

# Dwelling in Days Foregone



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*Nostalgia in American  
Literature and Culture*

Edited by

Weronika Łaszkiwicz,  
Zbigniew Maszewski  
and Jacek Partyka

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This volume was reviewed by Professor Tomasz Basiuk,  
University of Warsaw

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## PREFACE

Unless it brings about curative effects for the mind, nostalgia appears to be a futile sentiment. This is probably why Eva Hoffman likens it to alienation: namely, much as alienation is “an ineffectual relationship to the present,” nostalgia is “an ineffectual relationship to the past.”<sup>1</sup> It can also be argued that the bond between these two is far stronger: one can easily be taken as the manifestation of the other. On the other hand, as a blanket term, nostalgia is often used in arbitrary ways, its meaning overlapping with, say, melancholia.<sup>2</sup> Historically considered, the original word based on a Greek compound (coined for medical purposes in the 17<sup>th</sup> century) emphasized “homecoming” (*nóstos*) and “pain” (*álgos*). What exactly this “home” signifies is, however, difficult to pin down, which can be demonstrated if we briefly review rough equivalents or near-synonyms of the word “nostalgia” in different languages. For example, the German term *Sehnsucht* denotes inconsolable thoughts about those aspects of life that are tinged with incompleteness, or about a more or less hypothetical place which, irrespective of its “far-off” and “unearthly” character, is perceived as “home.” The Portuguese *saudade* implies a strong yearning for an absent thing or person, and, at the same time, a state of incompleteness that one, somewhat perversely, wants to preserve and cultivate. The Polish *tesknota*, naming a devotedness to the past, conveys analogical sentiments. The imports of *Sehnsucht*, *saudade*, and *tesknota* can be detected in the three uses of the English verb “pine”: “feel great desire for,” “become feeble through worry” and “grieve.” Still, all of the aforementioned are, to a lesser or greater extent, beholden to the Latin adage *memoria praeteritorum bonorum* (“The past is always recalled to be good”). In brief, dwelling in days forgone seems to have a widely recognized appeal.

The present volume collects papers that examine American literary texts and cultural phenomena as manifestations and/or expressions of nos-

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<sup>1</sup> Hoffman, Eva. 1989. *Lost in Translation. A Life in a New Language*. London: Vintage Books (242).

<sup>2</sup> Hoffman calls nostalgia “a form of fidelity” and “a species of melancholia” (115).

talgia. As the authors of the sixteen chapters demonstrate, the sentiment proves to be a handy key in the process, opening up new interpretive vistas and enabling new critical insights. The experience that comes under scrutiny in their texts is informed by the fundamental division into a certain “present,” which is the domain of insatiability, and a certain “past”—the locus of at-homeness, often irretrievably lost. In fact, the theme of doubleness (or bifurcation) acts as a unifying agent and permeates the whole book.

As a land predominantly populated by immigrants and descendants of immigrants, America is a place where nostalgia has apparently found inexhaustible layers of existential nutrients to feed on and thrive. Accordingly, the present book foregrounds this spatiotemporal dimension of yearnings for “homes,” charting a newly oriented historical map of American literature and culture.

The volume opens with **Zbigniew Maszewski**'s essay that discusses William Faulkner's collection of stories, *Big Woods*, from a personal (and nostalgic) perspective, which links the pleasure of re-reading literary texts, first read and enjoyed in the reader's youth, with the narrative techniques defining Faulkner's work. Focusing mainly on “The Bear,” Maszewski returns to Faulkner to appreciate his evocations of loss, failure, and desire for renewal in the context of Proust's and Hemingway's references to strategies of re-reading literary masterpieces.

One of the characteristic elements of the contemporary cultural landscape of North American Indians is the powwow. **Elżbieta Wilczyńska** argues that nostalgia may be among the key factors motivating indigenous people to widely attend this festive gathering. Following Fred Davis's claim that nostalgia is always engendered by the anxieties of the present—which are mostly associated with a threat posed to one's individual and collective identity—she shows how the mechanism of nostalgia may be activated in the context of Native Americans' participation in powwows.

In her musings on the significance of nostalgia, **Katarzyna Jerzak** considers the prose of André Aciman, who follows in the venerable tradition of exilic literature, both ancient and modern, albeit with a difference—whereas his predecessors treat nostalgia as a symptom of exile, Aciman derives from both exile and nostalgia a perverse, unstable sense of identity with which he imbues his literary personae.

Continuing the problem of exilic sentiments, **Anita Jarczok** analyses two volumes of Anaïs Nin's early *Diaries* and employs Svetlana Boym's concepts of restorative and reflective nostalgia to argue that while the first



instalment of Nin's journal displays restorative nostalgia, the second one engages in reflective nostalgizing. The article suggests that the reconstruction of the past on the pages of the journal and nostalgic reminiscing, together with the journal-keeping practice itself, helped Nin maintain the continuity of her self in the difficult times of the transition from one country to another.

**Anna Maria Tomczak** proposes a reading of Bharati Mukherjee's short story "Nostalgia," which concerns an incident in the life of Dr. Patel—a millionaire Indian immigrant living in New York City. The protagonist is a down-to-earth, acquisitive psychiatrist married to an American, and totally devoid of sentimental longing for his homeland and his Indian family. However, a brief encounter which leads to casual sex with a young Indian girl directs his thoughts to Indian culture and tradition, ultimately forcing him to act in an unorthodox way. Accordingly, his behavior discloses embodied memories of his childhood years. Mukherjee's ironic title provides a critical comment on the "creative reconstruction" of home and the "reappearance of the past" that often accompany expatriates' nostalgic moments.

**Joanna Chojnowska** reflects on the notion of nostalgia in the context of contemporary American black/white biracialism on the basis of Rebecca Walker's critically acclaimed memoir, *Black White and Jewish: Autobiography of a Shifting Self* (2001). The article presents the influence of alternating between her parents' homes on Walker's attitude towards rootedness, exploring the issue of her developing a chameleonic identity to fit in with different groups, and depicting the influence of nostalgia on the lost home on Walker's identity.

**Jerzy Kamionowski** demonstrates how Natasha Trethewey's confrontations with the past function within two separate realms: the personal, which is dedicated to a rethinking of the poet's emotional-cum-intellectual relationship with her father, a poet and amateur historian; and the historical, which confronts the history of the South, and especially the Civil War, from a black perspective, and also reflects on the relationship between Trethewey, as a poet from the South, with the Fugitive Poets and their Agrarian ideology. These realms are closely interrelated and sometimes even inseparable, but their apprehension depends on how Trethewey understands the notion of nostalgia.

Exploring further the racial context, **Kamil Chrzczonowicz** examines the ways in which selected comic authors—Richard Pryor, Chris Rock, Christopher Lander, Stephen Colbert and Louis C.K.—play with racial

tropes in order to point out the fact of the privileged socio-economic position of whites in the United States, make whiteness more visible both as a social construct and a normative concept, and accentuate the exclusionary quality of the nostalgia for a "traditional," ethnically and culturally homogenous America.

**Marta Koval** makes use of Svetlana Boym's concept of nostalgia to analyze the images of childhood in two novels by William Gass—*The Tunnel* (1995) and *Middle C* (2013). Gass brings into play nostalgia, memory and painful historical dilemmas. In both books the historical component shapes memories of the past and determines the function of nostalgia. The article therefore focuses on the relationship between nostalgia as a longing for a "private past" and different modes of the representation of the historical past.

The ways in which John Milton Harney, Joseph Rodman Drake, James Kirke Paulding, John Greenleaf Whittier, Charles M. Skinner, and Nathaniel Hawthorne defined the notion of enchantment and incorporated fairies into their works reveal a lot about the impact which the Old World's legacy had on the sensibility of American writers. Drawing on this recognition, **Weronika Łaskiewicz** examines a selection of works by the aforementioned authors to demonstrate how fairies and enchantment from their narratives express a vicarious yearning for the Old World, boastfully promote the New World, and attempt to recombine the old with the new to create something distinctly American.

**Małgorzata Rutkowska** looks at the tropes of nostalgia in two American bestselling travel memoirs written in the 1980's and 1990's—namely, Bill Bryson's *The Lost Continent* (1989) and Frances Mayes's *Under the Tuscan Sun* (1996). Written in a tone of "restorative nostalgia," both books are accounts of a search for the lost home at a time of emotional turmoil in the authors' lives. Bryson and Mayes seem to capitalize on their readers' nostalgic longings for other times and other places, characteristic of much of contemporary travel writing. Though the books differ in tone, both authors seem to subscribe to popular pastoralism, offering their readers a mythicized version of the past, where life was presumably always simpler and better than in the present.

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) offers a digest of American self-made archetypes: colonial settlers, western pioneers, industrial robber barons, and prohibition entrepreneurs. In doing so, the novel expresses nostalgia for a past that Gatsby does not experience firsthand, thereby animating a symbolic relation between personal and national iden-

tity in which seemingly future-oriented goals compete with desires that are oriented toward the past. To the sizeable body of scholarship focused on the so-called American Dream motif in *Gatsby*, **Mary Towers'** essay contributes an investigation of the hitherto neglected role of nostalgia in the novel that combines close reading and New Historicist methodology to suggest how nostalgia motivates the American national project of self-invention.

In his novel *The Circle* (2013), Dave Eggers waxes nostalgic about the amount of privacy that was possible in the past, at the same time sending a powerful warning of the perils posed by an increasing fetishization of instant web connectivity, the vulnerability of personal data, as well as the fast-growing rise of the surveillance state. Inspired by this narrative, **Robert Kuźma** offers an investigation into the cultural, historical, political and technological milieu which sees the destruction of privacy.

**Aleksandra Matusiak** focuses on Sandra Cisneros' novel *Caramelo*, which is closely based on the author's personal experience and enthrals with subtly poignant illustrations spiced with the humorous cosy mysteries and little dramas of a Mexican-American family. Although the book is ultimately fictional, it presents the author's nostalgic search for belonging, a feeling so common among immigrants, who teeter between two cultures, two worlds and two mindsets.

Sustaining identity in an "alien" land is often connected with cherishing memories of the Old Country left behind. Due to relocation, the homeland is unavoidably lost both in time and space but is constantly reimagined and reconstructed. **Zdzisław Głębocki** traces the classical forms of nostalgic feelings of American Polonia, especially those related with the melancholic longing for the Old Country expressed by immigrants of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and contrasts them with recent postmodern expressions manifested in the digital media.

The aim of **Tomasz Sawczuk's** paper, which concludes the volume, is twofold. Firstly, it sets out to explore the ways in which the Lacanian theoretical apparatus may prove useful in scrutinizing the phenomenon of nostalgia. Particular attention is drawn to the concepts of the object little-a, *tyche*, *automaton*, and the gaze, as they offer interesting insights into and set the frames for the sense of lack, loss, and yearning, all so characteristic of nostalgia. They also furnish the background for a critical study of Jack Kerouac's works—the second focus of the article—which attempts to superimpose Lacan's theoretical scaffolding onto the nostalgic experience of selected characters from the American writer's body of work.

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To a certain degree, all the papers included in *Dwelling in Days Foregone: Nostalgia in American Literature and Culture* have been inspired and/or theoretically strengthened by the ideas from Svetlana Boym's seminal study *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001). It was in August 2015, in the midst of the reviewing and editorial process, that we were saddened by the news of Dr Boym's unexpected passing. It is our hope that the present volume will be read as a tribute to her academic and non-academic achievements.

—The Editors

# A NOSTALGIC RE-READING OF WILLIAM FAULKNER'S *BIG WOODS*

ZBIGNIEW MASZEWSKI

In 1962, in one of the last interviews he gave, Faulkner was asked a provocatively naive and, considering the position he held in the literary world, respectful rather than tactless question: "Do you like writing?" Faulkner's answer, straightforward, admitting his readiness to accept the mode of the conversation was: "I used to when I was young" (Meriwether 1968, 285). He was thus returning to the notions of loss and failure which, as he often liked to emphasize in his interviews, reside at the very heart of all writing, not necessarily of his writing only, or of the writing about the American South. Saying "I used to [like writing] when I was young" in the year he completed *The Reivers*, Faulkner may also have meant that writers feel young as long as they feel driven to go on writing, knowing of the sense of homesickness which a literary work brings, once it has been finished and begins to live a life of its own. As it was not uncommon for Faulkner's public statements to relate a desire to write to the pleasure of reading ("A book which fails to create enjoyment is not a good one," he said in another interview in the same year [Meriwether 1968, 280]), one is tempted to manipulate the words quoted above asking the question: "Do you like reading Faulkner?" and perhaps expect the answer the writer gave to the interviewer's inquiry.

The name of the author, William Faulkner, can, of course, be replaced by any other name from long lists of authors whom we believe to be fading into some personal or collective literary memory. Whether still voiced by professional or non-professional readers today, the lament over the neglected habit of enjoying the works of the literary masters of the past, including Faulkner's, remains inseparable from the realization that such lists depend for their existence on the pleasure of re-arranging, re-evaluating, re-constituting. The sense of the possible loss of the text as a source of enjoyment is also likely to inspire interest in re-reading it, an interest answering the need to return to the texts which we read at the

privileged time when we were young, the texts which today we like to associate with the beginnings of our reading careers. In her 2011 book *On Rereading*, Patricia Meyer Spacks discusses modes of rereading (enjoying, enjoying again, no longer enjoying, enjoying for the first time) of various kinds of fiction she came to know at different times of her life, as a child and as a student, a teacher and an editor of literature. "The sense of having it both ways," she writes, "of preserving the joy that is the object of nostalgia while possessing new powers of understanding, makes the rereading of treasures from long ago especially satisfying" (Spacks 2011, 32).

Of the longing to have it both ways, emotionally and intellectually satisfying, readers must always learn on their own, in terms of their changing personal preferences, influenced, not infrequently in spite of their practices of resistance, by the changing historical and cultural conditions of the times they live in. In the modernist era, insights into the sources of nostalgia for "buried" literary "treasures" gained an innovative analytical clarity in the library of the Prince de Guermantes in the last section of Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*. When at the beginning of Chapter 3 in *Time Regained* the train Marcel rides on comes to a sudden halt, the delay offers him time to observe how little pleasure he can take in actual perceptions, such as that of the line which separates the luminous and the shadowy sides of the trees by the railroad tracks. Noticing that he has grown indifferent to "natural" effects, he knows that to consider himself a poet now would be as erroneous as it was, because of his artistic immaturity, in the past. But in this contemplative analytical re-reading of the lost experience, the past and the present have already been brought together and speak of the rejuvenating creative desires which the meeting of the two is capable of restoring. Loss invariably preconditions Marcel's sense of imaginative gain. On the next page we can see him in the car on his way to Allée du Bois where the Prince de Guermantes has his library and where, as a writer, Marcel will feel at home. The book which catches his eye there, George Sand's *François le Champi*, is, as it often happens in texts evoking personal memories of libraries visited or revisited, "not an extraordinary one" (Proust 1970, 247). For Marcel, thinking of the loss of faith in his own literary powers and in what he calls the "mystery" of literature, it is, however, a book capable of unexpectedly opening up a treasury of sensations, immediately related to the time it was read to him by his mother and "contemplated by me in my little bedroom in Combray" (251). Looking at the covers of the original editions, as he calls the editions in which he read them for the first time, Marcel hears his father saying: "Hold yourself straight" (252), sees, woven into the lettering of the

titles, “the moonlight of the distant summer night” (253). Once they seem again mysteriously hidden and evocatively condensed in their covers and titles, this modernist collector of involuntary memories is actually afraid to re-read them, for too long at least. If in youth to read is simply to enjoy, to re-read in older age is to seek pleasure in fear of the pleasure already being denied to the reader. Homesick for the security of his own text even before he has left it with the sense of discovering his vocation in the library of the Guermantes, Marcel-the-reader knows that “the only true paradises are the paradises that one has lost” (241), and that “the mind has landscapes which it is allowed to contemplate only for a certain space of time” (248).

I refer here to Proust for two reasons. Firstly, Faulkner, whose work I am re-reading, himself declared that he “[felt] very close to Proust:” “After I had read *À la recherche du temps perdu*, I said ‘This is it!’ and wished I had written it myself” (Meriwether 1968, 72). Significantly, this is what in *À la recherche du temps perdu* Marcel also says about his own early fascination with *Arabian Nights* and Saint-Simon’s *Mémoires*; having said it, he goes on to explain that, in order to “follow the truth” and to meet the demands of “another epoch” (Proust 1970, 250), the texts which we love so much when we are young need, perhaps, first to be abandoned, forgotten and then re-written (imaginatively re-read?) by us again. The true wonder of the text is its capacity of becoming resurrected, lost and unexpectedly brought back to life in the experience of the reader who, if only momentarily, again shares his time with the writer. Not much evidence is to be found in Faulkner’s interviews that he actually re-read Proust in his later career. The lists of authors he gave to the students of the University of Virginia included, among others, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Dickens, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Flaubert, Balzac, Conrad. Some of these, he said at a class conference in 1957, he re-read regularly every year, much as one re-visits “old friends,” perhaps “for a little while” only (Gwynn 1959, 150). Re-reading old books, Faulkner told his young listeners, does not mean having to look in them for “anything new:”

unless the evocation with a little more experience on your own part will throw a new light onto something that you thought you knew before and you find now you didn’t, that you maybe know a little more about the truth, that what the good writers say to the young man, he knows instinctively are true things. (Gwynn 1959, 50)

Despite the differences in the contents of their libraries, for Faulkner, for Proust, and for all compulsive readers (including Patricia Meyer Spacks), the books we return to remain the same as they once were read as long as they can open up, were it only for a short time, to embrace our new truths.

A re-reading of Faulkner (and this is my second reason for making references to Proust) is always a comparative reading; it is done from the perspective of the texts of other writers we have read (Proust, for example), and of the likenesses and differences between what readers we think we were in the past and what readers we think we are today.

*Big Woods* (1955) was the first book by Faulkner I read. To know now what it meant to me then, I do not need to read beyond the opening phrases of the texts collected in the volume: “*Mississippi*” in the Prologue (Faulkner 1955, 3), “There was a man and a dog too this time” in “The Bear” (11), “At first there was nothing” in “The Old People” (113), “*The old hunter said:*” in the Epilogue (199); to get under the spell of memories the book conjures up, it is enough for me to see on its page one of the familiar names: Boon Hogganbeck, Sam Fathers, Major de Spain, Old Ben, Lion, McCaslin, Ike, Uncle Ike, or one of the “decorations,” as Edward Shenton’s illustrations for the first edition were called, not very extraordinary ones, if I may judge them so today. In the book which I like to nostalgically re-read, nostalgia is the dominant mood; its function is to govern rather than to color the patterns of its whole design, its chapters, inter-chapters, paragraphs, sentences. A “re-collection” of texts published earlier (the earliest in 1931, the latest in 1954), *Big Woods* bemoans the loss of the American Southern wilderness. The loss comes with cars and trains getting closer and closer to the old hunting grounds, with highways linking towns which still bear the names of hunting stands: Panther Burn, Bucksnot, Bear Gun; with railway tracks bypassing the moulds of “the old predecessors” linking towns which still bear Indian names: Aluschaskuna, Tillatoba, Homochitto, Yazoo. Connecting the past and the present in names of places which, like the names of places in Proust’s work, tell us of what is no more, these lines of highways and lines of railways tracks, getting longer and longer in the Epilogue, are as much signs of the old world’s destruction as they are signs of the new creative power which nostalgia for the lost world releases. In *Big Woods* mourning wilderness feeds Faulkner’s syntax—his long, cumulative, meandering, sentences built of layer-upon-layer of words and meanings, whose myth-evoking, history-tracing effect depends also on them being followed and preceded by shorter, simpler structures, or by single words. It is then as though out of the density of wilderness, before it closes behind the readers back again once they decide to continue the narrative journey; they come for a brief moment upon a clearing in the woods: “*Mississippi*” (Faulkner 1955, 3), “Then he saw the bear” (30), “*This land, said the old hunter*” (213), “*Because those days were gone,*” “*Well, boys, there it is again*” (201).



In “The Bear,” arguably the most memorable of the stories re-collected in *Big Woods* (though appearing there without Section 4), the phrase “this time” opening up the narrative movement is, like the meeting point of light and shadow on Proust’s tree, a mark of temporal transcendence: the present gains significance by being re-connected to the past, and the past, the many earlier “times” when the autumnal “rendezvous” with Old Ben took place, returns with all its familiar shapes, smells, sounds, fears, expectations, premonitions, failures and satisfactions, all the texts by means of which the immediacy of the hunting experience can be regained, ritualistically and nostalgically (with the phantom of loss, whether temporarily with the end of the season, or permanently with the end of wilderness, always looming). In the repetitive, litany-like structures of the second paragraph animated by the short, factual statement “He was sixteen,” the hunter of “the big woods, bigger and older than any recorded document” (Faulkner 1955, 11) is the writer testing the evocative powers of the literary language. At his wordiest, Faulkner associates hunting with “the best of all talking” and “the best of all breathing” with “the best of all listening, the voices quiet and weighty and deliberate for retrospection and recollection and exactitude” (Faulkner 1955, 11). Remembering hunting in the big woods, Faulkner—both a writer and a reader—is also remembering hunting for the right word.

The distance between the library of the Guermantes in Paris or Marcel’s home in Combray and “the libraries of town houses,” or, “(and best of all),” the hunting camps in Mississippi is not impassable. Re-reading on his own the texts of the wilderness which older hunters, Sam Fathers and others, first read to him when he “wrote his age in two ciphers” (Faulkner 1955, 12), Ike McCaslin never fails to enjoy perceptions of blurring or vanishing lines of demarcation, such as those Marcel could notice from his train to Paris. For brief, privileged moments Ike finds himself at home in places where the luminous and the shadowy, the visible and the invisible, the marked and the unmarked, the familiar and the unexpected, the new and the timeless meet. Entering the woods in the early morning, Ike hears the “night-sounds” of birds fall still and give over to the sounds of the “waking day birds;” when he gets lost, he makes circles “so that the pattern of the two of them would bisect his track somewhere;” he sees a “seepage of moisture somewhere between earth and water;” he sees the contours of the bear’s paw prints fill up with water, overflow and “dissolve away,” these prints appearing to him “as though they were being shaped out of thin air just one constant pace short of where he would lose them forever;” coming out into a little glade while “the wilderness coalesce[s],” he sees the compass and the watch “glinting where a ray of

sunlight touched them;” and then, finally, he sees the bear “walking for an instant into the sun’s full glare and out of it” (Faulkner 1970, 27–30). Reading such passages, reading Faulkner in general, develops “the habit of looking intensely at words,” as John Ruskin put it in the essay “Of Kings’ Treasuries” (Ruskin 1909–14, 45), while at the same time letting one forget about the denotations of particular words and get immersed in the flowing, imaginative, nostalgic reality they create. Ike’s pursuit of the bear is Faulkner’s pursuit of form as a succession of narrative lines which search, posit, solidify, then dissolve, deconstruct, dematerialize. The recollection of the bear’s paw prints, an image of vanishing wilderness, offers a particularly suitable metaphor for Faulkner’s narrative method where successive, repeated patterns evoke a sense of condensation, open an imaginative path towards epiphanic revelations. The patterns seem to gather force and spill forth in an effort to communicate the truth of the actual experience, the truth which like the bear prints, the bear itself and “a huge old bass” remembered at the end of the first section of the story, always seems to be fading and sinking back into “the dark depths” (Faulkner 1970, 30–31). Faulkner’s text celebrates the loss of the possibility of finding proper expression as it recognizes in that very loss a precondition of its further movement.

There is no reason to doubt that for Faulkner-the-hunter the bear was the bear in the same way that for Hemingway-the-fisherman the marlin was the marlin, and the sharks were the sharks. We find sufficient evidence in Faulkner’s commentaries on his work to believe also that for him, as for Hemingway with whom he agreed on what it means to “feel good” having completed a story and then to feel compelled to resume writing what is always “the same story” (Gwynn 1959, 151, 183), hunting and writing are wedded forever, both having their sources in the pursuit as happiness and the pursuit as failure. Faulkner spoke of the writer’s “dream of perfection,” the dream that “anguishes him so much that he must get rid of it” and that, every time it is followed, makes the writer “completely ruthless” (Meriwether 1968, 239–239). The writer’s ruthlessness gives him the right to follow, and if necessary directly borrow, the literary tricks and techniques of the old masters, everything he has read before and can identify his own standards of writing with, without even bothering to acknowledge such practices because, in truth, all stories take shape out of and disappear back again into some commonly shared cultural background—all stories are re-read and re-written (Gwynn 1959, 115, 117). In “The Bear,” Ike McCaslin tells us of such ambitions when he remembers dreaming of the big bear and the big woods, and when, having repeatedly evoked the memory of Sam Father’s early instruction (“and he

did as Sam had coached and drilled him" [Faulkner 1955, 29]), he is granted a fleeting chance to see the bear from across the clearing, in his inherited wisdom of the hunter knowing already that the actual perception must fall short of the dream vision.

There is yet another dimension of the nostalgic in "The Bear," which may remind the reader of the American literary tradition of Poe's ways of linking the degree of perfection different kinds of artistic expression may long for to their analytically measured capacity of producing a desired effect. The medium which "The Bear" and other stories of *Big Woods* celebrate, and much more so than Faulkner's other works (perhaps with the exception of some sections of *The Hamlet*), is poetic and elegiac. "I think that every novelist is a failed poet," Faulkner said in an interview with Cynthia Grenier, "I think that he tries to write poetry first, then he finds he can't. Then he writes the short story, which is the most demanding form after poetry. And failing at that, only then does he take up novel writing" (Meriwether 1968, 217). On the way to Paris, Proust's Marcel, who considers himself a failed poet, would most likely agree and leaving the phantom of the abandoned vocation behind find himself ready to begin his work on *À la recherche du temps perdu*, conceived in terms of a grand architectural design. Faulkner never ceased to entertain the idea of vanishing lines of distinction between the poetic and the prosaic ("My prose is really poetry," he declared [Meriwether 1968, 56]) and to the memory of himself as a young poet most notably indebted to the French writers whose works he admired, re-read, and wished he had written himself. It was this memory of the author whose first published poem proudly bore the title "L'Après Midi d'un Faune" that allowed Faulkner to judge his original prose work, following his initiation to the masters of the past through his own poetic experiments, in terms of "splendid" failures.

The account of the hunter's experience in *Big Woods* shows distinctive traits of Faulkner's nostalgic returns to the poetic medium: highly stylized patterns rhythmically arranged, repetitions of parallel syntactic structures performing the function of the defining contour yet intent on creating a sense of unhindered flow, enumerations of words strung along continuous lines and chosen for their associative and evocative powers, for their sounds as much as for their meaning. Faulkner's concern with the proper form which the old texts of his hunting stories should achieve when included in the new collection is also indicated by the visual design of the Prologue, the four interchapters and the Epilogue: italicized, unnumbered, with ragged right margins. Ike's homesickness remains essentially of aesthetic nature. In the Epilogue, for example, the "old hunter's" longing "to remember and to grieve" his land "which man has deswamped and

denuded and derivered" (Faulkner 1955, 212) seeks gratifying expression in well-balanced, carefully measures cadences, such as the following:

*Because this is my home: this tent with its muddy floor and the bed neither wide enough nor soft enough nor even warm enough for the old bones; my kin, the men whose ghosts alone still companion me: De Spain and Compson and the old Walter Ewell and Hogganbeck.*

*Because this is my land, I can feel it, tremendous, still primeval, looming, musing downward upon the tent, the camp—this whole puny evanescent clutter of human sojourn which after our two weeks will vanish, and in another week will be completely healed, traceless in this unmarked solitude.* (Faulkner 1955, 208)

This is William Faulkner as Ike McCaslin, thinking perhaps not only of the realm of wilderness but also of the realm of literature he rightfully inhabits, where once he "served his apprenticeship" and where in the future his name will become a ghostly presence, like the names of his dead companions, the other writers, whose knowledge and experience he assumed "with joy and pride" (Faulkner 1970, 13). Behind the nostalgic aestheticization of wilderness and of its loss in *Big Woods* stands the figure of the writer looking back, or anticipating to look back, at his past when at some point in his life he "entered" the timeless world of literature which he could claim to be "his" but which he could claim to "own" no more than his predecessors could when they were searching for the same elusive phantom of truth.

It is from this perspective that readers today can ask themselves the questions: Do you like reading Faulkner? Can the rhythmical patterns of his self-conscious poetic prose be absorbed again into the patterns of your time? Are you ready to accept, if only for a moment, the wisdom of "*the lean old man's sapless body folded and fitted easily into the warm and old grove in the old mattress, hands crossed on breast as if in rehearsal for the last attitude of relinquishment and peace*" (Faulkner 1955, 206), or the hunter's "ancient and immitigable rules which voided all regrets and brooked no quarter" (11), or the bear's "heretofore inviolable anonymity" (42)? Can you still enjoy the text which becomes almost fetishistic in its own enjoyment of itself, excessive without (for the most part) distancing irony, proudly possessed by its own form?

One could perhaps answer these questions with the words which Hemingway, at approximately the same time that Faulkner published *Big Woods*, said returning nostalgically to his early years as a writer in Paris: "How can a man write so badly, so unbelievably badly, and make you feel so deeply?" (Hemingway 1964, 137). Hemingway did not say this about

any of Faulkner's works (and might possibly have said only of "The Bear") but about Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, which, unlike Tolstoy's *War and Peace* that "you can read ... over and over," he found himself unable to read, not even in the avalanche time in the mountains left with nothing else to read.

When it is not done for any academic or professional gain, I like to believe, re-reading Faulkner's *Big Woods* is very much a matter of emotional judgment, of how deeply one can feel that what appears on the page can be a substitute for what was or will be lost. It may then still be like the hunter's pleasure in "The Old People:" a sudden appearance of the buck out of nowhere, "just there, looking not like a ghost but as if all of light were condensed in him and he were the source of it" (Faulkner 1955, 113).

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# THE POWER OF NOSTALGIA IN PERPETUATING POWOWS IN NATIVE AMERICA

ELŻBIETA WILCZYŃSKA

One of the elements of contemporary Native American tradition that instantaneously makes non-Indians think about Indians and their culture is the powwow, defined as a Native American festive gathering. According to Albers and Medicine (2006, 26), there are four main types of powwow: individual family, tribal, intertribal, and exhibition. Depending on the type, there can be anything from 15 to 25,000 people in attendance; yet, it has to follow a certain protocol: there must be dancing, feasting, honoring, singing and drumming; the expandable elements are giveaways, prayers, memorial songs, contests and pageants, all performed in very traditional regalia.

For the last couple of years the number of powwows held across the US has been increasing, especially family, tribal and intertribal ones. The large-scale exhibition powwows organized by white people with no or little participation of Indians have been decreasing in number, though they still attract big audiences. In total, at least once a week there is a powwow, and on some summer weekends, dozens are held nationwide simultaneously. It seems reasonable to inquire why this very traditional event is still the most recognizable expression of Native American identity. Why do so many Native people see in the powwow “a source of renewal, joy, strength, and pride” (Ellis, Lassiter and Dunham 2005, VII) and travel long distances to participate in one? Part of the answer is that powwows fulfill a number of vital functions in the Native community: they strengthen Native American identity, both on an individual and a community level; they maintain family and tribal ties; they transmit traditional values, providing new knowledge and awareness of being an Indian; they constitute a unique way of remembering the past, celebrating the present and, for many, finding the strength to go on with their lives in the future. However, if something has been in operation for more than 200 years, in one form or another, then it must owe its popularity to some more potent reasons, one of which, as is the underlying premise of the paper,

may be nostalgia. Nobody goes to a powwow saying directly: “I am going there to sustain my Native American identity.” There must be some stronger stimulus that affects individuals. This paper posits that nostalgia is this kind of coercive power, motivating people to take part in a powwow, more strongly than any commercial, ideological, political or entertainment factors that are naturally at play as well.

The function of nostalgia, its reflexive aspect and the important part it plays in the maintenance of individual and community identity, derives from the definition of this concept coined by Fred Davis in the book *Yearning for Yesterday. The Sociology of Nostalgia*. Janell Wilson, in *Nostalgia. A Sanctuary of Meaning*, and Svetlana Boym, in *The Future of Nostalgia* also provide useful definitions. For this paper, however, what Davis has claimed in *Yearning for Yesterday* is most important:

If ... nostalgia is a distinctive way ... of relating our past to our present and future, it follows that nostalgia ... is deeply implicated in the sense of who we are, what we are about, and ... whither we go. In short, nostalgia is one of the means—or better, one of the more readily accessible psychological lenses—we employ in the never ending work of constructing, maintaining, and reconstructing out identity. (Davis 1979, 31)

So nostalgia serves the function of maintaining a dialogue with the past to help recognize a continuum in a very rapidly changing society. This paper will try to explain how nostalgia may prompt individuals or communities to participate in powwows and why. It will attempt to show how much more insight into the phenomenon of the powwow we can gain by applying the concept of nostalgia as presented by Davis in his discontinuity hypothesis (Davis 1979, 34).

Before looking at powwows from the perspective of nostalgia, the origin and history of the powwow will first be briefly delineated. Then the definition of nostalgia will be provided, and eventually, powwows will be looked at and analyzed through the lens of nostalgia.

## **Powwows—a Brief History**

In a guide to Indian powwows we can read that the word originated from the Pawnee word *pa-wa*, which meant “to eat,” while other research attributes its origin to an Algonquin word *pawaugos*, pronounced /pɔʊəv/, “which indicates a gathering of people for purposes of celebration or an important event” (*Your Guide* 2012), or refers to “shamans and their curing ceremonies” (Kavanagh 1996, 514).

The development of the practice of the powwow as we can see it today seems to be even more of a hybrid. Its dominant element, which is dancing, is said to be “among the most profound expressions of what it means to be an Indian” (Theisz 2005, 86). Indians have always danced, both for enjoyment and for duty: to give thanks, to honor somebody, to mourn, to connect with the Creator. Actually, any public expression is accompanied by a special type of dance, and each dance has its own origin and myth (Gill 1983, 77).

This habit of dancing was noticed by English, French and Spanish explorers in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. Missionaries and explorers of the 17<sup>th</sup> and then 18<sup>th</sup> centuries made the observation that “dancing is one of the principles of their amusement” (Kavanagh 1996, 513). Other missionaries and priests noticed a spiritual and ceremonial aspect in powwows; thus, many of the ceremonies which were subversive towards Christianity and related to nativistic ideology and national power were rooted out as early as in 1645 in the North East, the place of the first contact between the English and the Indians.

Michael Greyeyes claims that the roots of the powwow as a gathering featuring dancing and singing with entertainment undertones go back to the 1800s, when the Poncas created the Hethuska dance to celebrate the harvest, which then spread to other neighboring nations, like the Osage and then the Omaha, who created the Grass Dance, and eventually passed it over to the Sioux (Valaskakis 1993, 162). Hence, it is believed that modern day powwows, understood as “secular events featuring group dancing and social dancing by men, women and children” (Kavanagh 1996, 514) have their origin in the ceremonials held by the Prairie and Plains Indians. As they spread from nation to nation, new innovations and elements were added. Powwows as cultural events intensified in the face of the danger of either extinction as a result of disease, warfare, or the danger of acculturation due to the boarding school system or other policies devised by federal and state governments aimed at assimilating Native Americans. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, not only religious leaders, but also state and federal officials saw powwows as an impediment to acculturation and a link to the old practices, and thus they passed orders prohibiting Indian gatherings, specifically Indian dances.

At the same time and later, the survival or continuation of powwows was possible when some influences beyond the control of federal government started to operate. These comprised the Wild West shows and travelling carnivals, the most famous of which was the Buffalo Bill Cody show from 1883. These shows employed hundreds of Indians and gave them the opportunity both to dance and to sustain the Indian ritual, though



naturally these shows were primarily a means of earning money, as they “tended to reify the dance performances as a tourist commodity, a showpiece of exotic talent” (Kidd 1984, 106). Besides, the theme of Indian dances was also frequent in the popular dime novels of the 1920s and the few silent movies then made (Arndt 2005, 50). Some claim that once forced into the reservation, Indians were also made to dance for the public, who would come and see them parading through the town before the powwow began (“How the Powwow began...”). Another loophole taken advantage of by the indigenous population to resist the ban on dancing was the strategy of organizing dances during American holidays, preferably on July 4<sup>th</sup> or January 1<sup>st</sup>, or of organizing tribal fairs to celebrate the harvest, and agricultural or ranch labor, during which Indians would meet and dance. From this perspective, the propensity to dance and act collectively proved the failure of the assimilationist policy.

It is also interesting to note that quite unexpectedly, when the dances were supposed to have died out along with Native American culture, also due to the assimilationist influence of federal boarding schools by the 1920s, many representatives of the “returned students”—which is the name for graduates of the boarding schools who came back to the reservations—in fact “revived the dances and recreated them to rejuvenate pride [in this case] in the Lakota expressive culture” (Troutman 2004, 34). What happened was that these returned children, educated in the history and culture of white people, upon their return to the reservation missed “their native ceremonies needed to bring them to adulthood” in accordance with the Native tradition. Hence

they used dancing in the reservation as a means to incorporate themselves with their families and communities, as a method to Indianize themselves and gain the respect and acceptance of their reservation communities. (Troutman 2004, 40)

Powwows were also revived after World War II, when returning Native war veterans were given a welcoming ceremony; the events continued for a while, then died out or went underground as a result of the federal termination policy of the mid-1950s. One of the last seminal factors responsible for the reemergence of powwows in the 1970s was the American Indian Movement, which urged Indians not only to fight for the reversal of the termination policy, but also for the reclamation of their lands, culture, sovereignty and political rights. It also spurred Native Americans to go back to their beliefs and practices. Then, along with the Sun Dance and the Ghost Dance, powwows were also reactivated and

were instantaneously recognized as an expression of Indian culture, and this has been so ever since.

### **Nostalgia—Definition**

In order to look at contemporary powwows and understand what part, if any, nostalgia plays in their widespread popularity and attendance, it is necessary to begin by defining nostalgia as it will be used in this paper: coming from two Greek words, *nostos*, meaning return home, and *algia*, meaning pain or longing, it was first used to express the physical ailment of homesickness (Davis 1979, 1). However, since the 1950s, when it became the subject of study for different disciplines, it has been defined in a number of ways: Svetlana Boym says it is a “sentiment of loss and displacement” (2001, 7), Wilson claims that it is “a form of ideologizing or mystifying the past” (2005, 23), while Davis sees in it “a form of sentimental yearning for any object, event, place in the past or a positively toned evocation of the past” (1979, 18). There are many other definitions, even formulated by the same authors, and they always evoke a special way of remembering the past in the present. What can exact this yearning? According to Fred Davis,

[w]hat occasions us to feel nostalgia must reside in the present, regardless of how much the ensuing nostalgic experience may draw sustenance from our memory of the past. (1979, 18)

Which is confirmed by Panelas, who asserts that nostalgia

is always evoked in the context of current fears and anxieties, and looks to alleviate those fears by ‘using the past in specially reconstructed ways.’” (Panelas 1982, 1425)

### **Nostalgia and Powwows**

If nostalgia is caused by the present, then what elements of the present, be it in the 1920s, 1950s, or 1970s, might have caused such fears among Native Americans, making them seek a safe haven in nostalgia which can be appeased by a powwow? If we look at all these dates separately, and then at the events that happened then (briefly described in one of the earlier subchapters), their particular causes might have been different, but what they had all in common was a restriction or a ban on some of the pivotal elements of the Indian way of life, which posed a threat to their cultural integrity or even survival. Pratt’s compulsory boarding school program, the Dawes

Allotment Act of 1887, Jackson's removal policy of the 1830s, the ban on using native language and on practicing native religion, the discontinuation of traditional occupations, and many other things, were all aimed at cultural assimilation and acculturation. Modernization, secularization, urbanization, industrialization—they all took their toll on the Native American way of life, even when they were implemented by Indians living on reservations.

These processes are irreversible, so among the first reactions of Indians to the violence against their culture was either aggression or resentment, despair or listlessness. The law formally forced them to discontinue any traditional practices and occupations. Their way of life, mainly agricultural, was incompatible with the modern way of life. So their culture had to disintegrate in one way or another, as a result of which gathering, hunting, fishing or communal cultivation of fields, depending on the region, were forsaken. Most Native Americans in the given years complied with the law, while some practiced old occupations or rituals in hiding, powwowing included. This discontinuation was resisted and not willingly accepted. Naturally, in a moment of despair, people tend to look for solace for the pain of the loss they are feeling, for the pain of displacement. The sources of solace were often religious practices and customs, one of which was the powwow. The gathering of people, during which they would dance and sing, allowed for the perpetuation of spiritual and social rites, in different forms and arrangements. These "doings," as powwows were also referred to (Albers and Medicine 2005, 26), often represented an affirmation of indigenous culture, which on a daily basis was being downgraded, if not ridiculed.

Initially, the practices of dancing during powwows were organized during family or tribal celebrations, when, either covertly or overtly, Indians would have a dancing or singing feast, a curing or coming of age ceremony. During these ceremonies they were referring to the past "imbued with special qualities, which, moreover, acquires its significance from the particular way we juxtapose it to certain features of our present lives" (Davis 1979, 13). In the 1920s, the 1950s, and 1970s, the predicament of Native Americans, both on the reservation and often off the reservation, was dismal. Their contemporary lives featured community disintegration, economic and physical decline, loss of cultural values, and though not all individuals were affected by these processes (in the big reservations the continuation of tradition and the tribal life style was easier, e.g. for the Navaho or the Iroquois), economic decline and acculturation were still widespread. When Native Americans came powwowing, either to a small family meeting or to a large multi-tribal event, the indigenous vision of the past was revived, featuring community

spirit, comradeship, the honoring of their Native heroes and elders, religious rites such as a vision quest or a whirling log ritual, harmony with nature, or the speaking of their native tongues. The visionary homecoming to the legendary past also served as an antidote to the western world and its values, such as the solitary, individualistic, Christianity-based, materially oriented lifestyle, accessible through the English language. During powwows these longed for features of the past were restored, sustained and perpetuated through involvement in the traditional ceremonies. Only when they are practiced, can their indigenous identity be maintained and their true community spirit and nature felt.

Davis mentions two aspects of a nostalgic experience, which explain how this feeling may be reactivated at a powwow. First, for nostalgia to appear, identity must be threatened with discontinuation. All of the historical facts mentioned above posed a threat to the continuation of Indian identity: the conquest, the westward march, the boarding school system, Christianization, the allotment act, the ban on the communal ownership of land and the use of language, and many others. Not only did they pose a threat, but actually their effects were destructive to the Indian community: Native languages have been lost, many practices rooted in Indian religion given up, tribal councils dissolved, people dispersed. Outside reservations, Indian identity may often be recognized only by skin color, or asserted by the wearing of some iconographic objects like long braided hair and amulets, but this can be seen as superficial (Clifford 1988, 283). So, according to the discontinuity hypothesis authored by Fred Davis,

the nostalgic evocation of some past state of affairs always occurs in the context of present fears, discontents, anxieties, or uncertainties, even though they may not be in the forefront of awareness, and it is these emotions and cognitive states that pose the threat of identity discontinuity... that nostalgia seeks, by marshalling our psychological resources for continuity, to abort or, at the very least, deflect. (Davis 1979, 34–35)

So my understanding is that the nostalgia-born dialectic of the search for continuity amid threats of discontinuity [all the economic, political and cultural pressures imposed on Native Americans to be just Americans] (Davis 1979, 34–35) is activated in the context of a powwow. If some urban, educated Native Americans had a longing to experience some of the basic elements of the past in the life of Native Americans, born out of the first order nostalgia, which claims that “things were better then than now” for Indians, they then enjoyed cultural integrity. The so-called nostalgists

know that Indians “also had problems and experienced hardships then” (Davis 1979, 18), but despite this, they managed to progress and remain Indians, which contemporary Indians find hard to do. So nostalgia-driven Native Americans can take part in some of the discontinued or forbidden practices, and their participation may be a response to their longing for the past, during which Indians led their own way of living according to their peculiar rules and principles. Powwows can bring solace or an opportunity to forget, at least for a moment, about the shapeless (Indianless) form of contemporary Indian life and to recall the past: “the time lost.”

The second aspect is connected with collective nostalgia, which is a sentimental yearning felt by entire cultures, generations or nations. Davis states that the “anxious feeling shared by millions of people at the same moment of historical time...creates a fertile social and psychological medium for production and diffusion of nostalgic sentiment” (Davis 1979, 102). Davis continues to argue that in a closely linked group, mostly a whole generation, people are likely to summon to mind and communicate among themselves “comforting images from the past which seem to iconically bestow upon the past a...certain distinctiveness and separableness” (1979, 102).

Native Americans all over the United States, in the different periods mentioned in the first subchapter, when they constituted one generation, or as Davis says, were invented as generations “because of events, not in spite of them” (Davis 1979, 113), were subjected to the same policies. In the 1920s the Plains Indians shared the boarding school experience, abject poverty, forced removal to the reservation, physical degradation on the reservation due to the loss of former goals in life and the lack of new ones which would motivate them to live, and the loss of a communal way of life and self-governance. In the 1950s they all faced segregation, deprivation of many rights that would have put them on a par with the white community, strong prejudice and the prospect of a termination policy. In the 1970s they witnessed an application of the termination policy, which was like a red alert: we may be no more. These events in the respective generations all produced fertile ground for a nostalgic reaction among Native Americans, who, believing that in the past the Indian identity was more truly expressed, started to organize different kinds of powwows, during which they recreated the practice and revived the feeling of community.

Thus, the proliferation of powwows in these periods may have been a natural response to address the anxious feeling that has been troubling not one individual Indian but respective generations of people of Native American origin across the entire American nation. Albers and Medicine assert that

in the 1960s powwows were largely rural events, typically associated with reservation fairs, anniversary commemorations, and such holidays as the Fourth of July or Labor Day. As their popularity grew, they became a regular, recurring summer feature of small reservation communities and the larger agency town as well as a common event on the urban scene. Combining the old with the new, tradition with innovation, the powwow remains a dynamic event, renewing cultural identities, traditional values, and social ties important to many of today's tribal communities in the USA. (Albers and Medicine 2005, 26)

The perpetuation of rites and specific conduct during a powwow underscores collective identity, intertribal or tribal, and thus it seems to be aligned with the discontinuity hypothesis.

It may be remarked that nostalgia for the “vanishing” Indians is not only conceived by the indigenous population, but also by the white one. The Calgary Stampede and the Duhamel Indian Pageant are among the exhibition powwows organized by white towns, in which Indians may feature as paid guests who take part in dance contests, parades, or rodeos. Yet these events are mainly targeted at white audiences and are organized by white people as well, in cooperation with Native Americans. Renato Rosaldo (1989, 69) claims that this is a manifestation of a white nostalgia which is a “romanticized longing on the part of the colonizers for the culture they have destroyed” to exonerate their guilt, to present the traditional and now undermined version of the history of the heroic cowboy or soldier and the savage or noble warrior. Rosaldo continues that “[n]ostalgia is a particularly appropriate emotion to invoke in attempting to establish one's innocence and at the same time to talk about what one has destroyed” (Rosaldo 1989, 70).

Davis also remarks that “[c]ultural practices, rituals, representations create powerful collective archetypes, which put the individual in close emotional contact with his or her cultural history and evoke feelings of attachment to those periods which may be experienced as vividly personal” (Davis 1979). The archetype of an invincible Indian warrior, a skilled hunter of buffalo or deer, a salmon catcher, a trapper, a shaman, a wise chief or a medicine man, remaining in balance with nature—these are some of the prototypes in the mythologized memory which is the sanctuary of meaning for Indians. These meanings find expression during a powwow when Indians dance a Gourd, Grass or War dance, pray together, honor the medicine man or shaman, wear appropriate costumes, or listen to the beat of a drum whose archetype is the heartbeat of the Earth.