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Telling Stories, Making Selves: Nostalgia, the Lost Cause, and Postbellum Plantation Memoirs and Reminiscences

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Introduction

"Ah, well, these old days have passed away," heaved North Carolinian James Battle Avirett, while recalling the "beautiful belles" and "striking beaux" in affable antebellum Raleigh. "All that is left of them is f or the most part sadly reminiscent," he writes in *The Old Plantation: How We Lived in Great House and Cabin Before the War*.[1] Writing on Avirett's "devoted" portrayal of the "serene and halcyon days" of the antebellum South, one sympathetic reviewer noted it was a "vision too fair to last."[2] Born on a turpentine plantation, "The Rich Lands," in Onslow County, Avirett read law at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill during the early 1850s, was ordained an Episcopal minister in 1861, and served the duration of the Civil War as chaplain on the staff of General Turner Ashby, "Stonewall" Jackson's Chief of Cavalry. As the exploitative nature of turpentine production took its toll on the piney wood forests, Rich Lands was abandoned shortly before the outbreak of the war – a fate that befell many other coastal turpentine plantations – and the family house, enslaved blacks, along with several thousand acres, was sold to defray mounting debts. Although readers of *The Old Plantation* are left to infer that the Civil War and the legacy of the Emancipation Proclamation were to blame for the breakup of Avirett's plantation idyll, the reality was somewhat different though no less tragic. Avirett was thus displaced from his happy childhood home, exiled from his childhood (or, perhaps more accurately, from an idealized time and space). In surrendering to his nostalgia, consoling, certainly, to a sharply felt sense of loss, there emerges too the painful realization of what is missed when gone, the realization that the moment – and others like them – were now passed, leaving the former planter to weep for "the actors in those charming scenes" who "have passed off the stage" and into precious memory. Stripped of their wealth, property, and political authority, many former slaveholding southerners struggled to readjust to the postbellum hopes and aspirations of freemen and women. Imagining his obsolescence, Avirett's nostalgia for the "sunny life" of "old plantation days" held sway over his memories; his longing for a delightful past – irretrievable and thus innately lost – amplified by a dolorous present and uncertain future.[3]

Careful scrutiny of plantation memoirs and reminiscences, the narrative sources that inform this chapter, prompts further consideration of these efforts to accommodate and reinforce certain assumptions in representations of the Old South. Promulgated by the elites whose social, political, and racial interests it serves, this aggregate of private nostalgia supports the collective privileging of a utopian past, the segue of which registers dissatisfaction with the present while framing tropes of authenticity and legitimacy long associated with memory projects that seek to (re)invent the past. The sample of memoirs and reminiscences used here act as a forum through which the South's planter class expressed an underlying urge to reconnect with the past and thus salvage and shore up personal and social identities in the years following the Civil War and Reconstruction.

Several recent critics have demonstrated the importance of autobiography and memoir as forms of historical evidence and perspective, revealing a complex amalgam of personal attitudes and perspectives that underpin the norms of southern history and culture.[4] In this context, John Inscoe's *Writing the South through the Self* explores several canonical works to reveal the South's "past at its most intimate, its most emotional, its most human."[5] Although the southern autobiographical impulse has excited much scholarly interest over the last two decades or so, late nineteenth and early twentieth-century plantation memoirs and reminiscences remain consistently overlooked in this area of academic inquiry, as well as in social and intellectual histories of the Lost Cause. Critics remain sceptical about portrayals of the Old South painted by memoirists such as Susan Dabney Smedes, R.Q. Mallard, and Letitia M. Burwell, to name only a few, who described plantation scenes through a haze of moonlight and magnolias. Among the few historians who have critically examined the autobiographical life-writing of the South's planter class, John Blassingame has demonstrated the worth of these narratives to "move closer to the complex realities of life in antebellum America," sensitively mining the literary strategies adopted by male and female authors across a diverse *oeuvre*.[6]

Mindful of Blassingame's carefully considered evaluation of planter narratives, this chapter begins with a brief examination of nostalgia as means to bridge the gap between continuity and discontinuity of experience in the temporal continuum, placing that discussion within the socio-political world of the late nineteenth-century South. In doing so, I demonstrate the lineaments of nostalgic experience for a group of authors within the Lost Cause, exposing the emotional and political use of history and memory that shaped white southern identity in the post-war years. I then move to outline some assumptions about this genre of life-writing, examining: first, how plantation memoirists understood the purpose and utility of their personal narratives, highlighting how these autobiographical constructions approach themes clustered around subjective experience and the location of the self in the past and; second, how structures of retrospect codified the Old South into a lost racial utopia, drawing upon the image of the faithful slave to support the Lost Cause, reinforce racial hierarchies, and outline the kind of racial order envisioned by southern whites in the postbellum era.

Narrating the discontinuity of experience

In recent years, critical study of nostalgia has flourished. Notwithstanding its considerable diversity, this work, in calling for greater theoretical care in scholarly treatments of nostalgia, signifies an attempt to rethink, develop, and nuance some of the principal assumptions and uses of the multifaceted phenomenon; an effort, more specifically, to challenge nostalgia's stereotypical image as a reactive malaise as David Lowenthal, writing in the 1980s, identified. Broadly speaking, recent interventions have been centrally concerned with nostalgia's critical agency and potential, forcefully illustrating how individuals and groups deploy nostalgia to make sense of the past in the present. According to Elihu Howland, nostalgia "is worth our serious attention. . . . Because it is not merely a vapid yearning for a dead past but a vital emotion central to all human life and though it can be our undoing, it can at times be our salvation."[7]

For many, nostalgia is best understood as a rhetorical practice that enables and supports articulations of continuity with the past in response to an experience of discontinuity in the present. "In the clash of continuities and discontinuities with which life confronts us," writes sociologist Fred Davis in his influential study *Yearning for Yesterday*, "nostalgia clearly attends more to the pleas for continuity, to the comforts of sameness."[8] For Davis, nostalgia thrives on "rude transitions rendered by history" and thus on the uncertainties, fears, and anxieties that such disruptions and dislocations engender in individuals, groups, or larger societies. Nostalgia, then, in response to personal needs and political desires, uses the past in "specially reconstructed ways" and plays an important role in identity construction and representation, often cultivating "appreciative stances to former selves."[9] If a crucial dimension to the nostalgic mood or experience is the formation and maintenance of the self in our personal and collective histories, its evocative heft also serves as a lens through which segments of past standards, sensibilities, and simplicities are magnified and coloured, using these memory locations to fashion and value a relevant, significant, and viable past.

Drawing attention to the relationship between continuity and discontinuity in the critique of nostalgia, Stuart Tannock, extending the scope of his analysis beyond Davis, has highlighted how nostalgia operates as a “periodizing emotion” in which ‘then’ and ‘now’ converge with, and depart from, certain strands of nostalgic narrative and structure. Instead of characterizing the nostalgic turn as a search for continuity, Tannock’s reading weaves together the “continuity asserted” and the “discontinuity posited” by the nostalgic subject, animating the tension between a prelapsarian past and a postlapsarian present.[10]

More recently, Nadia Atia and Jeremy Davies, in a special issue of *Memory Studies*, suggest that nostalgia can be interpreted as a creative and analytical form of memory-work. By paying particular attention to nostalgia’s narrative pattern in relation to fragmentation, separation, and loss, for example, they posit this kind of nostalgic mode undergirds the construction of identity, guiding the negotiation between continuity and discontinuity. Here, continuity and discontinuity are understood not as “clear-cut opposites” but rather a crucial instant of recognition that realises “the continuity of our identity resides precisely in our most personal discontinuities,” wherein nostalgia names the emotion that arises from a “felt awareness of how identity is entangled with difference.”[11] It is important, then, to recognize how nostalgia manages experiences of continuity and rupture, negotiating the relationship between past and present, then and now, absence and presence.

With this in mind, the Lost Cause, the movement to memorialise the Old South and the Confederacy, provided white southerners with a compensatory mythological narrative necessary to work their way through the Civil War’s shattering outcome and aftermath, helping a defeated people to make sense of their lives by recourse to history and memory that was selected, developed, and maintained to help explain the past, make sense of the present, and shape expectations for the future.

By the 1880s the white South's "regional autobiography" had coalesced around an imagined plantation community, a lost feudal kingdom, replete with images heroic hotspurs, beautiful belles, and steadfast slaves. Nostalgic overtures to plantation life before emancipation "culturally anchored" the authority of postbellum southern whites, particularly an emerging middle class, in pro-slavery opinion modified for the postwar era. This narrative construct celebrated race, class, and gender accord while muting a rising tide of racism, attempts to impede blacks' voting rights, lynching, and the imposition of the Jim Crow laws during the late nineteenth century.[12]

At the same time, plantation memoirs and reminiscences, which raise and assemble structures of feeling, and ways of being and seeing, participated in the struggle for memory and historicizing of the Old South, the Civil War, and its aftermath, revealing the close association between nostalgia's turn to continuity and discontinuity and the impulse "to play the beguiling game of celebrating the past so as to better endure the future."[13]

In her memoir, *A Belle of the Fifties,* Virginia Clay includes recollections of some southern planters and politicians. For instance, she cites E. Spann Hammond, the son of South Carolina governor James Henry Hammond, on "those bygone days" before secession and war, framing concerns couched around the discontinuity of lived experience: "To me it seems as if I had been in two worlds, and two existences, the old and the new, and to those only knowing the latter, the old will appear almost like mythology and romance, so thorough has been the upheaval and obliteration of the methods and surroundings of the past."[14] Mary Norcott Bryan's before-and-after recollections between presents and pasts chart for her children an account of plantation life in North Carolina from "the dear old Dixie days" through "the awful war and its attending miseries" to the "disgusting Reconstruction period," creating a sense of disjunction between eras.[15] As Kentucky-born H.S. Fulkerson put it, the postbellum South appeared "a travesty" when compared alongside its "purer and better" antecedent.[16] Exploring how these binaries co-exist, inform, and guide nostalgia's critical engagement with the past in postbellum plantation life-writing, and bringing these hitherto unexplored texts into conversation with Lost Cause rhetoric and history, will advance understanding of white southerners' revision of the Old South and plantation slavery and how they used a reimagined past to serve white southern identity and historical distinctiveness following the Civil War and Reconstruction.

Between somewhere and elsewhere

Reflecting on his Virginia upbringing, J.S. Wise in his appropriately titled memoir *The End of an Era* writes in response to an experience of discontinuity and separation. For Wise, the Civil War was a "social, economic, and political earthquake," a rupture "never surpassed in suddenness and destructive force," that "burst upon" the South and its people, affecting change on such a scale that it "left little trace of what was there before."[17] Thus "the happy days" of his childhood and youth on the family's ancestral estates "passed away." These days belonged "to a phase of civilization and a manner of life which are as extinct as if they had never existed," he lamented.[18] Similarly, in his short memoir of daily life on a Georgia seaboard plantation, Edward J. Thomas noted that he "lived in two distinct periods of our Southern history," for the Civil War had "completely severed the grand old plantation life" from the "stirring and striving conditions that followed."[19] W. Fitzhugh Brundage has drawn attention to the "instability and uncertainty of the postwar era," together with "the unmistakable reality of Confederate defeat," that was a "formative influence on southern historical memory" for decades to come.[20]

For plantation memoirists, the loss of a collective past and attachments to childhood engendered nostalgic activity, often captured in vignettes that contrasted past plenitude with present-day lack and deficiency. In her autobiography, *A Slaveholder's Daughter,* Belle Kearney bemoaned the condition of Mississippi's planters at war's end in a chapter entitled "Changed Conditions." Therein she noted landowners were "in the throes of readjustment" as they confronted the "new and untried conditions" of a post-emancipation future. "The land which had been celebrated for its prosperity was the habitation of wrecks of human beings and ruins of fortunes," she wailed.[21] By contrast, Kearney's previous chapter, "The Old South," gloried in descriptions of "time-honored" social customs and "congenial and delightful" antebellum society.[22] In 1901 Frank A. Montgomery, another Mississippian, published his reminiscences of childhood on a cotton plantation in Jefferson County (which he inherited, along with its enslaved population, when he was orphaned at a young age), his wartime service with the First Mississippi Cavalry, and subsequent postwar career in farming, law, and politics. In Montgomery's view, Reconstruction, particularly the unprecedented voting rights and political power given to former slaves, was an era of humiliation, one in which white southerners, who "lay stunned and helpless" before their northern conquerors, were thrust into an "unknown future." Montgomery admitted that he "had struggled to maintain [him]self" on the plantation, which had "gradually dwindled down to a small farm," noting that he had "wholly failed to adapt" to postbellum economic realities and labor relationships and "from that time on gave it up."[23] Looking back on his life as a cotton planter and that "olden time" before the war, Montgomery wallowed in memories of that "most delightful existence," of "happy," contented slaves, of a warm and generous welcome, a "broad and generous hospitality," and other examples of fun, frolic, and festivities on the old plantation. "These were the halcyon days of the south," we are told, "never to return."[24]

In their memoirs and reminiscences of antebellum plantation life, former slaveholders elevated to high status the 'Big House' and sprawling agricultural estates. If the nostalgic drift allowed plantation memoirists to approach the plantation house and enter its rooms once more, “as if time and place were interchangeable, and time itself a succession of irrecoverable homes,” these authors were also reminded of the impossibility of return, an ambivalence that lies at the heart of nostalgia’s bitter-sweet dichotomy.[25]

“We danced on and on, never thinking this was to be our last dance in the big house,” recalled Eliza Ripley of Christmas celebrations in 1859 while living on Arlington plantation near Baton Rouge. By the following year, danger had turned into deliverance. The plantation house eventually “slid into the voracious Mississippi,” along with the slave quarters which had “fallen into ruins,” and the enslaved population were either “scattered or dead.” Ripley’s memoir illustrates the tensions between two worlds on the continuum of human experience, the places and spaces of childhood past and the adjusted sphere of an imperfect present. “The children, so happy and so busy then, are now old people,” Ripley grieved. “We lived, indeed, a life never to be lived again.”[26] If, as Louis D. Rubin, Jr. has written in relation to reminiscence and memory, nostalgia expresses the “wish to return to an irrecoverable past: irrecoverable *because* it is past,” then this inherently contradictory aesthetic of longing may also be seen, however painful, as a felt, if fleeting, moment of restorative experience, providing comfort, succour, and reassurance against swirling undercurrents of turmoil and change.[27]

Disconnected from the past self and an unspoiled past, from time personally experienced, postbellum white southerners hovered between home and exile, a transitional space where nostalgic reaction could thrive. “Oh, these memories, how sweet they haunt us,” wrote Charles Henry Smith, alias Bill Arp, the Georgia humourist, in a collection of his reminiscences. “The memories of the past grow sweeter as the years roll on. . . . [T]he treasure of age is memory.”[28] Many used the autobiographical occasion to gaze back upon the “un-dead past” – Robert Penn Warren’s evocative phrase for the Janus-faced deportment of his native region – and thus utilize a narrative space to discuss the burdens of the contemporary world and future concerns, as well as provide a repository for a lifetime's memories to benefit posterity and future generations.[29] H.M. Hamill, for example, paroled at Appomattox aged sixteen, claimed the Old South "the one unique page of our national history," a culture-bound assumption that informed his sense of self and the impulse behind committing his memories to print and publication.[30]

As David Blight has written, "Just as reminiscence reflects essentially the need to tell our own stories, so too crusades to control history demonstrate the desire to transmit to the next generation a protective and revitalizing story."[31] If some turned to the Old South and memories of antebellum slavery to historicise an era and its peoples, others developed literary strategies that claimed the status of truth for their memories, however imperfectly remembered or rendered. Caroline E. Merrick begins her 1901 memoir *Old Times in Dixie Land*, a tribute to her plantation home, Cottage Hall, in East Feliciana Parish, Louisiana, by stating what follows represents "an honest effort to tell the truth in the recollections of one's life – for, after all, truth is the chief virtue of history."[32] H.H. Farmer insisted that he had "endeavoured to be fair and true" in his memorial of Virginia before and during the war. "Above all things, historic veracity should be observed," he stated.[33] Suggesting that memoirs and other self-representational texts bring readers "close to the human soul," Myrta Lockett Avary suggested her personal recollections of how Virginians "thought, felt, and lived" during a "one of the most interesting and dramatic periods of our national existence" gave to her personal "record of those days" a "fidelity" that other literary forms lacked, speaking powerfully to the "veracity of history."[34]

As Margaret Devereux of North Carolina explained in the introduction to her *Plantation Sketches,* published in 1906 for her grandchildren, such autobiographical constructions of the self were justified, even necessary, at a time when the present threatened to eclipse the past in shadow forever, leaving "those whose hearts still cling to the 'Old

South' [to] look sadly backward and sigh." To allow the antebellum past to "fade away into dimness," to be "lost to sight," and therefore "live only in the memory of a few," was a chilling prospect: calling time on an illustrious past. Determined, then, "to rescue from oblivion" some of those "habits, thoughts, and feelings of the people who made our South what it was," Devereux drew imaginatively from memory to offer her "pen sketches of plantation life." In addition, Devereux also intended to counter widely held misconceptions that slaveholding southerners were "cruel despots" and that their enslaved peoples were mistreated, an important purpose of writing for many other plantation memoirists.[35]

In search of the faithful slave

As local governments and state legislatures across the late nineteenth century South gradually sanctioned white political dominance, black disfranchisement, and racial segregation, and in a national context of post-Civil War reunion and reconciliation that marginalized slavery from the war's causation, thousands of Americans, both North and South, propelled themselves into a sentimental world of aristocratic gentility and rural allure, into a "pre-Civil War, exotic South that, all but 'lost,' was now the object of enormous nostalgia" as America entered the Gilded Age.[36]

By the 1880s and 1890s, "the destruction of the antebellum dream in war converged with the lost childhoods" of many Lost Cause devotees. "Individual desire for childhood innocence converged with a regional longing for racial harmony," writes Grace Elizabeth Hale.[37] Just as abolitionist writers had insisted upon slavery's cruelties, postbellum southern whites elevated their own moral superiority over their erstwhile opponents with their emphasis on planter compassion and custodianship a relationship of mutual attachment and kindness that united all, black and white, master and servant, together in a familial bond of love and affection.

Written to honour her late father, Thomas Smith Gregory Dabney, and to "throw a kindly light on Southern masters," Susan Dabney Smedes's *Memorials of a Southern Planter,* published in 1887, champions the social manners and customs of the Old South and defends the South's 'peculiar institution.' According to Smedes, the Dabney family enjoyed a very close relationship with their enslaved peoples, and regarded the household servants, "inherited for generations," with "great affection," a feeling "warmly returned by the negroes." Smedes insisted on the "sacred" bond shared between master and servant, one that was as "close as the tie of blood."[38] In *On the Old Plantation*, J.G. Clinkscales estimated that the attachments between master and slave in the rice growing Piedmont section of South Carolina was "very strong and very beautiful."[39] With phrases such as 'our people' and 'belonged to the family,' plantation memoirists' saccharine gushes to tender affinities between the races rested on an insistence of a golden age in antebellum race relations when deferential love and adoration existed between masters and the enslaved. That feelings of "mutual attachment and kindness" ran deep was concisely put by R.Q. Mallard in *Plantation Life Before Emancipation*, a series of letters written originally for the *Southwestern Presbyterian* magazine based upon his plantation experiences in Liberty County, Georgia, when he noted: "No one who credits the statements of the competent and truthful eye-witness . . . will for a moment doubt that in innumerable instances the bond which bound master and slave had almost the kindness, tenderness and strength of the ties which connect dear kindred."[40]

Stories of devoted slaves who remained faithful to their masters and mistresses even during wartime, permeate Lost Cause nostalgia, as white southerners tried to convince themselves that something special had been truly lost with emancipation and freedom.

According to Letitia M. Burwell, Virginia's slaves "remained faithful" to their owners during the war, "manifesting kindness, and in many instances protecting the white families and plantations during their masters' absence" as Union and Confederate armies gradually transformed the state into "one great camping-ground, hospital, and battlefield."[41] Although R.Q. Mallard acknowledged that "some bad slaves," many of whom had been duped by "large promises of freedom," escaped to Union lines, "the great mass of them . . . remained quietly in their homes, and took care, with a beautiful fidelity, of the families of their owners."[42]

Some plantation memoirists even insisted that their slaves did not wish to be free, recollections that were often told by a black dialect voice in styles reminiscent of the commercially successful 'local colour' stories from authors such as Joel Chandler Harris and Thomas Nelson Page. One planter's daughter remembered her father's servant, Aunt Pallas, a "dear old faithful mammy," refused freedom under the conditions of his will. "Lawsa massey Mars Charlie I ain't got no notion of bein' . . . free," she apparently exclaimed. "I shore don't want no more freedom den I has already got. I thankee, Mars Charlie, just de same."[43] Writing of her upbringing in Mississippi, Susan Dabney Smedes used several recollections of enslaved peoples, including Mammy Harriet, the family's long-serving nurse, to demonstrate that her father was a good master in both slavery and freedom. "Law, I tells eberybody dat mammy is jes' as well off as she was in slave'y times," Mammy Harriet's daughter insisted. Keen to emphasise her father's paternalistic acts of generosity and goodwill long after emancipation, Smedes detailed a number of instances when the former planter provided clothing, provisions, and other comforts for his ex-slaves. "Law, mammy don't hab no trouble like we all, 'cuz de white folks don't forgit her," continued Mammy Harriet's daughter, an observation that allowed Smedes to make assumptions about the nature of racial decline since emancipation.[44]

As Richard Gray has explained, the employment of a former slave to evoke a blissful and racially harmonious antebellum South "made nostalgia dramatically permissible" which, in turn, allowed it to "be presented as an aspect of character as well as a quality of the text."[45] Thus slave fidelity went hand-in-hand with planter benevolence and custodianship.

The "idealization of slave life and glorification of loving and faithful black slaves, especially the Mammy, sought to conceal alternative memories of violence, exploitation, and cruelty," as W. Fitzhugh Brundage has reminded us of the inherent silences in this sentimental literature. As sure as the look in these works is backwards, with affection, slavery is, in effect, effaced, cleansed of its degrading and dehumanizing aspects for Jim Crow era audiences, leaving no trace of "[s]lave auctions, beatings, and uprisings, much less more mundane hardships . . . in this white historical memory."[46] Southern blacks, for the most part, were reduced to obtuse caricatures of their former selves, docile and acquiescent, boldly lauded whenever Lost Cause racial philosophy required strengthening from old friends.

Indeed, even advocates of the New South, such as Atlanta newspaperman Henry W. Grady, pandered to nostalgia for old slavery days in service of their efforts to realise a vision of a modernised and economically revitalised postbellum South built on industry and commercial enterprise. This New South Creed, as Paul M. Gaston called it, fused together industrial progress and Lost Cause nostalgia to create a powerful mythology that offered a narrative of continuity thus maintaining a distinctive regional identity derived from the finest elements of Old South civilization.[47]

Conclusion

Many critics have drawn attention to the prevalence of an antebellum plantation imaginary, a vernacular South replete with images of kindly masters and mistresses and their adoring, well-mannered slaves, as Americans, both North and South, confronted tremendous social, political, and economic change during the late nineteenth century. Gilded Age Americans, David Blight has written, "needed another world to live in; they yearned for a more pleasing past in which to find slavery, the war, and Reconstruction," a world away from the ugly racial and labor tensions of fast paced industrialization and immigration.[48] Nostalgia made modernity's disorientations and dislocations navigable.

A significant academic literature has begun to emerge around nostalgia, a felt state of recall that has gained critics but also currency across many disciplines, not least in memory studies. The research is highly relevant to understanding the Lost Cause and Civil War memory, and raises interesting questions about the formulation of mythologised, nostalgic ideas about the southern past; the extent to which memories are shaped by experience and entrenched ideas about intelligible hierarchies that privileged southern whites; and the emotional and political biases, racial and otherwise, of dominant historical narratives in identity construction. As Fred Davis rightly observes, "the past is never something simply there just waiting to be discovered," but rather the "remembered past," though it may well constitute a very welcome trip down memory lane, "is something that must constantly be filtered, selected, arranged, constructed, and reconstructed from collective experience."[49]

As this chapter has set out to demonstrate, recourse to plantation memoirs and reminiscences, a genre of personal, reflective writing that has so far received relatively little attention in accounts of the Lost Cause, develops these critical debates, bringing into focus nostalgia as an important framework within which to focus attention on the ways in which remembered feelings, glimpses, and moments of lived experience were incorporated into a narrative order that reinforced images of an idealised Old South and recast southern history and memory in the process. Plantation memoirs and reminiscences emphasize an idyllic plantation community, reiterating narrative plotlines across authors and publishing houses with predictable familiarity. If allusions to a racially harmonious society comprised of docile black slaves and genial slaveholders served as an alternative memory to any concerns southern whites may have had regarding race relations in the Jim Crow South, then such monolithic narrativizations allowed southern whites to raise these affinities as a vital standard with which to measure the present.

Grown old in a world transformed, J.S. Wise captures the discomfiting sense of distance between now and then, closing thoughts on the receding past, in the final line of his memoir, *The End of an Era*: “Nor is it more difficult now for the reader than for the writer to realize that this narrative is aught but a dream,” he states, reflecting on a life-story that rests upon an increasingly remote southern past, a past retreating further away with each passing year.[50] Wise’s pages foster the embrace of nostalgia, animating tensions between an illustrious past and impoverished present, creating a discursive space, as seen in most plantation memoirs and reminiscences, for an imaginative, yet recuperative, coming to terms with history, memory, and identity.

Notes

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[1] James Battle Avirett, *The Old Plantation: How We Lived in Great House and Cabin Before the War* (New York: F. Tennyson Neely, 1901), 170-71.

[2] *Charlotte Daily Observer*, 5 October 1901, 11.

[3] David S. Cecelski, “Oldest Living Confederate Chaplain Tells All? Or, James B. Avirett and the Rise and Fall of the Rich Lands,” *Southern Cultures*, 3 (Winter 1997): 11, 17-21; Avirett, *Old Plantation*, 171, 189.

[4] See, for example, Darlene O’Dell, *Sites of Southern Memory: The Autobiographies of Katherine Du Pre Lumpkin, Lillian Smith, and Pauli Murray* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001); Jennifer Jensen Wallach, *“Closer to the Truth Than Any Fact”: Memoir, Memory, and Jim Crow* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008); and Peggy Whitman Prenshaw, *Composing Selves: Southern Women and Autobiography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011).

[5] John C. Inscoe, *Writing the South through the Self: Explorations in Southern Autobiography* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 18.

[6] John W. Blassingame, “Patterns of Revelation and Silence in Planter Narratives, 1705-1940,” Andrew W. Mellon Professor in the Humanities Lecture, Tulane University (1991): 16. See also, David Anderson, “Down Memory Lane: Nostalgia for the Old South in Post-Civil War Plantation Reminiscences,” *Journal of Southern History*, 71 (2005): 105-136.

[7] Elihu S. Howland, “Nostalgia,” *Journal of Existential Psychiatry*, 3 (1962): 203.

[8] Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (New York: Free Press, 1979), 33.

[9] Ibid., 49, 11, 36.

[10] Stuart Tannock, “Nostalgia Critique,” *Cultural Studies*, 9 (1995): 456-57.

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[11] Nadia Atia and Jeremy Davies, “Nostalgia and the Shapes of History: Editorial,” *Memory Studies*, 3 (2010): 184.

[12] Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage, 1998), 52-53.

[13] Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday*, 49-50.

[14] Quoted in [Virginia Clay-Clopton], *A Belle of the Fifties: Memoirs of Mrs. Clay of Alabama, covering Social and Political Life in Washington and the South, 1853-66. Put into narrative form by Ada Sterling* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1905), 212.

[15] Mary Norcott Bryan, *A Grandmother’s Recollections of Dixie* (New Bern, NC: Owen G. Dunn, [1912]), 11, 43, 34.

[16] H.S. Fulkerson, *The Negro: As He Was; As He Is; As He Will Be* (Vicksburg, MS: Commercial Herald Printers, 1887), 70.

[17] J.S. Wise, *The End of an Era* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1899), 62.

[18] Ibid., 48.

[19] Edward J. Thomas, *Memoirs of a Southerner, 1840-1923* (Savannah, GA: no publisher, 1923), 5.

[20] W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 9.

[21] Belle Kearney, *A Slaveholder’s Daughter* (New York: Abbey Press, 1900), 12.

[22] Ibid., 2, 4.

[23] Frank A. Montgomery, *Reminiscences of a Mississippian in Peace and War* (Cincinnati, OH: Robert Clarke Company, 1901), 262, 273.

[24] Ibid., 19-20.

[25] Andrew Wernick quoted in Janelle L. Wilson, *Nostalgia: Sanctuary of Meaning* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2005), 23.

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[26] Eliza Ripley, *Social Life in Old New Orleans: Being Recollections of My Girlhood* (New York: D. Appleton, 1912), 262-263.

[27] Louis D. Rubin, Jr., *Where the Southern Cross the Yellow Dog: On Writers and Writing* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005), 15.

[28] [Charles Henry Smith], *Bill Arp: From the Uncivil War to Date, 1861-1903* (Atlanta: Hudgins, 1903), 328, 332.

[29] Warren's phrase is taken from his essay "Literature as a Symptom," in Herbert Agar and Allen Tate, eds., *Who Owns America? A New Declaration of Independence* (1936; rpt., Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 1999), 352.

[30] H. M. Hamill, *The Old South: A Monograph* (Nashville: Smith and Lamar Agents, 1904), 6-7.

[31] David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 291.

[32] Caroline E. Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land: A Southern Matron's Memories* (New York: Grafton Press, 1901), 5.

[33] H.H. Farmer, *Virginia Before and During the War* (Henderson, KY: by the author, 1892), preface.

[34] Myrta Lockett Avary, *A Virginia Girl in the Civil War, 1861-1865; Being a Record of Actual Experiences of the Wife of a Confederate Officer* (New York: Appleton, 1903), v-vii.

[35] Mrs. Margaret Devereux, *Plantation Sketches* (Cambridge, MA: Riverside Press, 1906), ix, 1.

[36] Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 211.

[37] Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 53-54.

[38] Susan Dabney Smedes, *Memorials of a Southern Planter* (Baltimore: Cushings and Bailey, 1887), 3, 47.

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[39] J.G. Clinkscales, *On the Old Plantation: Reminiscences of His Childhood* (Spartanburg: SC: Band and White, 1916), 8.

[40] R.Q. Mallard, *Plantation Life Before Emancipation* (Richmond: Whittet and Shepperson, 1892), vi, 235.

[41] Letitia M. Burwell, *A Girl's Life in Virginia Before the War* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1895), 181-182.

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[47] Paul M. Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970).

[48] Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 222.

[49] Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday*, 115-116.

[50] Wise, *End of an Era*, 463.

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