The Historicized Elegy in Natasha Trethewey's *Native Guard*

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Abstract In her Pulitzer winning poetic work *Native Guard*, Natasha Trethewey devotes her elegies to her mother, Native Guards in the Civil War as well as the Katrina-beaten American South. She historicizes the elegy writing so that the private stories and experiences are endowed with historical features. Out of Trethewey's perceptions of histories to be alive, concrete and ever-changing, she doubts the traditional way of historicizing based on visual and textual documents. This article looks into the poetic techniques the poet deploys to realize her historicized elegy writing as well as its cultural influences on reserving and refreshing collective memories of African American people in the South.[1]

Key words historicizing; *Native Guard*; body writing; persona and ekphrastic writing; poetic forms

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Introduction

The contemporary African American female poet Natasha Trethewey suffered the death of her mother in her freshman year in college and after years' of reluctance to talk about this great loss, she finally finds a way out in her elegiac poetry book *Native Guard* (2006). Following her consistent concern on history expressed in her earlier publications — *Domestic Work* devoted to the stories of African American working class in pre-Civil Rights Era and *Bellocq's Ophelia* telling the omitted story of mixed race prostitutes in Antebellum Era New Orleans, etc., this book was

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awarded the 2007 Pulitzer Prize for poetry for reserving the racial legacy of the Civil War. Divided into three relatively separated yet thematically connected parts, namely, her elegy and recollection to her dead mother, elegy to Native Guards[1] in the Civil War and reflection on the American South haunted with racial segregation and natural disasters. As she stated in a conversation, "Throughout *Native Guard*, I was elegizing my home… I wrote an elegy for my hometown" (Bingham & Trethewey 74). With the perception that *Native Guards* is a historical narration of elegies to her mother, this article studies the poetic techniques Trethewey employs to historicize the elegy writing in this book.

The Living History

Finally finding a way to voice the blow her mother's death brought to her, Trethewey throws her personal mourning to a larger notion—the Native Guards in the Civil War and then to the racially separated South, which makes this elegiac writing by no means restrained to lamenting, but bear a historicizing function. The thread connecting people who are rememorized in this book is that they were all silenced and somehow forgotten by history, like her African American mother buried without a headstone, black regimes in the Civil War as well as racially disadvantaged people in the South. Their legends in the world have no monument of any form and their stories untold. And these are the stories and experiences that Trethewey decides to historicize. To historicize means to make something historical, namely to endow things and events with historical features.

As for historical features, Trethewey's works deliver a different message compared with the static sense of history. In *Native Guard*, Trethewey entitles her first poem as "Theories of Time and Space":

> You can get there from here, though
> there's no going home.
>
> Everywhere you go will be somewhere
> you've never been.
>
> […] Bring only

1 Native Guards: Soldiers of the 1st Louisiana Native Guard or other colored regiments of the Union Army in the Civil War. They were largely composed by freed men of color or former African American slaves in the South.

What you must carry — tome of memory,
its random blank pages […] (Trethewey, *Native* 1)

In this poem, Trethewey records her one-day trip to Ship Island near her hometown in Gulfport and meditates on the ever-changing time and space. One can never go back to the place or point of time where and when he once has been, which means the past can never be retained and what is left is only one's memory which stays with him forever. And the "random blank pages" are what one needs to fill in for this is where the omitted parts lie. This abstract poem anchors the whole book about history and memory.

Though all poems in this book are written in standard language and forms, they are still regarded as revolutionary. One of the reasons is that the impulse to rebel and to deconstruct the status-quo history writing approaches is shown through out the whole book. In her poem "What is evidence", she writes:

[…] Not
the teeth she wore in place of her own, or
the official document — its seal
and smeared signature — fading already,
the edges wearing. Not the tiny marker
with its dates, her name, abstract as history. (*Native* 11)

Official documents, signatures and markers of her mother's death are all regarded as "abstract as history" and she denies that they are enough evidences of what happened in the past. These lines deliver a message that history in the real sense doesn't exist in textual materials for they are too abstract and cannot tell a thing. In another poem "Photograph: Ice Storm, 1971," the speaker foregrounds two different versions of the event in the 1971 ice storm: the crystal snow scene caught by the photo; the cramped domestic life and her step father's "fist" on her mother (*Native* 10). Together with the note on the back the photo, it is concluded that the picture tells a great lie. This example uncovers a horrible fact that what is caught in the camera is not necessarily the truth, and words and visual demonstrations can sometimes conspire to knit the lie, not saying the biased and misleading history text book, the movie and the teacher's instructions (*Native* 38), or the monument raised by Confederates' Daughters memorizing the white soldiers omitting the Native Guards' sacrifice (*Native* 46).

Trethewey's story-telling is targeted at the fact that almost all the historicizing

media including textual, visual and architectural devices are unreliable. These are static. However, as she argues, "A statue is a living thing… It lives" (Lara & Trethewey 131), history is never dead or frozen but living within the natural circle of life and death. From her writing of history, it can be detected that history is by no means eternal or static. Instead, it's always changing in the way the world and all kinds of lives do; it is concrete and specific instead of being abstract, which makes history real; it is polyphonic and has multiple versions. Thus every effort to freeze and eternalize the past, like what people do with visual, textual and architectural bearings is no more than human obsessiveness. The way to historicize that Trethewey practices is to enrich the past with life — all statuses of life, alive or dead. On querying the authority of these approaches, in order to voice for the unvoiced, Trethewey employs her creative craftsmanship techniques to embody a different literary historicizing practice and waits to see the outcome.

Historicizing in Body Writing

Trethwey's *Native Guard* manifests her close attention to human bodies, the technique of which has already taken shape in her first book *Domestic Work* (2000). In the description of domestic workers, she throws light upon their body gestures and facial expressions. But in *Native Guard*, her writing of bodies demonstrates more overt features. There are scholars who take notice of Trethewey's arrangement of this subject. Pearl Amelia McHaney (2013) juxtaposes the bodies of a black mother, a biracial child and a white father, which are symbolically represented with her three books *Native Guard*, *Belloque's Ophelia* and *Thrall*, and analyzes the unstableness in this seemingly harmonious family structure. Jill Goad (2016) specially looks into the "deserted bodies" in Trethewey's works, including aging inflexible bodies, disabled bodies, deserted dead bodies of Native Guards in Civil War, etc. and then gives voices to these historically silenced bodies to tell the stories in American South. It is consented that different body states bear their indications, like racial relationship, social and economical condition, etc.

However, as declared by Trethewey in her poem "What is evidence," the evidence of one's ever existence in the world is not defined by any textual document or decoration like fake teeth and making up, but by his or her own body — human body in the natural sense which inevitably experiences a whole life process, from being alive to deceased. "Her thin bones settling a bit each day, the way all things do" (*Native* 11). It is perceived that the poet doesn't expect the body to be eternal and she doesn't deny the decaying of them, only that what the body has gone through needs to be noticed and better recorded. That's the history of the body and

also that of the body owner. Considering this, it's possible to look into the bodies in the book along a time line, namely the past, the present and the future.

Human bodies keep records of its experience intuitively and materially as the "site of history" (McVey 152), so in literary works, bodies are often depicted as symbols of history, possessing history inscribed in it (Mullins 6) and the traces left on body are the most convincing historical proofs. Bodies in Tretheywey's works are both historical evidences and narratives (Mchaney 162-167). In her elegiac poem to her dead mother, Trethewey centers on the broken parts in her mother's body—"splintered clavicle, pierced temporal" (*Native* 11). These are the most direct proof of the crime her step-father did to her mother—shooting her twice, one bullet through her fingers and temporal and the other through her clavicle. The scene inscribes in Trethewey's mind and takes root. The document of this event might wear, but not her memory. That's why people only need to bring "tome of memory" (*Native* 1): people see things and remember, and the memory stays with the person. The violence Trethewey's mother suffered and died for, namely the history of this African American woman, is witnessed and recorded by Trethewey. In the title poem in this book, "It was then a dark man/ removed his shirt, revealed the scars, crosshatched/ like the lines in this journal, on his back" (*Native*, 26). The former slave now becomes a Native Guard, but the scars left by the slave owner' s whip stay, which tell his tormented past. The metaphor here linking the scars on his back to the crosshatching lines in the speaker's journal makes the implication more understandable, that is, the scars are the Native Guard's bitter history and they tell everything about the inhumane violence and racial oppression he went through without a single spoken or written word. This breaks the law in history writing that only those authorized with voices and with the pens could have the chances to tell their history. However, in Trethewey's poetry, bodies tell history, sometimes more convincing and straightforward than words.

Apart from traces on human bodies generated from past time, there are descriptions of human bodies of slowed-down moments in present tense, which prolongs the exposure time of the status quo body gesture or condition. In the poem "Southern Gothic," the speaker describes the body gestures of her parents together with herself in bed as "their bodies curved—parentheses/ framing the separate lives they'll wake to […]" (*Native* 40). Searching the scene from her childhood memory, she turns back and finds meaning in their gesture—the isolated condition in her parents' marriage, part of her mother's history. And as she recalled her mother's gestures and facial impression on a day not long after her mother's death, "her face tilted up/ at me, her mouth falling open, wordless, just as/ we open out mouth in

church to take in the wafer, / meaning communion?" (*Native* 9). For the speaker, her mother's gesture that day is a secret for her to decode forever. Once she could interpret the gesture, the gap between the past and her life is filled. The dying moment of Native Guards is featured in the poem "Native Guard" as "[…] (I) then watched a man fall/ beside me, knees-first as in prayer, then/ another, his arms outstretched as if borne/ upon the cross" (*Native* 28). This one-second process is prolonged by the detailed description of the soldier's body gestures. Ironically, the keening and stretching-arm gestures imitate those of praying and Jesus constrained to the cross. Only that these people didn't die for a sacred course as they have wished for but for persecution by their own comrades.[1]

Other cases indicate that a trauma or violence to a body may haunt the future of this entity or of other people for quite a long time or even, forever. In the Native Guard's dairy, he writes, "The diseased, the maimed, / every lost limb, and what remains: phantom' ache, memory haunting and empty sleeve" (*Native* 29-30). The limb lost in the past makes its influence remain in the person's memory and this psychological trauma doesn't have a due. Here, the absence of a physical limb makes the hurt present forever in the person. And in a larger sense, the absence of the records of social injustice and oppression results in the everlasting appeal for recollecting and uncovering the buried history. Dead bodies of those Native Guards who lost their lives were "unclaimed" (*Native* 28), deserted in the wildness as "the hog-eaten at Gettysburg, unmarked/ in their graves" (*Native* 30) or "swelled/ and blackened beneath the sun—unburied/ until earth's green sheet pulled over them" (*Native* 46) at Port Hudson. They were meant to be exiled from history by the authority, but the improper arrangement opens the gate for arguing and correcting. Trethewey expresses this desire to record by the voice of the Native Guard, "I dreamt their eyes still open—dim, clouded/ as the eyes of fish washed ashore, yet fixed—/ staring back at me" (*Native* 28-29). As in the pilgrimage that the persona takes, she narrates, "In my dream, / the ghost of history lies down beside me, / rolls over, pins me beneath a heavy arm" (*Native* 20). The dead past never dies. It reaches the living and gets announced through their tongues. "What is monument to their (black phalanx's) legacy? / […] Now fish dart among their bones, / and we listen for what the waves intone" (Trethewey 44). There are no markers or headstones, but the waves and fish send messages.

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1 The battle referred to in the segment "April 1863" (Trethewey 28) in the poem "Native Guard" is the Union attack in East Pascagaoula on April 9, 1863. Trethwey's notes in *Native Guard* were, "Union troops on board the gunboat Jackson fired directly at them and not at oncoming Confederates" (*Native* 48).

Bodies are history. The scars and broken parts archive the past—glory or trauma; the gestures embody the life state in a specific moment; and the past and present of this body always lead to a future. Though bodies decay and perish, but they remain in the memory of following generations in the most concrete and so real form, which transcends stony monuments.

Historicizing in Persona and Ekphrastic Writing

Trethewey not only records history by writing realistically the human bodies, she also fictionizes historical documents to explore multiple versions of historical events. Two main approaches she employs are persona writing and ekphrastic writing.

Persona writing is a commonly used technique to tell a story from the perspective of a fictional character. The poem that is typical of this writing technique is the first-person diary written by one Native Guard. He is positioned at the Ship Island fort guarding the war prisoners of the Confederate Army. Before that, he was taught to read and write by Dumas[1], which makes it possible for him to write down the history of his version. From the very beginning of his diary narration, the poet creates a crucial metaphor—the notebook the Native Guard writes on is one deserted by a Confederate officer with his records in it. But then this black soldier starts his narration above the former one crosshatched and overlapped. Two versions juxtapose, one by the South and the other by the North. The diary provides a new perspective of witness, which cannot be ignored. Fortunately, the speaker's stand is not biased for he records sincerely the suffering of Native Guards but also that of Confederate prisoners with compassion. It is more possible that this narrator doesn't take a side in narration, but takes a larger stand of humanity and empathy. The situation of the Native Guards in the Civil War is described mainly from two aspects, their routine work and maltreatment or even massacre imposed by their Union comrades.

As told by the narrator in the diary, black soldiers are treated no better than what they used to be—slaves.

> For the slave, having a master sharpens
> the bend into work, the way the sergeant

1 Francis E. Dumas (1837-1901) was an officer in the 2nd Regiment Louisiana Native Guards. He was the son of a white Creole father and a mulatto mother. The law didn't allow him to manumit the slaves he inherited from his father, so when he joined the Union Army, he freed them and encouraged them to join the Native Guards (Trethewey 47).

moves us now to perfect battalion drill,
dress parade. Still, we're called supply units —
not infantry — and so we dig trenches,
haul burdens for the army no less heavy
than before. I heard the colonel call it
nigger work. Half rations make our work
familiar still. (*Native* 25)

Native Guards, though as part of the Union Army in the Civil War, are never treated as the regular army. The work assigned to them is usually "dig(ging) trenches and haul(ing) burdens" (*Native* 25), and like the one in the poem, guarding captives. The supplies they receive are also no parallel to the white regular army, and that's why they need to "take those things we (they) need from the Confederates abandoned homes" (*Native* 25). If this unfair treatment is not harsh enough, others' ignorance to their lives explains the root of the former. It is normally believed that those who die for their country on battlefield be treated with glory and their bodies claimed and returned home. However, as witnessed by the guard,

Yesterday, word came of colored troops, dead
on the battlefield at Port Hudson; how
General Banks was heard to say *I have*
no dead there, and left them, unclaimed. (*Native* 28)

or "the hog-eaten at Gettysburg, unmarked in their graves" (*Native* 30). The lives they sacrifice were treated as nothing, not saying with respect. That explains from the bottom all the unjust treatment they receive.

Ignorance is not all. The worst is the massacre imposed on them by the Union Army. More than one such event are recorded in the diaries—Pascagoula[1], Port

1 Pascagoula Foray: On April 9th, 1863, 180 men from the 2nd Regiment on *General Banks* committed a foray at Pascagoula on mainland Mississippi together with gunboat *Jackson*. When retreating, *Jackson* covered for the Native Guards on the bank. But a cannon fell on them to cause four of them dead and five wounded (Hollandsworth, 46).

Hudson[1], and Fort Pillow[2]. Racial hatred is long covered by the right course for freedom and democracy, and victims of it are silenced under this thematic melody.

Choosing the first-person point of view to tell the story is the overt technique that Trethewey renders. With her doubt on the so-called "big history" and her belief that real history can never be "documented," only safely reserved in people's memory, she uses this fictional personae writing not to overthrow something, but to remind the public that there might be a second version.

To facilitate this telling, Trethewey introduces ekphrastic writing as another technique for fictionizing historical documents. Ekphrasis, as a classical literary device flourished in Renaissance, was regarded as "a descriptive language, bringing what is shown clearly before the eyes" (Quoted from Kennedy & Meek 6). But since "the poem knows something or tells something that had been held back by the silent image" (Quoted from Kennedy & Meek 12), ekphrastic poetry does more than just representing visual arts. In the process of observing and retelling, multiple versions of interpretations can be practiced. So ekphrastic poetry breaks the incomplete truths or even lies knit by visual devices. In Trethewey's ekphrastic practice, she juxtaposes the history that the creator of this visual work meant to demonstrate and a different one the poet detects. The tension between the two versions attracts readers to explore the deeper layer of truth. Visual works depicted in *Native Guards* are mainly paintings and photographs. The shared notion illustrated is the Southern history of inhumanity in and from the Civil War to the era of Civil Rights Movement, examples including the trauma of war, racial segregation and class oppression. In doing this, she is expressing remorse and lamenting to her troubled hometown as well as exploring the vital reasons for the tragedy of Native Guards, her mother and all those forgotten by history.

The only ekphrastic poem dedicated to a painting is the poem "Again, the fields." This work of Winslow Homer depicts veterans farming the fields after returning from the Civil War. Three time points are connected in this poem—the farming life before the war, the war and the farming after the war. The metaphor of "the dead they lay long the lines" to "sheaves of wheat" shadows the land with images of "[…] muskets, the bone-drag weariness of marching, the trampled/ grass,

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1 Port Hudson: It is noted at the end of *Native Guard* that in the battle of Port Hudson in May 1863, General Nathanel P. Banks of the Union Army deserted the dead bodies of Native Guards, declaring that they had no dead in the area where Native Guards used to fight (*Native* 48).

2 Fort Pillow: The notes of *Native Guard* say that when Confederates troops attacked at the Fort Pillow, Colonel Nathan Bedford Forrest disregarded the surrender of black troops and ordered them "shot down like dogs" (*Native* 48-49).

soaked earth red as the wine […]" (*Native* 31), which makes the farming location and person never the same with those before the war. The memory of inhumane cruelty is silent, but is inscribed into the mind of all involved.

In the latter two parts in a suite poem "Scenes from a Documentary History of Mississippi," two photos taken in the Jim Crow South are illustrated in a detailed way. "Flood" originates from the picture taken in a Mississippi flood breaking out in 1927. In the picture, black refugees take barges to seek landing but are stopped by the then National Guards, compiling them to sing prayers so as to be permitted to disembark. As for the slavery history, asking black people to sing easily refreshes their humiliating past when white slavers asked their black slaves to sing and perform for fun. At this moment of life or death, the black refugees must admit to be humiliated for survival. This photo might have been designed to show the religious power people hold when facing the disaster, which, however, is penetrated by the detailed observation provided by this poem. The second poem "You Are Late" exposes a scene of a black child being refused by the notice in front of *Greenwood Public Library for Negroes* saying "you are late." The photo was taken in the 1930s or 1940s, the age when public library services in Jim Crow South was extremely limited and unbalanced.[1] Trethewey points out the irony in the photo,

> The first one, in pale letters, barely shows
> against the white background. Though she will read
> Greenwood Public background.,
> the other, bold letters on slate, will lead
>
> her away, out of the frame, a finger
> pointing left […]
> She'll read the sign that I read: *You are late*. (*Native* 24)

The sign telling her to leave is more distinctive than the one telling her citizens' rights. She is not late and what is really far late is the racial equality. These photos may reserve memories for those silenced by racial segregation in history, like the refugees and the black girl, but the memories were false, unreal or at least partially real. Re-paraphrasing them provides an upright reason for them being memorized—

1 In his article "Black Public Libraries in the South in the Era of De Jure Segregation" (2006), Michael Fult observes that public libraries for whites didn't come into being until 1890s. In the Jim Crow South, public libraries for African Americans were established at least a decade later and the scale and recourses were quite limited and unbalanced (339-340). Until 1953, only 34.2% of these states (Jim Crow States) had accessibility to public library services (342).

once being maltreated in history.

Suffering for those inferior not only comes from racial segregation and war, but also from class oppression in economical activities. The rural South has long relied on cotton economy, so even in the year 1907, the photo named "King Cotton" still shows the magnificent view of cotton plantation and harvest in the South. However, the poet also inserts the insect disaster two years after the harvest which paralyzed the economic life of the South with tenant farmers' and cotton pickers' lives totally destroyed. In the poem "Glyph, Aberdeen 1913," the picture was focused on the poverty of a cotton picker with his disabled son. By imaging the daily life and laboring process of this father and son, this poem creates a three-dimensional life picture of proletariats in rural South, especially in the era of segregation.

Persona and ekphrastic writing, one from a subject's perspective and the other from a viewer's perspective enable poetic depictions to dig hidden details in history and in Trethewey's case, provides new historicizing methods to recollect the experience of those long ignored in Southern history.

Historicizing in Poetic Forms

The past can be historicized and re-historicized by textual, visual and architectural devices, but poetry with its formal features has the advantage of embodying history both textually and formally, the former telling stories and the latter constructing history physically. In this sense, poetry can be called history itself texturally. Written in traditional poetic forms and standard language, *Native Guard* encompasses rich poetic forms and their variants, which bear denotative meanings and in a way participates in the process of historicizing.

One of the most distinctive formal features in this book is various repetition which can be divided into two types, namely the repetition of some words, phrases, images or notions and that of poetic lines. The former is to emphasize on the meaning delivered by the words with the strengthening sound effect. The latter usually creates visual and sound impact so as to bring enormous thematic denotations.

The repetition of notions is not as typical as that of poetic lines, but can still be detected in two examples. In the poem "King Cotton, 1907," two images "flags wave down" and "bales of cotton rise up" (with deviated expressions) each appears for four times in the poem. These two key images support the whole "King Cotton" magnificence, showing the blind optimism and pride of the South. The more magnificent the scene is, the more ridiculous the whole historical event seems. The two images repeated, like the echoing cheering of the people, would finally decease

and turn into endless sighs. In another poem "Miscegenation" written in ghazal, the word "Mississippi" appears for eight times. According to the poet, this word "begins with a sound like *sin*, the sound of wrong—*mis* […]" (*Native* 36), which means the notion of sin is repeated from the beginning to the end as a thread through the whole story of her parents' marriage and her birth. What's more, the literal meaning of Mississippi can not be ignored—the state in the Deep South where racial segregation was authorized in the Jim Crow age. The word bearing the sound of "sin" and historical implication serves both as the reason as well as the result of racial segregation. By repeating these images, the poet is highlighting the keywords of history so shaping or reshaping the core operation of seemingly complicated historical phenomena.

Comparing with the repetition of words and images, that of poetic lines has more variations and thus bears richer implications. However, though the repeating types might be different from one to another, one common regulation in these schemes is the "recycling pattern" which takes the shape of a closed circle.

In the poem palindrome poem "Myth," Trethewey describes her dreaming of her dead mother, but finds it impossible to bring herself back to waking time—"Again and again, this constant forsaking" (*Native* 14). This is an everlasting and recycling trial and failure. The first three stanzas follow the time from dreaming to waking with no repetition of lines; the left three stanzas following the time from awaking back to dreaming, strictly repeating the former three stanzas from the last to the first line. The last line is the same as the first line of the whole poem. The format of repetition in the suite poem "Native Guard" is different. "Native Guard" written in crown sonnet form consists of ten segments written in diary form. The last line of each poem serves as the first line of the next and in the same manner the last line of the last stanza is actually the first line of the first stanza, so a circle is accomplished. In the pantoum poem "Incident" consisting of five four-line stanzas, the second line of the first stanza serves as the first of the next stanza; the forth line in the first stanza serves as the third line of the next stanza. The scheme continues until the second line of the last stanza becoming the third of the first stanza and the last line of the last stanza, the first line of the first stanza, forming a closed circle.

Thematically, the three poems are all about memory, those of one's dead mother, of the former war experience and of the old African American stories. For Trethewey, history takes the stable form not in documents but in people's memory. So such history takes the features of memory, which is ironically illustrated by the recycling lines. Memory never disappears. It stays with the individual or the group, handed down from generation to generation or just evoked from now and

then. History is not linear but a circle, lasting together with the recycling of life itself. That's how the living history exists and operates. In this way, Trethewey stirs the past and refreshes the old stories told or untold in the impactful form of circle which never breaks, stops or deserts anything in it. This mode of historic time and writing keeps all the forgotten people and story alive and move along time, just like returning to the photo taken before one goes to Ship Island (*Native* 1).

The language of Trethewey's poetry is typical of standard syntax and grammar, but in more than one poems in *Native Guard*, she indents lines after the first line of each stanza to form a kind of unevenness in the composing, sometimes fragments. The unevenness and asymmetry in format shadows that in subject. The couplet poem "Pilgrimage" narrates the pilgrimage that every spring people take to Vicksburg, Mississippi to cherish the memory of Confederate soldiers and civilians in the forty-day siege. According to Trethewey, this is the spot where "the living come to mingle with the dead" (*Native* 19-20). But the efforts to refresh the history with the historical remains and texts can make people only "brush against their cold shoulders in the long hallways, listen all night to their silence and indifference" (*Native* 19-20). The reality and past are not united until they meet in the speaker's dream. The disunity and unity are both vividly illustrated by the intent couplets and the single line at last.

The poem "My Mother Dreams of Another Country" also demonstrates lines indent, but the whole poem is not divided into stanzas. This poem is about the annoyances her mother goes through in expectant period, including naming of the biracial girl and superstition on maternal impression. The divergence between her longing for another country outside Mississippi and boredom she bears towards this place where people call her colored, negro or black can be sensed in reading the unbalanced intent lines. The feature of indent lines is also shown in the poem "South" which recalls the historical burden of this land and its people—slavery, poverty, war, racial segregation and gentrification. All these disharmony takes the shape of indent poetic lines like sawteeth to cut and grind, to break the historical chains so that a bright new phrase can begin.

Fragmented lines are typically elaborated in the poem "Providence." Apart from intent lines, the stanzas go into irregular divisions with spaces in single lines. On one hand, these textual fragments parallel the broken state of the town hit by Camille in 1969; on the other, it is also the mental state of people in the place punished by God's "providence." These elegies to the Native Guards in the Civil War, the poet's mother as well as to the South with a troubled past bear the shape of history as it was, uneven, inharmonious and struggling, full with hidden stories and

silenced voices. The poetic forms also serve as an unavoidable speech to tell and remind, in a more direct and impactful way.

What's thought-invoking is also the employment of traditional poetic forms in the book. Trethewey takes traditional poetic forms as restraint, as she holds, "A plaintive tone can arise through the notion of restraint because a poem that is restrained by form, where something is being held back, suggests the absolute struggle to say what is being said" (Turner & Trethewey 159). The strong tension of the desire to say and the anxiety of looking for proper ways to say is demonstrated in her choice of traditional sometimes flexibly adjusted poetic forms, including crown sonnet, pantoum, blues poem, ghazal, villanelle, palindrome, rhyming and unrhymed tercet and quatrain and so on.

The most impressive is the poem "Native Guard" with the speaker being an educated Native Guard on Ship Island guarding the Confederate war prisoners during the Civil War. The sharp contrast is that a black Union solider who is usually a silenced entity in history is given the right to speak and record while some of white Confederate soldiers are described as illiterate. What's more, the Native Guard writes in the form of sonnet, a traditional Italian poetic form from the thirteenth century and the whole sequence takes the form of diary. These elements endow this speaker with a kind of "documentary power" (Turner & Trethewey 160). Such examples include "Incident" written in the early nineteenth century Malay form pantoum, with the second and fourth lines in the first stanza serve as the first and third lines of in the next stanza, "King cotton, 1907" in the French villanelle from the 17th century, "Miscegenation" in the Arabic ghazal originating from the 7th century, and "Graveyard Blues" in blues poem which stems from the African American oral and musical tradition. There is hardly work written in free verse in this book. The use of forms gives the speaking in the poem a sense of history and authority. The repetition of rhyming sounds, meters and lines display all kinds of circling and connecting, making the voicing continuous and paraphrased again and again, like the echoing from history.

Conclusion

Trethewey makes full use of her poetic techniques to introspect the nature of history, to explore all possible versions of history and to authorize the silenced entities in the past to make new documents. In the context of monuments by Confederates' Daughters, streets and architectures named with somebodies' names, headstones raised in the graveyard, as well as history textbooks hiding truth or even lying, this book tells people that history is not necessarily memorized by stony landmarks or

indifferent words, but exists as part of life itself in this world. It perishes and decays, but never disappears in the memories of people or groups, like "a statue (which) is a living thing." People existed and things happened. This elegy makes the past breathe and live on, in words and in people's minds.

It is hard to imagine that the huge project of refreshing collective memories and historicizing can be achieved by words and poetry. As it has been stated in the former parts, this is not the accomplishment of the project, only a stone thrown into the pond. With the book winning Pulitzer Prize, the waves this stone stirs have been spreading. With this "disturbance," more connections will be recognized, like what Trethewey does with the memorization of her mother, her hometown and the Native Guards. In this way, the web of Southern African Americans' or Americans' collective cultural memory will be collaged.

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