

Beauty and Grief: How Ross Gay Explores Trauma and Nostalgia

Emely Bonilla

Instructor: Professor Dean

Pull Quote: “Nostalgia makes me miss these past eras of my life, but it also makes me think that there's so much more to come in the future and how I will one day get nostalgic about being a UCSB undergraduate.”

This project explores the idea of trauma and nostalgia that I understood from the essays “Ghost” and “Flower in the Curb” from *The Book of Delights*. The purpose of this piece was to research my curiosity about nostalgia and how we experience it, as well as how Ross Gay experiences nostalgia about his best friend, Don, and his dad. I also wanted to emphasize the idea of trauma and its importance. Many people go through different levels of impact from different events. Trauma is already a big issue, but I think focusing on how people can recover is an important aspect of it as well. Through the perspective of trauma, Ross Gay's reflections in “Ghost” and “Flower in the Curb” convey the idea of nostalgia as a feeling of pain or reminiscence, arguing that revisiting cherished memories can create resilience and facilitate recovery.

Going into detail about the purpose and impact of nostalgia, it is something that we all experience that connects with memories and our senses. Often when we have nostalgic experiences, it comes from smells, foods, music, and maybe habits we find in others that trigger

our brain with a sense of nostalgia. As I mentioned in my video, nostalgia is what gives us a way of thinking about who we are and helps give us a purpose in life. This may be the case for some people, though nostalgia isn't always a happy memory for all of us. It can make us romanticize a “better” era of our life and make us wish we could be back in the past. I’ve noticed Gay has an experience with this in his essay “Flower in the Curb.” He talks about his friend Don and how he remembers him from the route he would take walking home. He mentions, “...I always make the left just before the graveyard across the street from where my friend Don Belton lived for a year...” Gay began to mention memories he had with him when he was younger.

The reason I brought up the idea of trauma was because of the idea that I got from Gay that he also experienced trauma, and I mainly got that idea from his essay “Ghost” but also a bit from “Flower in the Curb.” “Ghost,” to me, served as a representation of the feeling of absence and loss, as I mentioned in the video. Gay experienced a lot of feelings of absence especially from a young age when he lost his best friend Don from the violent environment of his neighbor, as well as the loss of his father. Trauma isn't only experiencing big events like witnessing a murder or surviving a natural disaster. Trauma can come in the form of losing your pet, being bullied, or even experiencing the divorce of your parents, just like how one of the interviewees experienced and mentioned in the video.

I think what I mainly learned from this project was more about the science of trauma. I am very fascinated by how the brain works, so learning about how nostalgia and trauma work in our brains was intriguing to me. It was thought-provoking for me, specifically, how the amygdala and the hippocampus react and the brain receives trauma. These two parts of the brain

made me curious about how our brain works overall. What I learned while writing and constructing this project was about my creative and curious side. It made me feel like I would enjoy researching this type of genre with a professor, and hoping I'm able to one day. Overall, what I learned about myself mainly connects to nostalgia. I learned and remembered how my Victoria's Secret perfume reminds me of my eighth grade friend and the memories I had with them before COVID-19 began to take over and how the song "Bad Habit" by Steve Lacy deeply gives me nostalgia of my junior year of high school. Nostalgia makes me miss these past eras of my life, but it also makes me think that there's so much more to come in the future and how I will one day get nostalgic about being a UCSB undergraduate.

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