rock.*

And was four years later a
volunteer captain

In the Confederacy,

and took a Minie ball in his
palate

At Chickamauga he carried
there till his death

Almost half a century
afterward. (Wright, 2019, Lines
31-37)

Wright believes that through memories, he makes a connection with the dead by remembering their "Devotion" towards life. It is their journey that defines them throughout history. The poet then starts to recall his past with his "grandfather," who refers to him as "my look alike"; Wright believes that life is just like a "war" which for his grandfather ends with his death. But at the same time, his grandfather is always remembered for his

extraordinary journey, his past gives him a glorified end, as Wright believes. However, he admits that when one's life ends, everything will not be the same; the dead are now part of another world that the human mind cannot trace. Hence, memories now shape the past, but at the same time, they will never resemble the true reality of the past. (Sprengnether, 2012)

Nonetheless, Wright believes that by one's "Devotion" to life and its journey, one can achieve a satisfactory resolution. It is important to mention that Wright identifies himself with his dead "grandfathers" because of their passion for life's journey. "On the far side of the water, high on a sandbar, / Grandfathers are lolling above the Arkansas River," (Wright, 2019, Lines 1-2) a fulfilled end is what Wright is yearning for, though his journey is full of the feeling of uncertainties. His ancestors are great examples for Wright to keep going on his journey. As it is indicated that the tale of Wright's great-grandfather is not merely about a mouth wound, referring to the wound of Wright's great-grandfather. However, it is also

a story of unrest and resistance in the public realm. "Chickamauga", the battleground where Wright's forefather fought, is thus "talismanic," alluding to Wright's psychic battlefield. (Upton, 2006, p. 282):

And was captured again,
And wounded again,
confined for two years...

That year my grandfather,
my look-alike on the sandbar,
died,

The war ended, and nothing
was ever the same way

Again.

His mantelpiece clock sits on
my dresser now,

Still gilded and nineteenth-
century.

*Devotion, remember, is what
counts.*

*Without it you're exiled,
twisted and small.*

(Wright, 2019, Lines 42-69)

Moreover, to remember is to revise and thus craft one's portrait. Remembering is also a means of survival, both in terms of the self and of history. (McCorkle, 1992) Wright believes that speaking about the dead is what makes them alive in one's memories. He accepts that one can only remember what one wants to be

remembered. Eric Brenman believes that reconstructing the past is possible for psychotherapeutic aims, as he confirms:

It is inherent in man to seek knowledge, to enquire and discover. It seems important for [a person] to pursue enquiry about his origins, to find his roots; he needs roots and objects, he cannot function alone. To my mind, knowing his background provides him with a sense of continuity and meaning. Only if he feels he belongs can he achieve his own identity. Reconstruction is of value as a means of rediscovering roots, past objects and lost parts of the self. (Brenman et al, 2006, p. 11)

Nonetheless, according to Jarman (2006), Wright concludes this poem using a pun in "Knot by Knot" which means "not by not." Thus, Wright uses memory to purify himself of memory itself, to rid himself of the past, and to invalidate it. But that is an ambition that, nonetheless, he will never accomplish. The past is a part of him, and memories are the only way to make a connection with the world of

the dead: “To speak of the dead is to make them live again: / we invent what we need. / Knot by knot I untie myself from the past”. (Wright, 2019, Lines 88-90)

However, Wright's ongoing concern towards the past is deeply exemplified in “The Southern Cross,” a lengthy poem from his volume of the same title, which illustrates his memory poems. The pilgrimage in “The Southern Cross” is toward Wright's both physical and ideal birthplaces: his home in Pickwick Tennessee and his time in Venice. This poem reflects an idealized image of a pristine and full past in contrast with later conditions of dissolution. The past is different in its nature, it is like a lost paradise. The sequence of it is changing and apparently haphazard, including twenty-five disconnected parts of different lengths that show memories to appear as unchronological, as if the poet emerges from and retreats into the real landscape. (Dowling, 2014) However, Wright realized a more complicated structure within his memory: a sequence of blocks divided by little straight lines. This mixture

enabled him to differentiate between remembering and observation, between yearnings for the past and those for the future. Rather than outlining one particular memory, this poem develops a sense of depressed remembering, a process instead of a result. (Miller, 1998)

Moreover, in this poem, Wright uses memory as a way to his journey of personal discovery and spiritual inquiry. Wright begins the poem with “Things that divine us we never touch” the past is one of them, as Wright believes that it is a part of the “divine” of the other world. However, Wright states that “The Southern Cross” is a kind of an autobiographical poem, though with some differences:

Anyone's autobiography, at least in his own eyes, is made up of a string of luminous moments, numinous moments. It's a necklace we spend our lives assembling. That's what The Southern Cross is about, saying some of those beads. But that 'I' isn't I any-more. It's someone else, the character who plays me, someone who's a better actor than I could ever be. I'm just the writer.

Someone else is starring in my part. I remember him just well enough to try to write about him. A case of the negative sublime. I guess art's always after the fact. The real is imaginary, or imagined. Reconstitution, reconstruction, representation is all we're left with. Autobiography becomes biography in the end. (Wright, 1995, p. 107)

Wright admits that his past is not for him anymore, he is an observer of it. The present Wright is different from the old one. Though he believes that through poetry he can at least rebuild the fragmented memories from the past. Hence, "The Southern Cross" is represented by the "I" persona. The poem's first and earliest memory is of the poet as a child. The continuous line break that Wright uses throughout the poem emphasizes the expression "I'm one," distinguishing the memory as exemplary, isolated, complete, and essential. (Dowling, 2014) "It's 1936, in Tennessee. I'm one / And spraying the dead grass with a hose." (Wright, 2019, Lines 9-10) It is important to note that Wright always has an idea

behind his use of line breaks; it is not only for the style but for representing the process of things within his poems. However, this "I" is youthful and different in contrast to the gradually unclear figure he develops as he ages. The above memory is not the original one. Rather, it is a random flashback that can be interchangeable with different memories and times. (Dowling, 2014) Memories change over time, as Freud confirms (1962):

Our childhood memories show us our earliest years not as they were but as they appeared at the later periods when the memories were aroused. In these periods of arousal, the childhood memories did not, as people are accustomed to say, *emerge*; they were *formed* at that time. And a number of motives, with no concern for historical accuracy, had a part in forming them, as well as in the selection of the memories themselves. (p. 322)

The poem shifts through numerous memories from the speaker's childhood, which are triggered by photographs of the poet. He is in doubt about those memories, which came from his

early childhood, as he also doubts their accuracy. The speaker then laments the elusive nature of memory, he identifies himself with the natural world, “And then it’s not. And I’m not and they’re not. .../ if the sea could remember its waves...” (Wright, 2019, Lines, 12-16) This lamentation will persist throughout the poem, as the speaker constantly doubts the accuracy of his past whenever he approaches it. However, according to the Bedient, Wright longs for the past, even though it is a distant horizon. “How sweet the past is, no matter how wrong, or how sad / How sweet is yesterday’s noise.” (Wright, 2019, Lines 24-25) Whereas the past is intangible in its nature, Wright believes it will nonetheless be perfect deep inside the human mind. (Bedient, 1995, p. 130) He feels nostalgic for the past and the people of that intangible world as he mentions his inspirational parents from the past, “When my father went soldiering, apes dropped from the trees. / When my mother wrote home from bed, the stars asked for a pardon.” (Wright, 2019, Lines 64-65) As Dowling

states, those parents are actually Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson, as they both serve as inspirational figures in Wright’s poetry. Their unique life and their different perspectives towards it are similar to Wright’s view. (Dowling, 2014, p. 141) According to Ismail (2013), Dickinson searches for identity through the inner journey that she takes through her poetry, “[t]he inward journey indicates the struggle of the soul in search of an awareness and identity.” (p. 91) Wright goes on the same inner journey through his poetry, exploring not only his identity but also his past. However, this nostalgic feeling of the poet is a complete feature of the past that gives it an intangible sense. It feels like an “otherness” that lives “inside”. It is part of shaping the persona of the speaker, though he can never have the ability to remember it or make a physical connection with it:

There is an otherness inside
us

We never touch,
no matter how far down our
hands reach.

It is the past,

With its good looks and
Anytime, Anywhere...

Our prayers go out to it, our
arms go out to it

Year after year,

But who can ever remember
enough?

(Wright, 2019, Lines 174-181)

The speaker then reflects on “the sea” rethinking desperately about his journey towards the unseen. The depth of it gives the poet a feeling of anxiety and “*despair*,” through this, the speaker lights matches to trace the “black air” which works as a metaphor for memory. The transient nature of this smoke is similar to human memories and how they vanish into the unconscious without a way to trace them or bring them back in their full shape. “The huge page of the sea with its one word *despair*, ... And still I go on looking, / match after match in the black air.” (Wright, 2019, Lines 189-193) However, Wright believes in the power of the natural world to help him bring moments from his intangible past. Far away from his present mental state, which is full of fragmented memories, he understands that the natural world around him is perfect. Through the otherness of the

“landscape,” he can believe in the otherness of the past. Hence, the speaker always remembers “landscape” from his past. The poet admits that what he can remember are only “places” that “swim” inside his mind. However, those memories are continuously sinking as he cannot return them to their full shape. The places that the poet mentions “Seville,” and “Easter morning” are the places that go through his mind as according to Denham (2008): “[This] has no central focus, because the point is what returns to [one] in memory is random and momentary like a daydream.” (p. 113):

The landscape was always
the best part.

Places swim up and sink
back, and days do,

The edges around what really
happened we'll never remember

No matter how hard we stare
back at the past:

One April, in downtown
Seville, alone on an Easter
morning

Wasted in emerald light from
the lemon trees,

(Wright, 2019, Lines 211-218)

The nature of the landscape
is different from the nature of

human feelings and emotions. The inner feelings are a mix of numerous reactions towards life, in contrast to the landscape, which remains constant and cannot be altered like human feelings. The language of landscape is unchangeable; on the other hand, feelings and emotions from the past cannot be traced, and they are constantly reshaped inside the human mind, in addition to the effect of the present, and the future in shaping them.

Moreover, Dowling states that the changing nature of memory in "The Southern Cross", represented in the chaotic present and recalled landscapes, contradicts this notion of origins by proving them unclear, revealing a lack in the connection between the past and the present, and indicating that the past is unrecoverable. Wright's poems on memory reflect the past with an enduring influence that reflects wholeness while remaining elusive; it therefore represents the invisible. (Dowling, 2014)

What makes the speaker reluctant about memories is the fragmentation of the past. The

amplification of memory's failure continues to manifest throughout the poem, according to Miller (1998), Wright expresses, throughout the poem, his dissatisfaction with memory's limitations. Furthermore, the speaker admits the occurrence of this fragmentation, as he keeps repeating how he "can't remember." It is essential to note again the presence of the natural world in memories; the speaker consistently struggles to recall what he finds sensual, due to their continual change over time. But he finds himself remembering things related to the natural world like "flower paintings". It is crucial to acknowledge that Wright is known to be an exphrastic poet; hence, natural paintings have the same presence and effect as the natural world for him. (Spiegelman, 2005) Wright confirms (1995): "Inside every poet there's always something else trying to get out—in my case maybe it's a painter." (p. 148) "I can't remember the way the stairs smelled ... I do remember the flower paintings". (Wright, 2019, Lines 254-263) Moreover, life is akin to the ever-moving

“wind” that guides the speaker’s path. He acknowledges that his memory is as fleeting as “wind” which is always changing and evolving. However, “Pickwick” for Wright was never part of this “wind”; it is his birthplace, which takes one to the beginning of the poem. Wright’s parents moved from their hometown when he was still an infant, and they never returned. Nonetheless, he believes that the landscape of his hometown gives him his present “imprint”, though it is a place he cannot remember, but he identifies himself with the forgotten places:

The life of this world is wind.

Windblown we come, and
windblown we go away.

All that we look on is
windfall.

All we remember is wind.

Pickwick was never the
wind...

It lies in a landscape that
keeps my imprint
Forever, and stays unchanged,
and waits to be filled back in.

(Wright, 2019, Lines 351-365)

According to Smith, Freud believes in his paper about “Screen Memories” that one can always have a longing for

one’s childhood home, and this longing might be connected to present concerns. (Smith, 2000) However, Wright concludes the poem with a sense of certainty about the landscape's ability to transport him back to his hometown by re-creating his memories through the natural world. In spite of the fact that those recollections do not reveal the way things were in the past, but they instill in him a sense of hope that will allow him to go with his personal pilgrimage towards the unseen world: “Someday I'll find it out / And enter my old outline as though for the first time, / And lie down, and tell no one.” (Wright, 2019, Lines 366-368)

Conclusion

Wright headed off on his spiritual journey to the unseen realm with the purpose of investigating the subjects of this realm, which had always preoccupied him. The past is one of those subjects, as its intangible nature gives it a nostalgic feeling. Wright looks at the past with a yearning to fully glimpse it, though it’s almost impossible, but he keeps trying as he trusts the process of his spiritual journey toward the unseen world. His investigation

of this world, through his poetry, is a way to salvation. Hence, he might achieve the purpose of his personal pilgrimage. However, Wright realizes that the fragmentation of human memories gives him a feeling of insecurity about the true reality of past events. He delves into the fragmented nature of memories through his unique style, which is known for its line breaks. In addition to the fragmented memories, he remembers through his writing. Furthermore, the analysis depends on Sigmund Freud's concept of "Screen Memories," as both Wright and Freud question the reliability of memory to remember the past as it is without changing. However, memory for them is deceitful, it is full of changes, and its true reality is affected by different emotions and events, whether of contemporary events or old ones from the past itself. It is important to note that Wright's poems about the ambiguity of memory are longer than other poems, which indicates his struggle with memory itself.

For Wright, the past is a living world, full of untouched places and feelings. A place he

can never return to, only through memories infused with the power of the living world around him. He has the ability to attain a profound understanding of the hidden world from his observations of the natural world. Since the natural surroundings remain unchanging in both his memories and the present, it helps Wright recall the past. At the same time, the perfection of the landscape around him does not provide a perfect remembering of the past. Wright understands that human memory will always lack a full understanding of the unseen world. For this reason, he trusts the natural world more than anything else.

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