

Grief in Memorial Drive A Daughter's Memoir

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Abstract

The twenty-first century has witnessed a surge in memoir writing by African American women writers, revealing their inner life, in contrast to the external circumstances of race and gender. The present article depicts the African American woman writer, Natasha Trethewey, who not only explores the theme of racism and gender in her works, but also delves deep into the psyche of the African American women writers. This article demonstrates the process of grieving in Natasha Trethewey's *Memorial Drive, A Daughter's Memoir* by revealing the different layers of grief that the writer experienced in her journey of mourning for the death of her mother. The study intends to analyze how through the grieving process, the writer is able to gain knowledge of the self. This study employs the framework of Michael Cholbi's *Grief: A Philosophical Guide* to examine the intense grief of the writer.

Keywords: Memoirs, Grief, Mourning

Introduction

Natasha Trethewey, the acclaimed Poet Laureate and Pulitzer Prize winner of the United States, unveils the racial and historical inequities of her nation in her prose and poetry. Trethewey's style of poetry is a combination of free verse and a more formal presentation as found in sonnets and the nineteen-line poetic form known as the villanelle. Analysing her family background, she often plumbs into the legacy of racial inequality in the United States. Though the personal trauma in her life: the discrimination that she experienced after her father's interracial marriage, the systemic racism in her hometown in Mississippi, and the brutal murder of her mother by her abusive stepfather, serve as persistent themes in her writing, Trethewey delivered a heart-touching message to the crowd: "We are all threatened by ignorance in our daily lives, especially those most impacted by systemic forms of oppression," ("Why I Write": Natasha Trethewey Keynote Address).

The study intends to explore grief and trauma in the African American woman writer, Natasha Trethewey's *Memorial Drive A Daughter's Memoir*, as this memoir is an exploration of the profound experience of grief, trauma, and pain that Trethewey witnesses to gain an understanding of the tragic course of her mother's life and how the death of her mother has shaped her perspective regarding the world. Trethewey sees herself and the world through the prism of her mother's tragic passing, which profoundly rocked her life. The memoir is a lyric confrontation with grief, showing how grief changes and reshapes memory¹ to the extent that it permits flashes of insight. It is an astute investigation of loss and trauma. The author's personal experience of her mother's terrible murder and its enduring impact on her life are explored in depth in the memoir. Trethewey navigates the complex feelings of loss through evocative prose and reflection, creating a story that conveys the themes of suffering, recovery, and resiliency. In her memoir, Trethewey discusses how grief and trauma are linked. She considers the horrific circumstances that followed her mother's murder and how they continue to affect her now, affecting her views, relationships, and sense of self².

African American women writers engage in a conversation about kinship, loss and sorrow, memory, and mourning in an effort to express their conscious experience of grief, which had been suppressed during their centuries-long enslavement by racism and slavery. Grief, the most fundamental human experience, is expressed by people in an effort to better understand themselves, as a revelation of their inner lives, and to cope with the self-knowledge³ grief implies.

Memorial Drive: A Daughter's Memoir by Natasha Trethewey is a moving examination of trauma, loss, and sorrow that is based on the author's own experience of her mother's terrible murder. This book deals with major social themes including racial inequality and domestic violence in addition to weaving a beautiful tale of Trethewey's journey through grief's consequences. The story explores how trauma affects identity via the perspective of memory and how writing serves as a tool for both healing and preservation⁴. This article aims to investigate how Trethewey's autobiography addresses the communal pain of African American women's experiences in the US in addition to reflecting on individual loss.

Memorial Drive: A Daughter's Memoir by Natasha Trethewey is a significant work for examining the psychological and emotional aspects of trauma, loss, and grieving because it offers a potent junction of individual and societal trauma. Beyond a personal story of Trethewey's grief following her mother's passing, the memoir considers larger social concerns including racial injustice, domestic violence and the agony African American women have historically experienced. Trethewey's memoir has been identified to provide memorial aspects from history which is making this article one of the most effective ones in terms of

¹ Tonia Leigh Wind. *Memory and (re)memory in works of Black women writers*. Taylor and Francis. 2020.

² Olney, James. *The Metaphor of Self*. Princeton University Press. 2017. Page 25

³ Cholbi, Michael. "Regret, Resilience and the Nature of Grief." *Journal of Moral Philosophy*. 2018. p.16.

⁴ Balestrini, Nassim Winnie. "Layers and Forms of Relational and Collective Memory: War and Inner Conflict in Natasha Trethewey's *Native Guard* (2006) and *Memorial Drive* (2020)." *Grazer Forschungsbeiträge zu Frieden und Konflikt* (2020).

understanding the historical phenomena associated with the living standard⁵. Trethewey is a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet whose creative skill translates intensely personal suffering into a story that speaks to the universal themes of loss and resiliency.

This research also examines how storytelling may be therapeutic in addressing unresolved sorrow and how Trethewey's story might be seen as a kind of resistance to erasure, both cultural and personal. Her memoir has been analysed to show how literature may be used to help people comprehend and cope with the complex aspects of trauma, loss, and identity rebuilding.

Trethewey's memoir is an important work of literary studies that contributes to our knowledge of trauma, sorrow, and narrative healing. This study offers insightful information on how literature may address historical and societal traumas while also articulating and processing intense personal grief. In addition to providing a firsthand account of her mother's life and untimely death, Trethewey's book delves further into the issues of racial injustice and spousal abuse as well as the generational trauma African American women endure. Concerning these aspects, this study can be considered to provide valuable insights regarding the role of literature studies in addressing grief, loss and trauma in an individual's life.

Loss and Grief

Grief is an emotional and psychological response towards loss and has been studied in the psychological and literary context. Trethewey navigates the feelings of loss through evocative reflection, and creating a story which conveys the themes like resilience, recovery and suffering. Revisiting memories, then, even memories of trauma, loss and grief produced redemption and meaning for Trethewey⁶. Scholars like David Kessler and Elisabeth Kübler-Ross outlined different stages of grief which include acceptance, depression, bargaining, anger and denial. These stages provide a framework for understanding the process of grieving as many contemporary scholars argue grief is more individualised and complex. Mollie O'Leary⁷ says, that the traumatic memories mainly exist as isolated flashbacks and sensations without any form of narrative cogency. Natasha Trethewey's memoir exemplifies this complexity, as her grief does not follow a linear path but rather as ebbs and flows in her life. In her memoir, Trethewey discusses the linked phenomena of grief and trauma where she considers the horrific circumstances that followed the murder of her mother.

The horrific circumstances also analyse how her mother's murder continues to affect her now, affecting her views, relationships, and sense of self. The relations of memory and grief have some important themes in the loss of literature. Scholars like Paul John Eakin and Patricia Hampl explore memoir as a form of memorialisation, where the writing act has become the way of preserving the deceased's memory. In *Memorial Drive*, Trethewey's write-up serves a public and personal memorial for her mother. This memory allows her to remember the narrative of violence with her mother which ended her life. Trethewey's work under cultural

⁵ Kranz, Tova E. *Body, Land, and Memory: Counter-Narratives in the Poetry of Minnie Bruce Pratt, Brenda Marie Osbey, and Natasha Trethewey*. University of Louisiana at Lafayette, 2017.

⁶ Croft, Elizabeth Kelly. "'Hello. We are Here. Listen': Marginalized Memories and Silenced Stories in Literature of the US South." (2020).

⁷ O'Leary, Mollie. *Reconstructing the Self: The Poetics of Traumatic Memory*. University of Washington, 2022: 1-45.

archaeology is devoted to the unearthing of “the memory of America’s racial past”, and to track its present persistence⁸. Trethewey experiences a terrifying dream vision that seems to transcend her tremendous grief. Natasha Trethewey’s *Memorial Drive: A Daughter’s Memoir*, narrates the unfolding scenes of the past, and her own emotions and thoughts in present⁹. Her memories of her mother’s dark moods burst her anger sometimes, and provide context for a greater understanding of Joel’s abusive behaviour.

The Role of Forgetting and Memory

Memory, as a collective and personal plays an important role in *Memorial Drive*. The memoirs are structures for Trethewey’s attempt to piece together fragmented memories of her mother’s death and life as a process which mirrors the way trauma distorts and sits on memory. Different scholars explore memory social and personal memories intertwined under collective narratives from history. The landscape of the Mississippi is excavated with poetry to exhume the artificially forgotten or buried dynamic¹⁰. In *Memorial Drive*, Trethewey’s memories of her mother are shaped by the larger historical and cultural context of racial violence and domestic abuse. It is also clearly visible that Natasha Trethewey challenges the regional literary inheritance concepts that mainly refuse to recognise a broad plurality of histories and voices¹¹. Trethewey sees everything through the prism of her mother’s tragic passing and as so by memoir which forms the lyric confrontation with grief, through showing the reshaped memory and grief changes. The memory introduced by Trethewey in the form of a Pardon with symbolic significance represents manipulation and mistrust.

Trauma Theory

The concept of trauma shows the dynamic of how it is articulated and processed through the whole dynamic of narratives while playing a major role in analysing the memoir of Trethewey. The trauma theory provides a framework for analysing how individuals cope with and narrate traumatic experiences. The trauma theory captures the depth of traumatic experience, this theory also focusses on some of the specific aspects of traumatic experience, like cognitive processes or physiological response¹². Trethewey’s narrative develops these disruptions, for the recounting of events is punctuated by moments of repetition, fragmentation and confusion, which mirror the whole concept of the psychological impact of the death of her mother. Trauma the theorists argue often eludes the simple representation as it defies disruption and linearity for memory continuity. According to¹³, denial of trauma has also a vital effect on the parent and children when there is a sense of security is absent. Trauma is an event for not fully grasped when it occurs, but later it is experienced in the form of other repetitive phenomena, flashbacks, or nightmares.

⁸ Places, Jesmyn Ward’s. Haunted. "A Darkness Endemic to Mississippi." 16 (2020): 278-298.

⁹ Dunn, Hannah. "Hannah & Nana: A Personal Memoir on Appalachian Intergenerational Trauma, Womanhood, & Family." 635 (2021): 1-60.

¹⁰ Petrelli, Marco. "A Darkness Endemic to Mississippi: Jesmyn Ward’s Haunted Places." *Iperstoria* 16 (2020): 278-292.

¹¹ Dempsey, Sunshine. *Aesthetic Activisms: Language Politics and Inheritances in Recent Poetry from the US South*. Diss. University of South Carolina, (2020): 43.

¹² Wilmschurst, Kaitlin. "An integrated existential framework for trauma theory." *Canadian Social Work Review* 37.2 (2020): 131-147.

¹³ Jan, Talha Ubaid Ullah, et al. "Exploring Childhood Trauma and Coping Mechanisms Through Ferenczi’s Trauma Theory." *Journal of Asian Development Studies* 13.2 (2024): 1533-1543.

Understanding Trethewey's depiction of loss and grief shows the traumatised factor experienced by her. In the memoir, Trethewey grapples delayed the trauma after their mother's murder. The memories recurrence triggered the unrelated events, which reflects the non-linear nature of trauma and the difficulty in achieving closure. Racial, sexual, gender and ethnic minority communities are some of the disproportionately experience which is acute forms of trauma¹⁴. The business has a major impact on the life of the Trethewey and her family, as part of the "remembrance and mourning" stage she uses this memoir which revisits the traumatic past to make sense of it and begin the process of healing.¹⁵ try to reveal trauma by revealing the psyche structure of lesser-known parts. The writing itself becomes a form of reconnection, not only with her mother's memory but also with her own identity as a daughter, poet, and survivor. Trethewey's engagement with her mother's death, through her poetry and later in this memoir, represents an ongoing attempt to reconcile with the past and find a way forward.

Analysis and Discussion

The *Memorial Drive: A Daughter's Memoir* is a melancholic investigation of loss, sorrow, and the lingering effects of trauma that deftly combines historical and cultural analysis with intimate human story. Trethewey's battle to accept her mother Gwendolyn's murder at the hands of her violent stepfather is at the core of the story. Thoughts on the larger racial and socioeconomic circumstances that influence African American women's experiences in the United States, especially in the South, are interspersed throughout this intensely personal tragedy.

*"The twenty-sixth of April that year marked the hundredth anniversary of Mississippi's celebration of Confederate Memorial Day, a holiday glorifying the old South, the Lost Cause, and white supremacy and much of the fervour was a display, too, in opposition to recent advancements in the civil rights movement."*¹⁶

The author's memory, especially the traumatic experience from childhood, directly elaborated in the story. On the other hand, mentioning the tension between the glorification of the Confederacy and the ongoing struggle for civil rights in the South during the 20th century also displays the protagonist's grief regarding racism faced in the initial stage of her life. Concerning the grief of the author it can also be considered that the celebration of Confederate Memorial Day represents more than just a historical event; it is a reminder of the systemic racism that shaped the environment in which her mother lived and ultimately died.

When a loved one's demise is shrouded with trauma, the terrain of grief and trauma can be exceptionally difficult to traverse. These emotional dimensions have long been ignored. The analysis of grief and death in African American women's memoirs is important since the writers' conscious experience of grief was suppressed for years due to oppression and subjugation that suppressed their expression. Additionally, it is crucial to examine the

¹⁴ Marks, Charles, et al. "Articulating the trauma-informed theory of individual health behavior." *Stress and Health* 38.1 (2022): 154-162.

¹⁵ Wei, Qing, and Ziqian Guo. "An Analysis of Hassan's Growth Process in Memory of Departure from the Perspective of Trauma Theory." *Lecture Notes on Language and Literature* 7.4 (2024): 110-115.

¹⁶ "Memorial Drive: A Daughter's Memoir 9780062248596, 9780062248572 - DOKUMEN.PUB." *Dokumen.pub*, dokumen.pub, 2020, dokumen.pub/memorial-drive-a-daughters-memoir-9780062248596-9780062248572.html. Accessed 30 Aug. 2024.

innermost lives of women writers for how oppressed they were as a result of racism and gender. " In her memoir *Memorial Drive, A Daughter's Memoir*, Trethewey revisits the demise of her mother to lift the curtain of the present over the past.

Trethewey's memory of arriving in Atlanta with a smoking car engine is an ominous symbol of the mental anguish and physical violence that is to come as well. She experienced a sense of discomfort even as a young child and believed that death of her mother was somehow her fault for she failed to inform her mother about the abuse her stepfather inflicted on her. She explains that psychologists suggest that trauma can cause unusual beliefs and behaviors, suggesting that her parents' divorce and the sudden upheaval of leaving the family behind in Mississippi affected her thinking and her ability to make sense of the world around her. This was only the beginning of her trauma, of course, as it was followed by the torment she was subjected by Joel.

"I could measure my days in two columns: those in which I had done something to please her, a mirror to her loveliness, days when she called me "sugar plum" and held my face in her hands; and, in the other column, all the times I had done something that saddened or hurt or frustrated her".

Her memories of her mother's dark moods, which sometimes burst into anger, provide context for a greater understanding of why the author did not tell her mother about Joel's abusive behavior. The above quotation from the story indicates that she was desperate for her mother's approval as a child. The idea of dividing her days into two columns in which one for the times she made her mother happy and the other for the times she disappointed or irritated her, is a metaphor that highlights the contrast in their relationship. Trethewey categorizes her experiences in these ways, implying that her identity and sense of value were strongly correlated with her mother's acceptance. It is clear from this how emotionally dependent she was on her mother, as if her own existence depended on her ability to emulate or mirror her "loveliness". However, she did not want to upset or annoy her mother by telling her what Joel was doing. She also suggests another possibility, again evoking the myth of Cassandra:

"Since no one believes her admonitions anyway, perhaps she begins to think that only her silence can prevent what is to come. Better to keep some things to herself rather than speak of them and invite disaster with her words"

It may seem implausible to an adult's way of thinking, this belief that speaking of something out loud could cause something terrible to occur, but Trethewey was just seven years old at the time of these events and dealing with the trauma of a sudden disruption of her way of life after her parents' divorce and the move to Atlanta. At present, Trethewey wonders if she is, in part, responsible for her mother's demise for she never spoke up about Joel's behavior in the early stages of the relationship. This is an example of what is called survivor's guilt. Trethewey and her mother were both victims of Joel's abuse: but the author survived and Gwendolyn did not. This fact made her feel guilty and wonder if there is something she could have done to prevent the murder.

Additionally, Trethewey's remorse over not being able to save her mother is brought up again. Trethewey muses over the scenario in which Joel kills her at school. In response to her "smiling" and "Hey, Big Joe!" greeting, Joel decided against killing her and instead chose to murder Gwendolyn. Having lived with the guilt that she was to blame for her mother's death

her entire adult life, the author's loss of her mother left a terrifying impression in her mind. Trethewey's guilt is a result of her perception that there was anything she could have done to stop her violent stepfather from killing her mother. This regret is especially strong as it is a typical emotional reaction of those who lose loved ones to violence: they frequently believe that they could have stopped it or could have changed the course of events. For Trethewey witnessed the conflicts and abuse that preceded her mother's death, she feels an even greater feeling of guilt for the events that transpired.

"All my adult life I have lived with the guilt that I am implicated in my mother's death - or, more precisely, that she is dead because I am not"

The use of reveries used to reconstruct the past only serves to deepen one's sense of guilt. They investigate the interval between waking and sleeping. Trethewey struggles with remorse over her silence regarding Joel's abuse of her. She describes a condition known as "sleep paralysis"¹⁷ in the chapter "LOOP," which brilliantly expresses this guilt-related emotion. The phrase "I am implicated in my mother's death" is particularly powerful because it shows how Trethewey has internalised the idea that her existence, her survival had a direct impact on her mother's fate. The protagonists' thinking is therefore identified as creation of memory of the grief from the past incidents of her life.

In the memoir, Trethewey reveals her complete powerlessness at being powerless to prevent Joel from taking her mother's life. She believed that if she had told her mother about Joel's abuse and anguish, she might have been able to stop the terrible murder of her mother. Simply though she was unable to express her dread and anxiety for Joel, the following passage about sleep paralysis captures her plight:

"I remember struggling even to move my little finger, knowing that I needed to wake myself up. Researchers call this state, when one is in between sleep cycles, sleep paralysis. Your mind begins to wake up but your body is still in a relaxed state, and so you cannot move for several minutes."

Traumatic experiences frequently engender a desire to "witness" or "testify." The sufferer and the listener form a bond when the memories of the psychologically upsetting incident are provided a place to be expressed. The account of the domestic violence Trethewey saw serves as an example of the catastrophic incident. The second-person description of Joel's assault of Gwendolyn, which resulted in black eyes, bruised kidneys, a broken arm, and a shattered jaw, makes readers feel empathy for Trethewey and her mother. By the time Trethewey is in the fifth grade, she first hears "the loud smack" of her stepfather's fist being used to abuse her mother coming through the bedroom walls.

The act of domestic violence and the subsequent divorce that makes Gwendolyn a "free bird" for a brief period of time reveal the gradual and steady progression of the circumstances that led to her mother's horrible death. In one of the most heartbreaking and artistic chapters in the memoir "YOU KNOW," Trethewey appears to have reached the peak of her grief. Her complete command of a wide range of speech styles is evident here. The author shifts to the second person in order to bring the reader into her experience of suffering and plight from a

¹⁷ Cholbi, Michael. *Grief A Philosophical Guide*. Princeton University Press.p.31.

first-person narrator. With agonising precision, spousal abuse and male chauvinism are described:

“At home you catch your mother alone, sitting on the bed, her left temple dark and swollen. Standing in front of her, eye level, you shift your weight from one leg to the other, your head down. ‘Mommy,’ you say quietly, so as not to be overheard.”

Being a writer offers Trethewey the ability to direct the story, which is vital in her conflict with Joel. When domestic violence occurs, the abuser frequently uses emotional, psychological, and physical coercion to try to quiet the victim and control her. Nonetheless, Trethewey's work acts as a counterbalance to this dynamic. She regains control over her life's circumstances and her mother's passing by sharing her tale. Writing gives her the ability to express her sorrow and sadness in a way that Joel, the violent offender, tried to bury.

“In my first act of resistance, I had inadvertently made him my first audience. I had begun to compose myself.”

Her identity, as a writer, was created by these confrontations with Joel. Joel abuses Trethewey psychologically. Her mother gives her a diary, which she uses as a way to express her feelings until Joel intrudes on her personal space and reads through the daily writings. Trethewey uses her diary as a "near-public act of a communication" to criticise the man for his intrusions and abuses as a result of this invasion of privacy. Apart from these, the memory of visiting psychic offers insight into her ambivalent experience and the lingering effects of trauma decades after her mother's death.

“I have only two options,” she says, “to believe he was a fraud or to believe that, after all these years, my mother would not emerge to communicate with me: that she'd have nothing to say”

At the time, she claimed that she wanted to see the psychic as a means of recreating Gwendolyn's final days, yet deep down she secretly hoped that the man would be able to tell her something about her mother, or even provide a message from the afterlife. The uncertainty she feels about the psychic is similar to the ambivalence she feels about finally reckoning with her mother's death and its effect on her. She wants to do this but feels frightened of experiencing these complex emotions. Despite her overt skepticism, the author deeply wished that the psychic could make contact with her mother, and later she was disappointed that he gave no indication that he did so.

The cassette tape that the author found of her mother's voice long after her death is a symbol of her grief and the stasis in feelings she experienced as she neglected to fully process that grief. She explains that she began to forget many things about her mother in the years following her death, and that she regrets not being more careful with her things and her memories. The murder was so traumatic that the author faced difficulty thinking of her mother in the following years. When she found the tape, she felt something had been restored to her, yet she broke it almost immediately after discovering it. She equates this moment with another story from mythology:

“The length of tape that held her voice had been as tenuous as the faith that held Orpheus and Eurydice together as he tried to lead her out of the underworld. In my impatience, I had severed it”

In this myth, Hades tells Orpheus that Eurydice can follow him out of the underworld and return with him to the land of the living, but only if he does not look back at her during the entire journey. Orpheus is unable to follow these basic instructions, and Eurydice is sent back

to Hades forever. Trethewey felt as though she had her mother back for a moment when she found the tape, but her impatience in trying to fix it too quickly caused it to snap and mother's voice was gone forever. Natasha Trethewey's "Memorial Drive A Daughter's Memoir" successfully transitions from an intimate experience of grief and trauma to a commentary on trauma and grief by transcending the psychotic and metonymic testimony modes and achieving the metaphoric testimonial mode.

Trethewey faced a conundrum as a result of the impact of her mother's murder since she was unsure if she could talk yet felt she needed to express her anguish and sadness. The author finds herself on the "cusp" of two stages of her life a day after her mother was killed, with "adulthood and bereavement gripping her at once." The feeling of "twoness" is echoed in the prologue when Trethewey writes about seeing a news story in which the film shows her arriving and going up and walking into the apartment the morning after her mother's brutal murder. The "twoness" of that feeling as akin to watching oneself similar to writing the chapter "You Know." Michel Cholbi's theory of grief is crucial in this case because Trethewey experiences an "identity crisis" as a result of her mother leaving her on the cusp of her past when she saw her mother's mortal remains and her present when she must deal with the bereavement. Her mother was the center of Trethewey's universe. When her mother, toward whom Trethewey's concerns and objectives are, in part, directed, is no longer able to play the role that she previously did in her connection with the writer and in her life as a whole, Trethewey has a heartbreaking moment. In times of loss, many different relationships control how people interact with one another. One such instance is the close relationship of love and affection that helped shape Trethewey's practical identity.

In addition, Cholbi's usage of the phrase "practical identity investment"¹⁸ reaffirms Trethewey's deep sorrow over her mother's passing. Trethewey was crushed from the inside out a day after her mother, the foundation of her identity, was cruelly murdered. Trethewey was profoundly shaken. The basis of Trethewey's relationship with her mother is what Cholbi refers to as the "practical identity investment" in *Grief: A Philosophical Perspective*. Grief is essential to the existence of the bereaved because it illuminates the knowledge of self and specifically improves knowledge of the values, emotional dispositions, and concerns that the bereaved person has. This is because grief involves "sustained and diverse emotional attention" to an integral relationship whose orientation changes for the death of one of the participants, according to Cholbi.

Trethewey incorporates court documents, including a transcript from a call between her mother and Joel. In the thirteenth chapter of the memoir, "EVIDENCE Tape of Recorded Conversations, June 3 and 4, 1985", Trethewey burrows deep into the transcripts of the telephonic conversations between her mother and Joel. The description of the transcripts represents an urge to express her grief and to depict the inhuman behaviour inflicted on her mother at the hands of Joel. It marks the incisiveness and depth through which she portrays her grief. In the transcripts in Chapter 13, the reader can see how Joel employed psychological manipulation tactics and outright threats to attempt to coerce Gwendolyn to be in a relationship with him again. The fact that he believed that this would be an effective technique, as well as

¹⁸ Hurd, Ryan. *Sleep Paralysis: A Guide to Hypnagogic Visions and Visitors of the Night*. 2005

the threats themselves, are evidence that Joel was experiencing serious mental health problems. In the beginning of the conversation, he apparently believes that she has told him she wishes to get back together, even though this almost certainly did not happen.

“I’m not gonna hurt you, I’m just gonna take you with me – that’s not hurting you”

This statement is from Joel as mentioned by the author which clearly indicated the intention of the author regarding killing her. He is clearly suffering from delusional thinking. Nevertheless, mental issues are not the only problem being addressed here, as Joel expresses a complete lack of regard for anyone but himself and derives a sadistic pleasure in frightening Gwendolyn. When she asks him if he has thought about how the children will feel after he kills her, he declares, “eventually they will get over it”. He lists the numerous ways he could carry out his plan shooting her, setting her apartment on fire, planting a bomb in her car.

The scene in the final interlude in which Trethewey recalls driving to Mississippi is a symbol of her ongoing mission to keep her mother’s memory alive and the fact that Gwendolyn remains with her in spirit even three decades after her death. When she took the steering wheel, she was working in tandem with Gwendolyn to drive the car, as though they were one person. The protagonists write:

“For several miles we’d drive like that: so close we seemed conjoined, and I could feel her heart beating against me as if I had not one, but two”

Regular thought and emotion patterns, which formerly seemed to be at the center of existence, now seem weird and unfamiliar. The world suddenly seems strange to the bereaved since their life experiences major changes. The bereaved feels disoriented and alienated, which causes him to lose track of who he is. Grief eventually leaves a mark of strangeness on the self, rendering the person nearly incorporeal and unidentifiable to oneself. This brings up a crucial issue for our modern experience: how to depict loss and trauma. Memorial Drive uses examples and insights on grief, loss, and trauma to explore this concept. Trethewey is able to make sense of her life following her mother's passing through poetry and prose. The poem "Graveyard Blues" from the collection of poems Native Guard, which describes the unavoidable cycle of trauma, is a great example of how she dealt with her mother's passing.

According to Trethewey's conclusion in Native Guard, “[w]hat matters is the transformative power of metaphor and the stories we tell ourselves about the arc and meaning of our lives.” The gaps left by Trethewey's poems can be filled by her narrative, which also makes parallels between her life and her mother's life and death. Trethewey also addresses the death of her mother in the poem "Myth" in this passage. The poem addresses the emotional upheaval brought on by losing a loved one. The poem's opening nine lines make an attempt to describe the bizarre emotions of mourning experienced when a loved one passes away. Since the speaker was sleeping when the loved one passed away, the poem opens with the speaker's ignorance of the death. The speaker now only experiences the loved one during the brief period of time between sleeping and waking, which is indicated by the allusion to the mythological limbo of "Erebus." The speaker expresses his or her desire to bring back to life the deceased loved one. In the limbo, the speaker feels abandoned as they turn to look for the person behind them but they are no longer there. The speaker reiterates this mark of abandonment after an asterisk. They become aware that they have been having dreams about their loved one who has passed away. The speaker again laments the loss of their loved one and wishes they could be successful in finding them. The speaker becomes aware that they have been keeping their loved

one with them by creating the liminal zone between dreaming and consciousness, but the loved one has passed away.

Poetry and memoirs offer a forum for processing and discussing difficult experiences. The proverb "the willow that bends in the wind survives; the oak that resists, breaks" is one that can be found in many cultures, according to poet Gregory Orr in his book *Poetry as Survival* (Orr 43). According to him, this implies that the best way to deal with "disorder" is "to let it enter you, to open yourself to it, rather than resisting or denying its power and presence" (Orr 43). This seems to support the notion that trauma victims can become empowered by embracing their tales and taking ownership of the narrative. Orr believes that the first step in surviving a crisis is to "'translate' our crisis into language," as doing so puts a "bearable" space between the victim and the incident and is also an active action as opposed to "passively enduring [the event] as lived experience."

The set of events in the narrative advance throughout the memoir due to the connection between grief, trauma, agency, and voice. By giving voice to her mother's suffering and the author's grief over her mother's passing, Trethewey attempts to counteract this erasure of Black women's voices in the book. She focuses on the immediate events leading up to and following her mother's murder in order to delve deeply into her mother and her own psyche rather than the wider environment. Trethewey makes it possible for her mother's and her voice to be heard in this way. In the end, the author uses Gwendolyn as a focal point for the abuse and trauma victims.

Trethewey is able to reevaluate how she portrays her own and other people's grief and pain through the memoir. The author de-centers herself, recreates a newer self, and returns to the scene of the crime in order to portray the anguish she felt at the loss of her cherished mother. This allows her to describe the pain and misery of her mother's passing. Trethewey gives consideration to the experience of grief. Grief is obviously upsetting on an emotional level, but it also gives the bereaved a chance to regain hope and find a purpose for living in the world despite the continual interference of death. "Even my mother's death is redeemed in the story of my calling, made meaningful rather than merely senseless" (211), continues Trethewey. Writing about the pain and suffering she went through after her mother passed away not only helps the author bring her mother back from the dead, but it also enables her to see the world from a new perspective.

The fundamental element is the idea of continuity between past and present, and African-American women writers seem particularly interested in showing the ways in which the present has been affected by the past and history. Such contemporary writers seem especially engaged in a re-examination of important issues regarding their role and the role of the black people, as a whole, within American society and culture. They think that they can bring back to light parts of the black experience that have been ignored or misrepresented by official American culture. Black women writers want to stress the uniqueness of their experiences and perspectives that differ from those of many black male writers as from those of white American writers. In addition, they feel a strong responsibility in preserving their cultural heritage, and, at the same time, in recreating a culture which could be passed on to the new generations. In her book, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, for example, Alice Walker stresses how daughters have to rebuild emotional bounds with their own past:

"we must know our mothers' names, [. . .] [their] words, [. . .] [their] actions, [. . .] [their] lives" (276). Her intent is to recollect and reconstruct forgotten lives, in order to rescue them from oblivion or indifference.

Conclusion

In *Memorial Drive: A Daughter's Memoir*, Natasha Trethewey offers a profound exploration of grief, loss, and trauma, grounded in the deeply personal tragedy of her mother's murder. Trethewey employs the conventions of the blues song, including the repeated phrases and lines that work as recurring bridges, to enact and re-enforce the painful tragedy of death. The memoir is not just a story of individual loss, but a reflection on the collective trauma experienced by Black women in America, and how personal grief is shaped by societal forces. Through using the lens of personal narratives, Trethewey invites the readers to get engaged in a broader form of historical and social issues which also includes race intersections, racial trauma and domestic violence. The memoir of Trethewey aligns with the literacy of African American literary tradition for the personal narrative to serve as the means of social critique and personal.

Trethewey generally memorises her mother's whole life dynamic from living to murder and dying and asserts a narrative which shows her identity as a daughter, survivor and poet. The act of writing becomes a form of resistance against the erasure of Black women's stories and a way of reclaiming her mother's memory from the violence that ended her life. The theme of life forgetting and memory is the central synonym of this memoir as Trethewey also focuses on grappling with the psychological impact of trauma and how this trauma disrupts memory. The memoir is forgotten to overlook the violence and trauma faced by the marginalised group of many Black women. Sharing a personal story of Trethewey ensures her mother's memory and erases the history of violence which is experienced. The memoir serves as a form of mourning and remembrance, allowing Trethewey to confront her unresolved grief and begin the process of healing.

In conclusion, it is found that *Memorial Drive* is a powerful exploration of personal trauma and grief which is shaped by a broad range of societal forces. The writing on this dynamic foster a form of reconnection for both her sense of identity and her mother's memory. Trethewey can reevaluate how she portrays her own and other people's grief and pain through the memoir. Trethewey through her memoir serves as a social critique and a narrative of personal loss while offering the reader a moving dynamic of an account experienced by the grief and it also fosters a way to shape the society's large structure. Natasha Trethewey's memoir exemplifies this complexity, as her grief and discusses the linked phenomena of grief and trauma where she considers the horrific circumstances that followed the murder of her mother. Trethewey and her mother are victims of Joel's abuse: but she survived and her mother did not this fact also creates a sense of guilt in her.

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