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WITHIN AND WITHOUT:
PSYCHOANALYSIS, TRAUMA THEORY, AND THE HEALING NARRATIVE

BY
CARRIE CRISMAN OORLOG

A thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Master of Arts

Major in English

South Dakota State University

2016

WITHIN AND WITHOUT:
PSYCHOANALYSIS, TRAUMA THEORY, AND THE HEALING NARRATIVE

This thesis is approved as a creditable and independent investigation by a candidate for the Masters of Arts in English degree and is acceptable for meeting the thesis requirements for this degree. Acceptance of this thesis does not imply that the conclusions reached by this candidate are necessarily the conclusions of the major department.

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In Memory of

Tracy Marie Wait Crisman, my mother,

who taught me to fight for all that is right and good in this world;

And Dedicated to

Adam Wade Oorlog, my son,

who has come to remind me how delicious life may be.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to the English Department at South Dakota State University for providing me with the skills and structure to complete this project. I extend a heartfelt thanks to Christine Stewart whose guidance and skill were key in the imagination, research, and realization this project. Most of all, thank you for continuing to encourage me throughout this prolonged journey. Thank you as to Dr. Jason McEntee, Dr. Nicole Flynn, and Dr. Charles Dieter for serving as my thesis committee.

I would also like to thank the mentors and friends who have helped me through this process: Sue Morrell, who taught me to love words so many years ago and who continues to be my muse and sounding board and Patrick Hicks, who was with me the morning that I received the news of my mother's illness and who has always encouraged me to see myself as a writer. I also want to thank my fellow English teachers at Brookings High School for their encouragement and support throughout the years. A particular thank you goes to Ricky Ganci for providing feedback on early drafts of this project. Finally, I need to thank my family for taking this journey with me. My father John Crisman and sisters Jayne Crisman and Miranda Crisman have always been my rock, even in our darkest days. And to the loves of my life, my husband Wade Oorlog and my son Adam, thank you for always supporting me in every way possible.

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ABSTRACT

WITHIN AND WITHOUT:
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CARRIE CRISMAN OORLOG

2016

In this collection, I explore the process of writing to heal from trauma. In exploring the rhetorical landscape of trauma writing, I offer a new framework for understanding how those who experience a traumatic event may use the process of writing creatively to engage in a process of healing. I argue that through the creation of art, individuals may take ownership of their experiences and memories, thus exerting the agency over the experience that was lost as the result of trauma. I also demonstrate and reflect upon my own journey in creating the healing narrative as a process of healing from trauma.

Introduction

The survivor did not only need to survive so that they could tell their stories; they also needed to tell their stories in order to survive. There is, in each survivor, an imperative need to tell and thus to come to know one's story, unimpeded by ghost from the past against which one has to protect oneself. One has to know one's buried truth in order to be able to live one's life.

(Laub qtd. in McCurdy 96)

Trauma stories color our post-9/11 world. From cinema to reality programming to the “survivor’s tale” popularized by best-selling novels such as *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2011), *Room* (2010), *The Road* (2006), and *The Glass Castle* (2005), trauma is a common literary trope that storytellers employ to make sense of the current literary and cultural landscape.

Trauma narratives are not new. The heart of trauma studies emerges from the writings of Freud; one can even argue that trauma writing had its birth in the ancient writings of Aristotle, Homer, and Sophocles. Drawing from the foundations laid with Freud’s “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” to his many definitional works about psychoanalysis and “traumatic neurosis,”¹ the field has branched in numerous directions. A contemporary of Freud, Pierre Janet’s lectures to the Harvard Medical School between 1906 and 1907 set the stage for a biological understanding of how trauma affects the brain. Contemporary trauma theory begins with the period following World War II. Theorists like Lacan, Caruth, van der Kolk and van der Hart, Storolow, Feirstein, Kaplan, Butler, and Gibbs have furthered the study of this theory in the past seventy years.

In his 2011 essay, “Emphatic Civilization in the Age of Trauma,” Robert Storolow deems the cultural era post 9/11 as the “Age of Trauma.” In his foundational argument, Storolow claims that such an age defines our current cultural existence because

. . . the tranquilizing illusions of our everyday world seem in our time to be severely threatened from all sides – by global diminution of natural resources, by global warming, by global nuclear proliferation, by global terrorism, and by global economic collapse. These are forms of collective trauma in that they threaten to obliterate the basic framework with which we are members of our particular society have made sense out of our existence.” (“Emphatic Civilizations”)

According to Stolorow, we are living in an age of uncertainty, pressing us to the bounds of the ontological frameworks within which we function. In a world defined by and increasingly more desensitized to trauma, those experiencing personal trauma find themselves having to measure up against a metric of suffering. When the world is defined by unthinkable trauma, defining or measuring trauma becomes a greater focus in cultural criticism than that of healing. In turn, the focus on the trauma narrative in print and media has transitioned from that of personal healing, as was the case with the early psychoanalysts, to a competition to portray increasingly more shocking accounts of extreme pain and suffering.

In the fifteen years since 9/11,² advances in technology have driven a key cultural shift that increases the likelihood that an individual will identify as traumatized in his or her lifetime. The advent of social media and twenty-four hour news channels plays a key role in this process, increasing the risk that individuals will experience national (or in the case of today’s connected world, international) or natural trauma. Such mediums also open the door for what E. Ann Kaplan calls “vicarious trauma” (39). While Kaplan’s focus is primarily on how film and literature have the potential to create secondary

trauma, I argue that the idea of vicarious trauma can be furthered to encapsulate “up-to-the-second” reporting via contemporary media and social media. For example, as I write this introduction, such means of communication play a central role in political and cultural civil wars. From a civil war in Syria and a military coup in Turkey to the Black Lives Matter Movement, police violence against people of color, and assassinations of police officers in the United States, national and international trauma are immediate and pervasive in the lives of the average individual, even if he or she does not directly or physically experience any of these traumas.

The study of trauma writing has a long history, but never before has it been as immediate and as important as right now. Kaplan points out in the introduction to her book *Trauma Culture* that the “political-ideological” context of trauma impacts its lasting effect. For this reason, individual and collective traumas are linked. She writes:

. . . as Freud pointed out long ago, how one reacts to traumatic events depends on one’s individual psychic history, on memories inevitably mixed with fantasies of prior catastrophes, and on the particular cultural and political context within which a catastrophe takes place, especially how it is ‘managed’ by institutional forces. (1)

Therefore, one’s understanding of trauma is dependent upon one’s past experiences – a collective psychiatric history, which may be characterized by other personal or collective traumas – and by context within which that trauma takes place. Additionally, in order for one to understand individual trauma, one must first be aware of the institutional forces at play in his or her life and how these forces affect one’s ability to access and articulate this trauma. While the experience of trauma varies greatly from person to person, individuals

in today's world experience both individual and collective trauma with greater frequency than ever before. Therefore, if Stolorow is correct, and we are living in the "age of trauma," the trauma narrative is a direct reflection of the experiences of both the individual and the collective culture of this period.

My academic study of the trauma narrative and my personal experience with trauma overlap with curious clarity. I was notified of my mother's fight with sepsis seven days into the course *Troubles Literature and Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland*. I arrived in Dublin from London three days before I received word that she was ill. While in the early stages of a course that would put my group in direct conversation with former IRA and UVF fighters about the horrific acts that they both witnessed and perpetrated, my classmates and I immersed ourselves in the recollections of trauma by Brian Friel, Seamus Heney, and Brian Moore. We sat in discussion groups that marveled at the beauty that these writers could bring from trauma, and compared notes on what elements we found the most gruesome, and therefore, the most memorable. The day before she fell ill, I attended a reading by Glen Patterson who attempted to explain to a room full of Midwestern students the importance of reassessing the past – a concept lost on those of us who lacked anything remarkable to reassess. Hours later, after learning of my mother's critical illness, Patrick Hicks, my professor and mentor, and I discussed Patterson's concept of reassessment on my bus ride to the airport for my flight home. In that moment, I told him that the experience of my mother's illness would be my reassessing moment – one that would subsequently come to color everything that I experienced and wrote from that moment forward.

Thirty-six hours later, what had been an outward study of collective trauma became an inward study of how I personally processed the physical deterioration of my mother and the decentering of my family structure. My experiences, while life-altering for me, are not unique. In the months and years following this experience, I read widely about trauma and loss, and I wrote. From what I called “the moment of impact”—the period spanning from the phone call I received from my father to the time I returned to college one week after my mother’s funeral – I have been collecting a body of work that explores how I have processed the memories and emotions from this period. I look at both my personal experiences and my responses to collective traumas that have created the context of the past decade, therefore, this study becomes my reassessment of my life narrative in the context of an altering experience. This thesis seeks use the framework of the contemporary trauma narrative to explore how this evolving genre serves a dual purpose: as a part of the healing process and as a document that allows others to explore how individual authors represent the experience of trauma. Furthermore, I seek to press the bounds of the genre, focusing beyond the recounting of the experience to the process of healing, thus resulting in what I call the healing narrative.³

In chapter one, I explore how Freud’s psychoanalytic writings laid the foundations for the process of writing to heal. Further, I explain how the trauma narrative has evolved as a result of post-9/11 “trauma culture,” and I suggest an alternative to the trauma narrative – the healing narrative. Finally, I explain how several contemporary poets use a process of writing to heal as they represent different experiences of trauma, and how they create an “evolution of healing” within their bodies of work.

In chapter two, I present a body of my own writings that traces my journey towards healing over a ten year period. I divide my work into three parts: “From the Moment of Impact,” “Beyond the Bounds,” and “Writing Towards a Future.” In the first section I use my knowledge of brain function during trauma and the theory of *narrative memory* as well as the rhetorical lessons that I gather from several mentor texts to create a representation of the moments of trauma associated with the illness and death of my mother. In the second section, I examine trauma as mitigated by time and the layering of experiences. In the final section, I put the experience of trauma from my mother’s illness and death in conversation with the trauma experienced during the birth of my son, and I explore how I am able to find healing in the intersection of these stories.

Finally, in chapter three, I analyze my writing using the concepts of repression, *narrative memory*, temporal centering, and metaphor, along with the rhetorical strategies inspired by mentor texts to examine how my individual poems and the body of work as a whole address the transition from trauma to healing. In this section, I also examine how individual poems interact with one another, forming the unified document of the healing narrative, and the role that such a narrative plays in my projected future.

Chapter One

Creating the Space: From Trauma Narrative to Healing Narrative

Freudian Foundations and Contemporary Re-imagination

Trauma writing has a rich history. From the exegesis of the chorus over cries of a physically and psychologically destroyed Oedipus in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* to the story of Abraham called by God to sacrifice Isaac in the Book of Genesis, the trope of physical and emotional trauma can be found in almost any tradition. However, it was not until the years following the Holocaust that Trauma Theory emerged as a distinct field of literary and cultural study (Kaplan 1). Since 9/11, the scholarship on trauma and literature has increased exponentially. Such proliferation is in response to a pervasive feeling of helplessness and a desire to tell the stories that have come to exemplify the daily anxieties of many in today's world.

Modern trauma theory can be traced back to the foundational work of Sigmund Freud. Much has changed in the century since the publication of Freud's works, but scholars have continued to analyze and interpret his ideas within the context of their respective eras, and the applications today are arguably just as fitting. Central to any discussion of trauma is Freud's work "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," specifically his explanation of what he dubs "traumatic neurosis." In only a few short paragraphs, Freud sets the basis for what today has become one of the fastest growing schools of analysis. While Freud does not make use of the contemporary term trauma, he does explore the physiology of the traumatic neurosis. For Freud, such neuroses differed from other "hysterias" studied in his time in that they those suffering from trauma showed "signs of subjective ailment." Such "subjective ailment" Freud equates with fright, which he

explains is a state that one encounters while unprepared for it, unlike fear which has a definitive object and anxiety. Because these specific elements exist, fear denotes a preparation on the part of the subject. For those suffering from traumatic neurosis, such fright occurs most often through the repetition of dreams that return the subject to the moment of trauma. Therefore, according to Freud, a divide exists between the conscious and unconscious. He writes, "I am not aware, however, that patients suffering from traumatic neurosis are much occupied in their waking lives with memories of their accident. Perhaps they are more concerned with *not* thinking of it" (12-13). Therefore, those experiencing "traumatic neurosis" have little to no control over the experiences of their memories. Such memories only arise during the unconscious (dream) state. Therefore, unlike anxieties or fears, trauma (fright) cannot be directly addressed by the subject.

While Freud's cultural context limits his imaginings of trauma to situations such as "severe mechanical concussions, railway disasters" and the startling neuroses seen in soldiers who fought in World War I, his analysis of the divide between the conscious and the unconscious processing of traumatic experiences created the framework upon which increasingly complex analysis could be built (18). In attempting to reconcile this divide, Freud writes:

The patient cannot remember the whole of what is repressed in him, and what he cannot remember may be precisely the essential part of it. . . . He is obliged to *repeat* the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of, as the physician would prefer to see, *remembering* it as something belonging to the past.

(18)

It is in this portion of his theory that Freud introduces the concept of a fractured sense of time for the subjects of trauma. By bringing the “repressed” past into the present, the subject creates a fractured personal timeline. I will return to this idea of fractured time later. Here, however, it is important to look closely at the concept of repression. In “Five Lectures about Psychoanalysis,” Freud recounts the cases that led him to form his theory of repression. From these cases he concludes the subject found what Freud calls a “wish” or desire within their consciousnesses that was “was not capable of being reconciled with the ethical, aesthetic and personal pretensions of the patient’s personality” (8). Therefore, when a subject experiences a desire otherwise incompatible with his or her pre-trauma personality, an inner struggle occurs which results in the repression of this desire, thus causing the wish to be forgotten in the consciousness (8). While those who have experienced trauma today are not as apt to be labeled as “neurotic” as they were in Freud’s time, “repression” still appears in contemporary definitions of trauma, and the desire to reconcile the unconscious and conscious experiences of the trauma forms a key challenge for the subject trying to gain agency over the story of his or her experience.

This question of agency lies at the core of the scholarship on this topic in the last twenty years. Cathy Caruth, who is widely recognized as a leading contemporary authority on trauma theory, categorizes trauma as, “a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or set of events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts, or behaviors stemming from the event. . . the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly in its repeated *possession* of the one who experienced it” (*Trauma* 4-5). Recent scholarship published in the past five years calls Caruth’s use of the concept of *belatedness* in this definition in to

question. Alan Gibbs argues in *Contemporary American Trauma Narratives*, “With the concept of repression, Freud clearly allows that trauma is often banished from consciousness deliberately and knowingly, rather than unconsciously erased through amnesia, as the currently more popular dissociative model insists” (10). Such a difference in interpretation has profound applications when exploring the application of Freud’s theory. Most importantly, it brings to light the question of agency for the subject of trauma. The “amnesia” inherent to Caruth’s argument puts the traumatized in a passive position, at the mercy of purely bio-neurological factors. In such a situation, the subject has no control over how and when these details may return, opening him or her to the potential for “retraumatization”⁴ in the process of healing. Inversely, Gibbs and McNally’s interpretation of belatedness opens the subject up to a more systemized approach to processing trauma as memories transition from one part of the brain to another.

For a subject of trauma looking to apply an academic language to his or her experience, the concept of agency becomes a key consideration. In my journey, such autonomy could only be found through the process of writing. This process was the only means of making sense of the disjointed images that remained of the initial traumatizing period. I have come to call this collection of experiences “The Moment of Impact.” In the first section of my work, I use the process of writing to order memories, focusing in on the use of recurrent metaphors to bring order to the disconnected, “flashbulb” type memories that fractured my sense of time post-trauma. It also serves as a means of addressing the belated memories that I was unable to process as the events occurred.

How the Brain Processes Trauma

Central to understanding one's story is an understanding of the way in which the brain captures and orders stimuli during trauma. In their work, "The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma," Bessel van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart appeal to the all-but-forgotten work of Pierre Janet to explore how the brain functions at the moment of trauma. In this interpretation, they explain that as people experience new events, they encode them and automatically integrate them into existing schema (159). Janet called this process *narrative memory*, which is what we use to make sense of our environmental stimuli. In situations in which the subject is not able to integrate the stimuli into the existing schemas, the experiences are stored differently and "not available for retrieval under ordinary conditions: it becomes dissociated from the conscious awareness and voluntary control" (160). The mind, however, continues to try to assimilate this experience in order to make sense of the situation (160). A key component to the eventual assimilation of memory is the assignment of emotion to the experience (162). Therefore, according to Janet's theory of *narrative memory*, the assimilation of experience into memory is based upon the same principles as story. If a key component of one's story is missing or if he or she is missing the emotional connection to an element, the story will remain incomplete, and that individual will not be able to claim ownership over this incomplete narrative.

One key difference that separates contemporary critics from Freud and Janet is the sophistication of modern neuroscience. While the theorists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were able to hypothesize about the brain's functioning in traumatic situations, modern neurobiologists are able to ground such explanations in scientific

principle. They have found that during traumatic situations, the brain not only records memories in a standard way in the hippocampus, but also on what David Eagleman calls a “secondary track” on the amygdala (126). According to Eagleman, these memories have a “flashbulb” like quality, popping up independent from the regular recall mechanisms that hippocampus memories follow. Thus, those who experience trauma have multiple memories of the same event, which are competing for neurological prominence. Eagleman describes these competing memories of the same event as if “. . . two journalists with different personalities were jotting down notes about a single unfolding story. . . . In the end, it is likely that there are even more than two factions involved, all writing down information and later competing to tell the story” (126). Such an explanation adds depth to Janet’s theory. The irreconcilability of *narrative memory* is not due to amnesia of an event or involuntary repression; narrative memory is interrupted because there is no one version of events that can be reconciled into a complete story (126). This fractured story often colors our collective trauma culture.

The divided, disjointed representation that Eagleman describes is translatable into poetic form, specifically when the poet uses the present tense and alternating perspectives or metaphors as a means of drawing the reader into a recreation of the moment of trauma. In order to clearly illustrate this idea, I will analyze the work of two poets who employ the use of the alternating perspectives particularly well.

War poet Brian Turner draws the reader as close as possible to heightened physical and emotional state of an attack in his poem “2000 lbs.” from the collection *Here, Bullet*, which follows the physical and emotional journey of a soldier in Iraq. In his poem, Turner describes a city square before, during, and after the explosion of a car

bomb. The events described took place in less than a minute. However, by creating a narrow focus on very specific details, Turner slows the reader's pace, forcing a meditation on the details, mimicking the way in which the brain records memories during trauma. For example, in the opening lines, Turner writes:

It begins with a fist, white-knuckled
and tight, glossy with sweat. With two eyes
in a rearview mirror watching for a convoy.
The radio a soundtrack that adrenaline has
pushed into silence, replacing it with a heartbeat,
his thumb trembling over the button. (1-6)

Through his specific focus on the sensory language in this stanza, Turner sets up a very narrow focus through which the reader will examine the sights, sounds, smells, and physical sensations in the coming stanzas. As a result, Turner creates a narrative gaze that shifts rapidly amongst the scenes without allowing for the larger description of the explosion to intrude. Such a focus is accomplished by drawing the reader immediately to the “fist, white-knuckled / tight and glossy with sweat” (1-2). This image is left behind in the next sentence as the focus moves to the “two eyes / in a review mirror” (2-3). Each subsequent image compounds, competing for resonance in the reader's mind.

While the first stanza of this poem could expand into a complete narrative, Turner instead shifts perspective in each stanza, bouncing the focus throughout Ashur Square, thus giving the reader multiple versions of the same experience within fractions of the same moment. In stanza three, the subject is “Sgt. Ledouix of the National Guard.” Through his perspective, the reader is left with the resonate image of his wedding ring,

“the bright gold sinking in flesh going to bone” (47). Not only does this image have permanence because it closes the stanza, but it also advances the emerging symbolism of fingers and hands that began in stanza one with a fist and a “thumb trembling over the button” (6). Hand imagery extends throughout the rest of the stanzas, acting as a thread that strings together these otherwise disparate images: the lovers who cannot reach one another’s hands, the civil affairs officer who stares at his missing hands, an old woman’s hands wet with her dying grandson’s blood.

By creating these differing perspectives, Turner slows down the traumatic event through the use of description and mimics amygdala memories that flash from one image to another. Each stanza in Turner’s poem tells a very different story, and despite the hand imagery that threads through the poem, this poem represents an inability for the viewer to integrate these images into existing schema, therefore impeding narrative memory.

This framework fits well with the type of war trauma that Turner explores. However, amygdala “flashes” and a breakdown of narrative memory can occur any time a subject encounters an experience that is irreconcilable with existing schema. In her book, *Sparrow*, Carol Muske-Dukes explores the workings of her grieving mind following the traumatic loss of her husband. Specifically, her poem “The Call” explores the explosion of a moment, allowing the reader insight into how the speaker recreates a moment from disconnected details. Much like Turner’s poem, Muske-Dukes relies heavily upon sensory detail, particularly distinctly different visual scenes, to decenter the reader. Unlike Turner, however, Muske-Dukes establishes the past tense in her first line and stays consistent with it throughout the poem, removing readers one step from “the

moment of impact.” She instead places them into the realm of the fractured narrative memory.

In the opening lines, the distant tone emphasizes information that is never revealed in the course of the poem: “I repeated my question twice / without receiving an answer” (3-4). The use of the passive voice in the second stanza furthers this distanced tone:

. . . I was given another number
 and at that number I asked again
 without response. At last someone took
 pity on me. That nurse in a distant blazing room (5-8)

By removing agency from the lines here, the author parallels her own feelings of helplessness. Such a removal also slows down the pace of the events, setting up the increasing sense of panic that the layered images in the coming stanzas portray.

Because this poem is told from the position of a fractured narrative memory, the images in stanzas five and six become superimposed upon one another, a symptom of the mind attempting to repair the disparate into a single narrative:

. . . I held the phone to my ear, repeating each
 of these answers to my question, so that images of you,
 disappearing, appeared in the air. Our kitchen, the dishes
 in the sink, the stove, that shocked gaze meeting mine –

 then yours superimposed on hers – your eyes wide
 in that other room where you lay, rapidly dying

beyond the open receiver. The shouting technicians
 hovering over your body as the other sound, unearthly,
 spoke quietly beyond the monotone in my ear:
 blood pressure, pulse rate, respiration. (17-26)

For the speaker, two distinct images compete for mental prominence: the memory of her physical surroundings in the kitchen and her imagined landscape of the hospital scene on the other side of the phone. Within this overlapping of scenes, two very different realities exist for the subject at the same time: “images of you, / disappearing, appeared in the air” (18-19). The juxtaposition of these contrasting images draws the reader into the space that, for the subject, represents the irreconcilable nature of narrative memory. These competing images are furthered across the next stanza break as the subject describes how the daughter’s eyes are transformed in her imagination into the gaze of her dying husband. The poem ends without these two spaces ever being reconciled, signifying a broken narrative.

Both of these poems provide an example of how a focus on specific imagery can help recreate for the reader the “flashbulb-like” imagery that best captures the feelings of trauma in the moment. In the first section of my creative work, I use such imagery as a means of representing the disjointed memories that I subsequently reconcile through the juxtaposition of my experience with those of other, of time periods, and of space.

PTSD and the Trauma Trope

PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) is common vernacular, thanks in large part to film and television adaptations of this trope. As a result, the average person can rattle

off the tell-tale signs of PTSD. Consumers of popular media know that PTSD can result from domestic abuse, car accidents, sudden and profound illness, and, of course, military combat. Such events lead the contemporary reader and viewer to expect certain criteria for a trauma narrative: intense flashbacks, psychological breaks long after the moment of impact, vivid dreams of the incident, and a propensity for re-traumatization when faced with similar situations. What such popular media fails to acknowledge, however, are the physical manifestations trauma can take.

This “trauma trope” is an effective vehicle for storytellers post 9/11. In analyzing the increasing pervasiveness of trauma into the American narrative, Gibbs argues that trauma’s “creeping ubiquity as a critical paradigm eventually becomes limiting” (1). He continues his assessment stating that eventually a tendency develops to read everything as trauma, creating what he asserts is a “trauma genre.” He finished this argument by stating: “The events of 11 September 2001 only served to strengthen this relationship, with the emergence of a glut of cultural production seemingly based on aesthetic models approved by existing trauma theory, and often subsequently praised by critics subscribing to those same theories” (2). Gibbs’ argument sets forth the theory needed to perpetuate the “trauma culture” mentioned earlier. In times colored by a sense of disorder, the availability of the label of trauma, or in turn PTSD, allows a convenient label for those struggling to make meaning. Identifying with such a label may also serve as a unifying experience for some. As a result such identification, the label holds the potential to become a self-fulfilling prophecy, resulting in traumatized individuals fitting their stories to the structure of other PTSD stories that they find.

Gibbs is not alone in questioning the prevalence of PTSD cases post 9/11. Kaplan appeals to a number of humanist and deconstructionist scholars who question the pervasive “victim” culture in America. Among them, Kaplan uses the ideas of Elen Showalter whom she summarizes in writing: “[Showalter] argues that humanists are drawn to the concept of post-traumatic stress disorder because it avoids the complexities of dealing with the unconscious: In Radstone’s words, ‘At stake. . . is the issue of the inner worlds *mediation* of the external world, a mediation which is foregrounded by psychoanalytic theory and minimized by trauma theory” (35). However, if many modern theorists are going to attack the very diagnosis that gives legitimacy to the concept of trauma that spans the disciplines, what then are we to replace it with? Kaplan’s answer to this question serves as the thesis to *Trauma Culture*. She writes, “I will argue that telling stories about trauma, even though the story can never actually repeat or represent what happened, may partly achieve a certain ‘working through’ for the victim. It may also . . . permit a kind of empathetic ‘sharing’ that moves us forward, if only by inches” (37). With this thesis, Kaplan moves the focus away from what I call “the moment of impact” and the subsequent effects towards a projected future in which healing is possible. In such a movement, one cannot discount the psychological, biological, and cultural effects that trauma has upon an individual; however, the focus can be shifted, especially in terms of the story of trauma.

In my own creative work, such a shift took many years of trial and error to accomplish. While the concept of the “moment of impact” came early in my process of writing, since my experience was completely decentering, the next conceivable step was much harder to conceptualize. It was not until I wrote an early draft of the poem

“Concentric Circles” that I was able to capture the guiding metaphor to conceptualize the shift from the reconciliation of memory towards constructing a full story. Olga Botcharova applies the same image of the concentric circles as she explains the process of “breaking out” of trauma in her work, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Religion, Public Policy, and Conflict Transformation*. Within her framework, the inner circle is defined by recognition of trauma and includes the realization of loss, denial and suppression of fear/grief, anger, desire for justice/vengeance, telling and retelling the “right” conflict story, and acts of justified aggression. According to Botcharova, the move to the outer circle of reconciliation is both a decision and a process. The first marker of this outer circle is the ability to glimpse a future amidst the grief that the traumatized allows him or herself to feel in this stage (298).

The real work of reconciling story, however, lies in the gulf, or in terms of the concentric circles, the annuli. This is the terminology that I adopt for the second section of my creative project. Poems in this section focus on the process of healing, imagining a life characterized by loss, and subsequently setting the scene for a future.

The Healing Narrative: Redefining the Trauma Genre

Through studying the history of trauma, one can see that the definition of trauma is as varied as the experiences. While I have already outlined many definitions, in “From Trauma to Writing: A Theoretical Model for Practical Use” Marian MacCurdy develops a definition that encapsulates the idea of looking forward rather than back. She acknowledges that biological foundations of trauma stem from the idea of the one or many bodily injuries by an agent exterior to the traumatized. The experience of this external force has a lasting impact on what she deems as “mental life.” Through this

definition, she makes the concept of trauma ubiquitous, writing that, “In popular language we speak of who has been ‘traumatized’ by some terrible experience, but in point of fact no one can reach adulthood without some moment of trauma” (161). Some may argue that MacCurdy’s definition of trauma is too all-encompassing. Such a definition can become problematic when one compares day-to-day anxieties of individuals to the unspeakable experiences akin with trauma of those who have witnessed cultural genocide. Kaplan reminds readers that even though the school of trauma studies began in response to study of the Holocaust, daily experiences of terror, while not fitting of the “classical” form,⁵ must also be recognized as trauma (1). Therefore, in creating a working definition of trauma, the weight should not be placed upon the type of experience itself, but rather upon the resulting effect it has on the subject. Such an endeavor is difficult in a culture conditioned to consume increasingly more traumatic stories as a means of entertainment. Therefore, those who have endured trauma are hesitant label the experience as such. Through the conceptualization of trauma as story, the metrics are eliminated.

Despite disagreements amongst scholars about the function of repression, Caruth does speak clearly to the importance of story as a means of defining trauma:

Trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell of us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its bleated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language.

(4)

Therefore, at its core, trauma is the story of a kind of experience. Such a focus allows the subject to explore not only what is known, but it allows space for the unknown as well.

In their work, “Presence in Absence: Discourses and Teaching (In, On, and About) Trauma,” Peter Goggin and Maureen Goggin explore how trauma affects the way that their students interact with the world. They assert that “*trauma* can only be tackled/approached/grappled with discursively; it is not until it is spoken/written that trauma is made present” (31). Therefore, if there is agency for the traumatized, it comes in the ownership of the story of trauma. For this reason, I propose a shift, from that of the trauma narrative, which in many cases is focused on reliving the traumatic event in an attempt to order events and to reconcile the unconscious and the conscious, to the healing narrative.

The healing narrative comes from an idea that Louise DeSalvo outlines in *Writing as a Way of Healing*:

We are the accumulation of the stories we tell ourselves about who we are. . . .

Through writing, we revisit our past and review and revise it. What we thought happened, what we believed happened to us, shifts and changes as we discover deeper and more complex truths. It isn't that we use our writing to deny what we've experienced. Rather, we use it to shift our perspective. (11)

Therefore, the aims of the healing narrative differ from those of the trauma narrative in that they are not concerned with uncovering the repressed or unifying the unconscious with the conscious. The aim of the healing narrative is to craft a story that represents the truth for its subject, regardless of the “truth” that others hope to project upon the subject.

Tim O'Brien famously writes of this idea of truth in his essay "How to Tell a True War Story" which later appears as a chapter in his novel *The Things They Carried*. For O'Brien, the experiences of not only remembering, but also of creating narrative about war are slippery in nature. He explains that in order to tell others a story that is even partially believable, one has to rely on at least some of "what seemed to happen," rather than a definitive truth. He explains, "The angles of vision are skewed. . . . In many cases a true war story cannot be believed. If you believe it, be skeptical. It's a question of credibility. Often the crazy stuff is true and the normal stuff isn't, because the normal stuff is necessary to make you believe the truly incredible craziness" (67-68). While not all traumas are war-related, and not all healing narratives require such a willing suspension of disbelief, many do. Writing to heal is not an exercise in which the subject strings together a narrative of quantified facts – it is the experience of weighing and examining the events that do stick, the believability and unbelievability of what happened and locating the stories, the moments, and the symbols that create a story to which he or she may add another chapter – a future.

Writing Towards a Future

Most writings about trauma narrative focus on the reconciling the past and the present; very few make mention of a future for the subject. The one exception that I have found is Freud's short work "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming." In it Freud outlines the process through which creative writers subvert the human instincts of suppressing "phantasies,"⁶ thus deriving pleasure from the experience of substituting "play" or "day-dream" for reality. For the writer operating from a position of trauma, according to Freud's theory, the process of writing creatively allows the subject to arouse one of his or

her major wishes, harkening back to an occasion in early childhood where this wish was pleurably fulfilled. Thus, as Freud writes, “. . . past, present, and future are strung together, as it were, on the thread of the wish that runs through them” (439). Such transcendence thus allows the traumatized, through the act of writing creatively, to project a future in which he or she can again imagine pleasure and fulfillment.

A similar idea emerges in DeSalvo’s writing. Meditating on the following line from D.H. Lawrence, “One sheds one’s sickness in books – repeats and presents again one’s emotions, to be master of them,”⁷ DeSalvo explores the role that writing has on impacting the past by “‘re-presenting’ – presenting scenes from the past as if they were presently occurring. This would undo, remedy, or rectify the effects of early experiences” (18). Through such an action, the creative writer can take ownership of past experiences by “trying on” different perspectives, recasting timelines, and re-examining the significant moments and symbols that may not currently be part of the existing narrative. Writers know that a final product only comes from multiple drafts. Through the process of writing to heal, one may open up to memories, thoughts, and realizations that may not otherwise emerge when attempting to articulate a complete narrative that constitutes the “truth” of the experience.

MacCurdy pushes this idea even further in exploring the role that images and emotions have in this process. She writes that images are strongly connected to memory. In the case of traumatic images, the physiological connections are even deeper as traumatic imagery resides in the same portion of the brain as emotions. Therefore, when traumatic images are called to the surface, emotions accompany them. Such a process is important because, as MacCurdy writes, “When we begin to put words to those images we

are using the parts of the brain that create narrative, and we begin to create a sense of control over those memories. They no longer control us; we can move them around, manipulate them, call them up when and if we wish because they are now a part of our consciousness” (*Mind’s Eye* 92). MacCurdy explains that initially when many of her students set out to write about traumatic events, they “draw a blank.” Through exercises that focus on the details of the setting, they are able to begin to uncover the stories that need to be told. Details become images and through these images the forgotten – the repressed – the writer may articulate and own them. Psychoanalysts, neurobiologists, and creative writers can all agree that the key to “working through” trauma is the use of metaphor because the study of memory is a study of metaphor.

Metaphors: Currency of Mind

Metaphor allows Freud to describe some of the key tenets of his theory, especially that of the unconscious.⁸ However, as Michael Adams explores in “Metaphors in Psychoanalytic Theory and Therapy,” contemporary use of therapist-created metaphors within psychoanalytic therapy may stifle the patient’s ability to recall repressed information (29).⁹ Despite such objections, psychoanalytic therapists continue to commonly direct patients to use metaphors to uncover repression/concealed/forgotten memories. For the writer engaged in constructing the healing narrative, metaphor can organize otherwise disparate thoughts. Arnold Modell, clinical professor at Harvard Medical School, explains in “Emotional Memory, Metaphor, and Meaning” that metaphor stands as the “currency of mind,” allowing the mind to detect patterns and organize emotional memory (555). The power of metaphor is even more pronounced when the healing narrative takes the form of poetry. In many instances, key metaphors

will emerge as the unifying elements in a poem, as is the case with Turner's "2000 lbs," or as a thread that runs through an entire collection as is the case with birds, particularly sparrows, in Carol Muske-Dukes' *Sparrow*. By using one image as the unifying element, authors are able to reexamine an idea or experience from a variety of positions in time, space, and emotional intensity.

Practicing psychoanalyst and published poet and playwright Fredrick Feirstein illustrates the power of metaphor as he writes, "Creativity has a healing power. It gives . . . a safe place to reexamine emotions that have been stunned into silence by making a bridge of metaphors connecting creating distance between what we knew and felt and what we didn't want to know or feel" (255-256). Feirstein continues this argument by explaining that in the unconscious time does not exist. Through his use of poetic devices, namely metaphor, meter, and rhyme, he is able to revise what he calls his "life narrative" (257). Feirstein illustrates this point by using his poem, "The House We Had to Sell:"

This is the house we lived in, white as a bride.
 Mozart is echoing the birds outside.
 We're sitting at the table playing gin.
 My son is laughing every time he wins
 Because he's eight, because we're all in love,
 Living the future we're still dreaming of.
 Spring is in the mountains, green as Oz,
 In the fresh-cut flowers in the crystal vase,
 Mirroring the garden where the bees are thick.
 Though everyone was dying, dead or sick,

These were our uncontaminated hours,
Like bottled water sipped by scissored flowers
Permanent in memory; sealed by the pain
That childhood ends, and we can't go home again.

Feirstein leaves much to be inferred, but he provides the reader with a number of images that establish overlapping and eventually revised timelines. First, the title itself, “The House We Had to Sell” establishes that the events described in subsequent lines took place in the past. However, the second line alters this sense when the verb tense shifts from the past tense “lived” to the present tense “is.” This present tense remains in lines 2-6, calling the reader to “live” in the moment along with the author. By using the present tense, Feirstein has recalled these past moments into the present tense for him and for the reader. He writes of this concept: “Psychoanalysis and the arts teach us that we are compelled to repeat our traumas, losses, and disappointments as a means of helping us find a form for what’s hurt us, for making what’s passively experienced active” (258). In “The House We Had to Sell,” Feirstein uses the metaphor of the house as the vehicle for revision of memories, placing the subject and his family before a time when “everyone was dying, dead or sick.” He does not accomplish a complete revision, however, as the speaker remains self-aware, even within the present-tense “reliving” as he writes, “Living the future we’re still dreaming of” (6). Feirstein does exactly what MacCurdy asks of her students: he returns to a space that serves as the backdrop for story both before and after trauma. Within this space, he “re-presents” the pleasurable moments that precede the traumas to which the writer only vaguely alludes. Through such a recasting of time and a focus on detail he is able to draw out the emotions that he experienced in this place and in

turn sets up what he refers to as “reattachment and reconciliation” in later poems in his collection.

This concept of “reattachment and reconciliation” is a key aim of the healing narrative, and personally, a prime motivator in my undertaking of my own project. In the case of my work, I did not begin with a key set of metaphors to guide my writing process. Instead, through the course of writing in different stages of the process, several ideas emerged time and time again, in different contexts. Through these images, I have been able to address emotions that are too complex to engage head on. Central to this study is the imagery of impact on smooth water. From this central metaphor, I am able to explore the interconnectedness of each of “snapshot” moments that I isolate and develop in individual poems.

Locating the “Center of Gravity”

Sometimes dubbed the “father of freewriting,” Peter Elbow purports that central to the creative writing process is the idea of finding a “center of gravity.” Judith Harris further examines this idea in “Re-writing the Subject: Psychoanalytic Approaches to Creative Writing and Composition Pedagogy”:

There is a force, by the law of natural physics, that grounds language to a particular body and by extension, to a particular psyche. Language has a deeply inherent value for us, laden with affect, beginning with the resonance of what was heard, and absorbed, in our earliest interactions with other people, which the mind contains and associates with present events. (177)

While such an idea can easily be dismissed as the tenor of the aforementioned guiding metaphor, there is something deeper to Harris’ argument. The transformative power of

language allows the writer to see his or her life “from the outside – as the world would see it” (179). In such a view of writing, the writer may use the whole of all interactions he or she has ever had. The power of reconciling the past and present in writing affords the writer malleability in determining such a center of gravity or inversely decentering writing from what may seem like the rational center. By re-centering – exploring images, ideas, or moments that have been initially inaccessible because of the disconnected and repressed nature of trauma memory – the writer can reveal aspects of him or herself that may have been previously lost. Harris explains, “Writing is a process of finding out what is already, on some level, known, but it can also be a means of creating an identity. Words are always self-designating. Thus, a teacher’s change in the syntax or order of student writers’ words ultimately expands or changes the writers identity” (183). Therefore, the act of writing the healing narrative is an engagement in the future that has only been imagined. Writing is a transformative process. A future is only possible, however, when the present is used as a starting place. Through the juxtaposition of images and thoughts across time, the writer defines the context of his or her life and owns the change that have occurred. The very act of writing and revising creates the agency of the story. If trauma is defined by a loss of control, the act of writing while cognizant of the past, present, and future using the material of trauma, one may exercise the control that has been inherently lacking from the beginning. Linking the past, present, and future is the center of the healing narrative.

The act of re-centering allows for otherwise disparate experiences to influence one another as the writer takes part in an evaluation of the important moments in his or her life. Frank Bidart intertwines the experiences of his past and present as he explores

that space for a new centering in his poem “Writing Ellen West.” Bidart sets this poem in the context of the larger collection, *Metaphysical Dog*, as a means of announcing the larger project of re-centering. Bidart writes:

“Writing Ellen West”

was exorcism.

*

Exorcism of that thing within Frank that wanted, after his mother’s death, to die.

*

Inside him was that thing that he must expel from him to live.

.....

He was grateful he was not impelled to live out the war in his body, hiding in compromise, well wadded with art he adored and with stupidity and distraction.

*

The particularity inherent in almost all narrative, though contingent and exhausting, tell the story of the encounter with particularity that flesh as flesh must make.

*

“Ellen West” was written in the year after his mother’s death. (1-4, 16-22)

The disconnected snippets of thoughts are very stream-of-consciousness in nature, causing the reader to jump between disparate thoughts in the same way that the speaker does in looking for a center. This separation is furthered by the physical separation of

each stanza by a single, off-centered bullet, thus punctuating the division already achieved by the stanza break.

Bidart uses the third person to create distance in the poem, thus allowing the reader to approach the speaker as a case-study rather than a first person meditation by author-as-speaker on his previous work, “Ellen West.”¹⁰ In an interview conducted by Shara Lessley for the National Book Foundation, Bidart addresses this shift in perspective: “It’s a way of making fact available to art. To write about oneself as a character—to think about oneself as a character—opens up space between the ‘I’ and the author.” In her text, *Precarious Life* –which seeks to explore the role that traditional institutions play in the individual experience of grief post 9/11 – Judith Butler calls such a division “the disorientation of grief.” She meditates on the questions: “Who have I become?” “What is left of me?” and “What is it in the Other that I have lost?” (30). Therefore, by shifting pronoun tense, Bidart as an author has engaged in re-centering as he casts an objective eye to the autobiographical experiences that he explores, thus allowing him the distance needed to place the disparate elements of his trauma in conversation with one another, which initiates his healing narrative.

Such a distance is important as the speaker’s focus shifts in each stanza from Frank’s desire to die, to the experiences of learning about and writing about Ellen West, to Frank’s own body ethic, to the ways in which he disappointed his mother, and finally to his grief following his mother’s death. As the poem progresses, each of these ideas becomes increasingly more intertwined, thus mimicking a “working through” of not only the trauma but also of other distressing memories and current situations that are causing the speaker emotional distress. Bidart plays off the title in this first line, continuing the

thought with a two word stanza: “was exorcism.” With this opening declaration, Bidart sets up the overarching theme of the poem: the cleansing of the author’s soul through the act of writing. However, such a theme is brought into question when examined with the closing line, “One more poem, one more book in which you figure out how to / make something out of not knowing enough” (75-76). Within this context, the poem becomes a meditation on the subject, Bidart’s ignorance of the events, memories, and ideas that exert the greatest control over his life. Such narrative helplessness mimics the feelings that contemporary subjects of trauma describe when initially seeking treatment.¹¹

The work of healing following a trauma creates a framework for some that allows not only a healing from the trauma in question, but healing from a number of instances that one may or may not be aware bear weight in the unconscious. Feirstein writes of his experiences writing in the wake of 9/11. In this process he created a “sequence” which helped him “connect 9/11 trauma with earlier ones and to complete a mourning that I have been unable to do before” (256). Feirstein argues that a pervasive trauma becomes a metaphor for other losses that may exist “just below the surface” (256). In Bidart’s poem, the death of his mother unlocks the other losses that he must reconcile with himself before his “exorcism” is complete. The metaphor becomes transparent in stanzas two and three where he writes, “Exorcism of that thing within Frank that wanted, after his / mother’s death, to die,” (2-3) and “Inside him was that thing that he must expel from him to live” (4). In these opening lines, Bidart is setting forward his mother’s death as the impetus for a deeper desire that he explores through a divided metaphor of a mind that wants to flourish and a body that, like Ellen West’s, wants to die. While his body and his mind are the vehicle, the reader quickly realizes that the tenor is that of his identity: a son

– composed of body and mind – versus that of an artist. His body has disappointed his mother by his refusal to move closer to home in stanza fifteen, “His mother in her last year revealed that she wanted him to move / back to Bakersfield and teach at Bakersfield College and live” (31-32). This disappointment embodies the tension that exists within him about his identity as a son and as a writer. When he loses his mother, like Feirstein, the subject finds himself addressing other tensions that were repressed previously. Bidart writes in stanza twenty, “Out of the thousand myriad voices, thousand myriad stories in / each human head, when his mother died, there was Ellen West.” The story of Ellen West is so pervasive for the subject because he is in need of a “new identity” after his loss of centering following the loss of his mother and the profound guilt that he feels for choosing his art over the physical presence his mother requests. By utilizing the vehicle of Ellen West and the mind / body divide of anorexia, which is the subject of his first poem, “Ellen West,” Bidart’s subject can explore his grief from a number of perspectives. Ultimately, the process of writing allows him to reconcile not only the death of his mother but also the tension that he feels between the different aspects of his identity. By creating distance between himself and the subject of the poem, Bidart is able to re-center himself through the act of writing, both in terms of the catharsis of writing “Ellen West” and the meta-exploration of his own transformation through the framework that was established by that poem.

Deconstruction and Reconstruction in Donald Hall’s *Without* and *The Painted Bed*

Robert Frost suggests that in any collection, the book itself stands as the final, and in many ways, definitive poem (Levine). If the aim of the healing narrative is to craft a document that represents truth for the author, each individual poem is only capable of

representing one snapshot or piece of the experience. Together, the collection and its intersections and varied perspectives provide a rich overview of the process of defining truth for the writer.

Donald Hall's *Without* (1998) is the story of the illness and subsequent death of his wife, poet Jane Kenyon. In this work, Hall uses metaphors that allow him to transcend the disconnects of time and the past-present divide of trauma. Hall frames the collection with two long poems, "Her Long Illness" and "Last Days," which are interspersed in pieces amongst other poems. By continuing the thread throughout this collection, Hall is able to control the unfolding of time in a way that would not otherwise be possible through the use of self-contained poems. "Her Long Illness" begins with the same third-person distancing that Bidart employed in "Writing Ellen West." Hall writes:

Daybreak until nightfall,
 he sat by his wife at the hospital
 while chemotherapy dripped
 through the catheter into her heart. (1-4)

From the first moment, the reader finds him or herself hearing the story of an event told in the past tense. In setting up the exposition to his story, the speaker is recounting the history of this illness. Through the subsequent appearances of the poem, Hall tells the story of both Kenyon's illness and its effects on their relationship. "Her Long Illness" concludes with recovery and the subject's conflicted feelings about how the end of this period will change the relationship between him and Kenyon. Hall writes, "He felt shame / to understand that he would miss / the months of sickness and taking care" (287-289). However, the reader learns on the next page, in the opening lines of "Last Days," that the

previous sentiment is a false denouement. Hall provides the reader no sense of the time that has passed between the conclusion of “Her Long Illness” and the beginning of “The Last Days.” In fact, when read together, the opening lines play with the reader’s centering of time as Hall writes, “‘It was reasonable / to expect.’ So he wrote. The next day, in a consultation room” (1-3). The use of the phrase “the next day” has no temporal grounding in the poem, suggesting to the reader that while this event did not actually happen on the day following Kenyon’s recovery, for the subject looking back, it seems as though it did. In manipulating time in such a way, Hall mimics the way that remembered events are recalled within a context of prolonged traumatic memory. There is a loss of centering in time, where only the most prominent memories are recalled. For Hall, the feeling of relief at the conclusion of the illness is followed, seemingly immediately, by the new and fatal prognosis that he describes in “The Last Days.”

Without transitions from the story of illness to Hall’s processing of Kenyon’s death with the work’s namesake poem, “Without.” Stylistically, “Without” mimics its title. There is no capitalization or punctuation to separate the disparate thoughts that flow into one another. Hall gives a nod to such a structural choice as he writes, “the year endured without punctuation,” (9) “the book was a thousand pages without commas,” (17) and “intolerable without brackets or colons” (21). By appropriating punctuation as a guiding metaphor for the poem, Hall appeals to the reader who seeks the natural pause that punctuation and grammatical structure provides. Without it, the temporal elements of the work collapse upon one another, mimicking the loss of control of time that many who experience prolonged traumatic experiences report feeling.¹²

While the first six stanzas of “Without” focus on the imagery of time passing beyond the subject’s control, stanza seven marks a profound turn in relation to the agency for the subject. Hall writes:

one afternoon say the sun came out
 moss took on greenishness leaves fell
 the market opened a loaf of bread a sparrow
 a bony dog wandered back sniffing lath
 it might be possible to take up a pencil
 unwritten stanzas taken up and touched
 beautiful terrible sentences unuttered (44-50)

In reading *Without* as a collective statement, this moment marks a shift in both the agency of the poet and as the symbolic moment where the healing narrative begins. The act of “tak[ing] up the pencil” marks a shift in the subject’s role. He is no longer chronicling the experiences of the illness – being controlled by the situation. He exercises agency through this act of writing. Hall’s subject is taking control of his experience, writing the “beautiful terrible sentences” that up to this point he was unable to write (49). With this shift, Hall is opening up the work to the possibility of a future that was unimagined in the earlier pieces. *Without* concludes with several letters addressed directly to Kenyon recounting the events that color the year after her death. This portion of the text very much represents the present for Hall as he processes the trauma and subsequent mourning.

While *Without* leaves the reader with an uncertain answer to Freud’s third piece of narrative – future – his subsequent work, *The Painted Bed* (2002), finishes what Hall

was not able to reconcile previously – the imagined future in which he may tell his story from a place of healing. The most immediate and profound difference in *The Painted Bed* is the way that Hall references his wife. Throughout *Without* Hall uses the familiar pronoun “you” when referring to Kenyon. In *The Painted Bed*, Hall uses either “her” or Jane , a fact that he clearly acknowledges in the poem “Ardor” as he writes:

Now I no longer
address the wall covered
with many photographs,
nor call her “you”
in a poem. She recedes
into the granite museum

of JANE KENYON 1947-1995 (9-15)

Such a semantic shift not only signifies the passage of time, but also signifies that *The Painted Bed* is the story of Hall’s journey towards an imagined future rather than a lamentation for Kenyon or a story of her death.

The Painted Bed begins with the long and weighty poem “Kill the Day,” which recounts Hall’s experiences in the seven years following his wife’s death. If the sub-thesis of *Without* is a loss of temporal centering, “Kill the Day” brings this back in a very real way. Hall moves through the years with great detail chronicling his journey through sorrow with searing imagery. The opening lines clearly create the chronological connection between the end of *Without* and the beginning of this work. Hall writes:

When she died it was as if his car accelerated
off the pier’s end and zoomed upward over death water

for a year without gaining or losing altitude,
 then plunged to the bottom of the sea where his corpse
 lay twisted in a honeycomb of steel, still dreaming
 awake, as dead as she was but conscious still. (1-6)

The Painted Bed is Hall's emergence from this corpse-like-state, instead telling the story of his grief and learning how to live again. Hall makes this desire evident at the conclusion of stanza three as he writes, "As the second summer of her death approached him" (27) "Her absence could no longer be written to" (30). Returning to McCurdy's theory of emotional memory, throughout the process of writing through the trauma surrounding Kenyon's death, Hall finds himself in a place where he can control and manipulate the images and memories that previously were locked away by unprocessed emotional reactions. In stanza nine he writes about some of the traumatic imagery that only existed in glimpses and flashes in *Without*:

In the second year, into the third and fourth years,
 she died again and again, she died by receding
 while he recited each day the stanzas of her dying:
 He watched her chest go still: he closed her eyes. (85-88)

Here Hall owns the images that eluded him before; however, McCurdy writes that such a process needs to transcend the desire for catharsis. The subject needs to undergo a change in cognitive structuring. This process requires the production of art because art mitigates the required detachment from experience (*Mind's Eye* 90). By writing this moment over and over in numerous ways, Hall has finally restructured the memory enough to be able to call it up on demand and use it in the creation of his art, thus

demonstrating his agency over this moment and a reconciliation of the past with his present.

In section IV, “Ardor,” Hall shifts his semantics, again using the pronoun “you;” however, he is not referring to Kenyon, but instead uses the pronoun to refer to a number of new lovers that occupy his bed. The section begins with the short poem, “The Old Lover,” which dramatized the subject’s re-emergence as a lover. The subsequent twelve poems chronicle various sexual experiences, void of temporal markers. The subject’s lovers are only referred to by the pronoun “you,” leaving the reader to question whether these snapshots recount one lover or many. This section makes no mention of Kenyon, thus perpetuating the idea that Hall’s process of writing through his grief has come to a conclusion, and he is now ready to move on to other topics.

The Painted Bed concludes with the poem “Affirmation.” In it Hall meditates on the nature of life and death, exploring the natural progression of loss that most experience. The poem begins with the line, “To grow old is to lose everything” (1). This poem is Hall’s survey of loss. Hall traces this progression from the grandfather who dies in one’s youth to the middle age in which one may “row for years on the midsummer / pond, ignorant and content” (6-7). However, Hall chronicles how the experience of death becomes more realistic as “a friend from school drops / cold on a rocky strand” (10-11). By line thirteen, Hall acknowledges Kenyon’s death in this life-trajectory, writing “our wife will die / at her strongest and most beautiful” (13-14). However, this is not the end of Hall’s poem, signifying life after trauma. The subject’s wife’s death is a significant moment in this poetic life-trajectory; however, Hall imagines a future for the subject. Just as important events have come before, important events follow. “Affirmation” ends with

the lines, “Let us stifle under mud at the pond’s edge / and affirm that it is fitting / and delicious to lose everything” (23-25). With this line, the subject is affirming his closure. Hall is showing his readers that while altering and disruptive, loss is one of the experiences that in the end makes life “delicious.”

In the next chapter, I use the concepts outlined here to form my own healing narrative. In section one, I present poems that attempt to capture the moment of trauma by mimicking what I have learned about traumatic brain functioning, *narrative memory*, and reclamation of repressed memory. In section two, I explore how metaphor allows for the representation of the otherwise unspeakable. In section three, I place the trauma of experiencing my mother’s illness and death in conversation with the trauma I experienced during the birth of my son. Within the intersection of these experiences, I explore potential futures informed by these experiences.

Chapter Two

Within and Without: A Healing Narrative

Concentric Circles

As a girl, I would play
misty July mornings in rain-
filled ruts dropping pebbles
into mirrored water, expecting
the refracted world to break
in razor-edged shards. Instead,
from the shock, perfection tremored.
Measured waves rippled and lapped
against gravel bounds. And I imagined
the moment of impact
that radiates me beyond
the confines of sodden Dakota
summers, carrying on ripple ridge
to a future beyond the confines
of imagination.

I: From the Moment of Impact

Wake-Up Call

A phone rings at 4 a.m., College Street, Dublin.
3,914 miles away, blue lights flash in an ICU. Incoming trauma.
Flight nurse shouts over rotor wash, third code in forty-minutes.
Asleep, I curse, drop the phone in the receiver. Only a mis-timed wakeup call.

A weary night clerk pounds on my door, 4:10 a.m.. “An urgent call from America, ma’am, you must wake up.” I manage a broken hello. No reply. Distanced voices. “We’ve got her.” And a crackled tone. “Code team report.” And my father’s voice. “Wake up.” He implores me. And I try. “I need you to wake up.” I open my eyes,

and I am crumpled in the doorway to a hotel room, College Street, Dublin
and my mother has died for the fourth time in two hours, a world away
doctors pound her chest as my father implores me to surface from this dream
into the nightmare that engulfs him.

Schrodinger's Lie

*"Sometimes story truth is more true
than happening truth."*

– Tim O'Brien

In an empty air terminal in Dublin International Airport, I sit directly across from the only other soul, a woman Midwestern in bearing sixty, hair white and eyes red. We stare, with the same tear-rimmed gaze at the coming and going of planes and see nothing.

In memory, all variables are equal. Diverted glances, clipped response, comfort in the silence that buffered the words. She tells a sad tale – her husband, an Irish man, dissolving into cancer. Ashes brought home to the Irish Sea. And my choice, neither truth nor lie: "My mother has died."

With their release, the quantum of the universe collided. The planes dissolved into elements. Weeks later, as memories strobe in fitful sleep, I wake convinced I killed her – thrust final punctuation on a story that exists in molecular parts, bumping and scraping against the truth.

Wordless Advice

“Her body is attacking itself,”
the faceless doctor explains
on my mother’s last day. I caress
charred fingertips, wipe tears
from blistered cheeks. “The body
has an amazing ability to kill
disease. Unfortunately
it sometimes kills the living as well.”
Disseminated Intravascular Coagulation.
Medical speak for eaten alive.

Alone, I smear lavender hand cream
under my nose before replacing
my medical mask, a learned barrier
against the stench of dying flesh.
A black hand pulls mine
towards her cheek, then her heart.
Her lips form breathless words
around the intubation tube,
and I try to remember her
in a memory, any other time,

in a place where skin
does not fail and flake,
and each beat of her heart
does not break tissue-thin
capillaries, black rosette
staining asymmetrical patterns
across her body. These
are her final words,
played out in a crude charade
black hands tapping a broken heart.

Three Seconds

are the length of a human present moment,
ephemera to cortex. We plan our instants
in these intervals, make decisions
based upon parcels of experience.

Poets write of fleeting moments,
but some last forever, scatter in the expanse
between living space and memory, words
sundered in the chasm of free will.
Forever

I live in the moment of “no more,” words
that pull air from lungs, still the quiver
of effete heart, and proceed
to nothing.

It took three seconds and two words
to end my mother’s life.

Midnight Matriarchs

I.

They beat us home the night mom died,
pooling on the doorstep
at 2 a.m. with offerings
of soup and casserole,
toilet paper and Cheetos,
warming themselves by the steam
that rose from the pots
and mingled in January air.

We were raised to believe
that Sunday dinner is sacred,
no problem too large to solve
around the dinner table. But
a provisional mother's chicken soup
eaten in the wee hours of morning
leaves a bigger hole than it fills.

Weeks later, my father stands before the stove,
reverend of the kitchen, preaching
the healing power of lasagna,
sending his disciples to the
homes of the mourning with tithes
of noodles and prayers.

II.

The time for mourning's past, now
Altars vanish to plain sight, prayers
surrender, half-gasp to fractured pieces,
small parts of a life: a sock, a list, a necklace charm,
a single strand of hair (chestnut, long, wound
round and round a Christmas bough) a gold stud
buried between carpet fibers below where
her bed once sat, a Ball jar, spaghetti sauce,
2007 in her hand, pantry's bottom shelf.

Those mothers of the night, they don't
see these things, they forget
our story, move on, pity others,
pool at new thresholds, bearing
supplies, extracting stories. They walk,
heads down, through grocery aisles, glaze,
call me by her name. Stop.

"It's okay. . . ," they say.

"I said it because . . .," they say.

"She's not really gone. . . I mean. . ."

They say,

"You are so much like her, it's like. . ."

they shrug,

attend to their carts,

move on.

Mother's Ring

I found it
a few months after the funeral,
buried
in a tin on the windowpane
above the sink
where each evening
she would slip
off her rings before washing
the day's dishes.

The once-glowing gold
was muted by years of wear,
the synthetic stones,
shrouded by a film
of Dakota soil
and humid afternoons.

I drop it in a murky blue substance
that promises "to return luster
to even your most well-loved jewelry,"
slip it on my finger and
mourn the shine
that now replaces the shaded
resonance of time.

Concerning Owls

“Do not mistake the call of an owl for that of a dying child,” warns the Dakota storyteller of my youth. Evil flies on silent owls’ wings, cautions tradition. Be mindful to not let it in.

The owl called to me for three nights after my mother died, outside the thin-paned windows of our farmhouse. Hoots startled me from trauma dreams, images of my mother’s crumbling hands dissolved by the bird-call.

Once, my mother, looking up from the newborn calf she tended, saw the dusty shape of the Great Horned Owl perched in the pasture wind-break. Good and evil. Healer and destroyer. She called to it, asked it for its wisdom. It remained silent, scanning the horizon.

I never found the owl, though I tried, stumbling through the dark to the trees where he once watched. Eventually the calls subsided, the dreams dissipated, as the sharp edges of her memory cut less often in the night. Yet I imagine it still perched in tall ash, link between the living and the dead.

Letter to a Dead Musician

It's been a month
since you died. We pick
our way through the house,
building Altars to you –
notes and shopping lists,
a discarded nametag
stuck to a program
from an concert
you didn't want to attend.

You would laugh
at our absurdity. Yesterday
I moved your guitar
from the piano bench,
where you placed it
the night you got sick.
Classical Gas,
my favorite song,
in yellow and wrinkled
sheet music tented
above the strings.

I remember, as a child,
how I begged you to play,
to finger-pick a lullaby,
but you would worry
me to bed before opening
the black case to play
a concert all your own.

Last night I swore in the dark
I heard you play, your
breathy voice rising
through the floorboards,
the chords bouncing up
the stairs. Today I run
my fingers along the razor
smoothness of the E string
until my finger bleeds.

Epitaph

A friend once wrote, while dying,
death is a blizzard raging
in the soul: cold, thick, blinding
and white. This morning I crunch
through the resting snow and watch
signs of your presence, your touch.
Icy breath through parted shawl,
spring's first ray, cutting through cool,
sharp crystals, forming veins, small
rivers of gold autumn chaff –
July sun: an epitaph
destined to never flow off
my pen. But when the storm dies,
left are broken dreams and lies.

II: Beyond the Bounds

Tender Remains

June. I squeeze
brown soil through bare toes
wringing winter from organic loam.

Years ago, as I bounced
beside my father, black coffee sloshing
in rhythm as furrow cut into natural rise,
he implored me to read silt and clay,
surrender to mechanical precision
100 seeds per second, sliced
into doctored soil, dancing to the song
of a borrowed John Deere.

My mother craved the dirt,
blistered hands, hoe handles
worn smooth, the plump weight
of beans pod, the whisper of lettuce seed
across the crooked furrow. She sighed
into new leaves silent prayers
by moonlight, dreams of fruits
held latent in spring soil.

The winter she died, I chose
the tender remains, tearing brittle
vines from frozen soil, cursing
the silent prayers she buried.
The fields lay barren, dead.
I sought life, working icy dirt
through frozen fingers.

Today my father,
and his machines cut through
last-year's bean stalks, tomato vines.
Green tractor, brown dirt. He fixes,
in his mind, all that is broken.

Grafton Street

The receiver is heavier than I remember
on the seventh payphone south of Trinity College
on Grafton Street, Dublin. This is the one,
I think. All the same, hook switch, some wires,
technology, virtually unchanged for a century.

In the months after she died I dreamed of our last call,
the transatlantic pop in the receiver, cobblestones
pressed at my feet. But never a voice. Silence,
just as now, one year, one day later, 4,000 miles from home
I press a dead phone to my ear and weep at the carelessness
of memory and time, and last words that cannot live again.

Bog Body

I found you, a year and a day
after my mother died,
tucked away in a corner
of the Irish National Museum.
American audacity drew me in,
but it was the muted gasp
of your mouth or the tip
of your perfectly iridescent toe
that induced me to photograph
your body, the flash refracting
off your green-black flesh.
It reminded me so much of the
color that crawled up her limbs,
a shattered roadmap of destruction

Altars

My father fills the creaking farmhouse
with them, Altars of the ordinary:
a lopsided mountain of pictures, twenty
years old, mismatched and caked
with dust above the television,
her hairbrush in the medicine cabinet,
long strands of auburn hair trailing
down the sides like a cascade of ivy.

Her car keys hang, just as they always
have, her parka waits, gloves in sleeve,
poised near the door in mid-July,
in case some evening, as he snores
in his recliner, she walks out of his
dreams, dresses against the blizzard,
and roars the tractor to life.

III: Writing Towards a Future

Premonition

Sell your cleverness and buy bewilderment.

– Rumi

It works like this:
 the sharp points
 of panic begin
 at in my scalp
 and wash to shoulders,
 kneecaps, big toes.
 Some days I turn
 to fight what isn't there,
 others I weep for the loss
 of what I have never
 known.

Before I told him
 of our child,
 my husband reached
 for me in his sleep, dreamed
 of his son, knew
 before I of his existence,
 and imagined the great things
 he would someday be.
 The fates wove
 a different tapestry
 in my dreams.

I had this feeling before,
 when I wept for two nights
 before crossing
 the Atlantic, mourning
 a nameless, faceless
 death. Carl Jung watched
 the sea turn to blood,
 bodies drowning in yellow
 waves months before the world
 seamed with war. Calpurnia
 watched her husband
 crumble in the forum.

In my dream
my mother, nine years dead
lifts my baby from my swollen
belly, kisses his lifeless
cheek, and vanishes.

Almost

In the final days I carried my son,
I planted a garden that I knew would die.
I wrapped my body around his
as I nestled seeds into the too-cold ground,
crumbled root balls that screamed
for the protection of their nursery.

My mother taught me to prevent death,
not to bring life. Her garden always
too dry, too late, too necessary
to feed a not-quite-starving family.
She taught me to live a life of almos,ts,
where nothing ever quite measured up.

She almost lived, like my garden, crumbling
on the surface. Dependent upon deep roots
that defy prairie storms. My son almost died
clinging to the tendrils of a body
that only knows almos,ts.

Birth Announcement

In the orange glow of his nursery, I trace my fingers
around my infant son's neck, imagining
where my body curled around him like the tendrils
of wild morning glory that jump their trellis, crawl
vine on vine ever closer to his nursery window. I imagine
your fear as your body betrayed you, skin curling away
from itself, peeling back, like a spent rose, petal by petal.

My son was born on a Thursday,
took his first breath 3410 days and 9 hours after
your last. On his new skin dark rings, bruises
from where my body held on too tightly, stilled,
for a moment, his heartbeat, his primordial desire
to look into my eyes, impart the name mother,
and remind me that someday we too will part.

Police Wife

Next to the door in my classroom is a flipchart to be accessed in case of emergency. On page 1 it reminds all who read that the best preparation is practice and planning. And I think

he should have received one of these the day they slid a gun and a badge across the desk, instructions to prepare to live in a constant state of emergency.

Page 2

How to cull him to sleep
hours and hours
after shift's end,
to slowly peel off
the layers of night,
and draw head to pillow
as I listen to him tell
about the phone call to a mother
of an almost-adult
whom he found
abused,
dying,
dead.

Page 3

How to breathe again,
after a friend from Dallas PD
Tweets “Alive”
and I watch distraught
widows on the television
cradle their babies
as I rehearse the words
I might someday say
to my son
at his father’s
funeral.

Page 4

How to unhear the stories
told over beer and poker:
guns drawn, the right words
or the wrong ones, classmates
from the academy, friends
led to rest by a river of flashing
lights. The accident scene
that I see play out on his sleeping
face. The wound torn too wide,
the noose he picked apart
while trying to not look
at the blue face of a child.

Page 5

How to restart my heart
each time a uniform knocks
at my door. Each midnight
phone call from restricted
number. How to huddle,
with my infant son, in the waning
hours of night waiting for nob
to turn and the door to fall closed –
a seal between our worlds.

KALOS

There will come a day
in the not too distant future
when my son will pick
up a picture or interrupt
a story around the holiday
table or ask about why
every Christmas Great-
Grandma cries as she lights
a candle and why during
family prayer the room
weeps for the empty chairs.

In time, stories will weave
with neural folds, mixing
the real with imagined
until one day, my son
will recount the time
his grandma carried him
to her garden, running
his toddler hands along
the fresh leaves of spring
or wrapped her tan arms
around this tiny waist
as she rises him to touch
the nose of a newborn calf.

He will know, in the way
that only a child might,
the texture of her weathered
hands and her smile. In time
he will wander to her granite
home and sing to her the lullabies
she prepared so long ago.

In Eden

she imagines a tree. Under it a woman,
neither old nor young, who builds
with calloused hands a boy,
fair-skinned, from the soil.
She caresses his face, whispers
the first words to touch his ears –
Adam – the beginning and the end.

Chapter Three

Writing to Heal and Healing to Write: Process and Reflections on the Healing Narrative

This project began on a Dublin city bus a decade ago as I attempted to reconcile the helplessness that I felt in not knowing whether my mother was alive or dead. Four hours previous, I was abruptly startled from sleep by a hotel worker who breathlessly shoved a cordless phone into my hand. He was only able utter “emergency.” He had sprinted up three flights of stairs in the wee hours of the morning to bring to me a call that would forever change my perspective on life. My forty-seven year-old mother, who was in perfect health twelve days earlier when I boarded a plane across the Atlantic, had coded three times during the one hundred mile flight from our local hospital to the trauma center. While I still only remember fragments of the phone call, I do remember my father telling me that my mother may not be alive by the time I arrived home. The next several hours were a blur of activity as I contacted institutions and airlines. I also remember strange calmness as I attempted to pass the hours before my flight.

The concept of writing about this experience was conceived in a conversation I had with my professor and mentor, Patrick Hicks, on the way to the airport that morning. He vocalized the question that had rattled through my head since that phone call hours earlier: “What next?” My second-to-last semester of college began in three weeks. I had no knowledge about whether my mother was currently alive or dead. The only certainty at that moment was that life for my family would be forever different. While I did not know what came next, Patrick did. He told me that I would write about this experience, whatever it became.

That story has taken ten years to be remembered, formed, and written. There are still elements that will forever be lost in the recesses of trauma memory. There will still be others that will resurface in the coming decades when I am the least prepared for them. The experience of losing my mother will remain an undertone of all I write, and images, memories, and metaphors from this time will undoubtedly remain a part of my creative work for many years to come.

Healing from trauma is a process, no matter what the path. In describing the practice of writing to heal, Louse DeSalvo explains that the creative writer moves through several stages: preparation, germination, working, deepening, shaping, completion, and going public. She warns that writers need to be cognizant of where they are in the process, careful not to move too slowly or quickly lest they stall and lose interest or they move too quickly and fail to develop the essential foundations needed to move to the next stage of healing (108-111). Such a framework was helpful in understanding why some steps in my process took much longer than others. DeSalvo also cautions writers against the possibility of retraumatization by moving too quickly through the process of memory and story arrangement. She borrows a concept from Tim O'Brien who states that "through writing, it is possible. . . to change *reliving* of events into a creative and healing *retelling*" (161). The poems contained in this project are artifacts of the process of moving from "reliving" to "retelling" as I worked to access and order my memories.

Early on in this journey, I identified two goals. The first involves a process of self-healing. In the months and years following my mother's death I read many texts¹³ that promised healing through the process of writing. However, I found myself

unsatisfied by the prospect of writing as a purely cathartic practice. In those early years, my writing was fragmented and tangled. Before I could write, I had to find the significant moments that were absent from my working memory. This realization led me to an exploration of how the brain functions in a traumatic situation, and even more importantly, how memory functions after the event. Michelle Boisseau and Robert Wallace, authors of *Writing Poems*, remind poets that before a memory may influence a poem, it must be “investigated and shaped” (133). The process of investigation proved to be much more complex than I initially anticipated, as the only way of accessing the memories I sought was by first writing about those which presented themselves as the most pervasive. Boisseau and Wallace address this concept, reminding writers that while the metaphor of photography is popular, it is misguided as “even the most vivid memories aren’t snapshots, aren’t complete, self-contained units with set boundaries. Memories come to us as protean and mysterious, trailing ties to everything else we remember, everything else we are” (133). Recognizing that the memories that I sought to recover and own did not represent a lack of control on my own part only came about when I was able to overlay my experience of trauma and loss with my experiences of becoming a mother myself.

This intersection provided finality to my second initial goal: the composition of a narrative that captured not only the moments of trauma, but also explored the journey toward a unified story and a sense of healing. However, I knew that such a narrative could not be accomplished through the self-indulgent practice of personal or purgative writing.

I did not know it at the time, but my rhetorical reading¹⁴ had already begun before the moment(s) of trauma. Seamus Heaney's *North*¹⁵ traveled across the Atlantic with me and was the primary text that I read during the weeks that my mother fought for her life. Later I discovered other writers including Donald Hall and Fredrick Lindsay whose work served as a literary model for how the healing narrative can act as art and how such a document can serve as a space to re-experience the emotions that may otherwise be quieted by the necessity of surviving day to day. The key to the creation of this space comes from the "bridge of metaphors" theory of Fredrick Feirstein that I explored in chapter one. Through the use of literary elements, the writer is able to span the space between the known and the unknown. In the weeks, months, and even years following my mother's death, I dealt with memory loss that encapsulated not only the two week period of her illness, but that also affected my short-term memory processing. Through the process of studying the emerging fields of brain research over the past ten years, I have found that it is through the process of forming a unified narrative of my experience, I am able to restore the neuro-pathways that were severed by the trauma. McCurdy argues that the process of writing about traumatic situations can remedy such memory loss because the process of writing reduces the instances of intrusive thoughts, therefore reducing the load of the working memory, which in turn makes learning easier (*Mind's Eye* 90). I argue that in order for this process of writing to work, one may not simply engage in cathartic writing. Instead, it is essential to make mindful and artful use of poetic devices – to create Feirstein's "bridge of metaphors" – for creative writing to allow the writer to access repressed memories.

In this chapter I will explicate my process of writing, paying particular focus on the three sections of my work: “From the Moment of Impact,” “Beyond the Bounds,” and “Writing Towards a Future.” Each of these sections reflects not only a distinct time period in my writing and healing journey but also correspond to the stages of repairing traumatic memory that I outline in chapter one. Within these sections, I will apply several rhetorical strategies that have led to the construction of a complete telling of my story.

From the Moment of Impact: Repression, Metaphors, and a Pathway to Writing

My first forays into the healing narrative¹⁶ occurred the semester following my mother’s death. Finding myself thrust back into academia less than two weeks after this life-altering event, I was listless and without grounding. At the urging of the campus counselor, I attempted to write my story as a narrative. This attempt only solidified my fear that many of the memories from the preceding month were not accessible, disjointed, or otherwise indescribable. Fortunately, I happened to be enrolled in a poetry writing class that semester. I decided that my focus in that class would be the representation of my experiences through poetry. It was through the drafting and revising process that I realized that the creation of art would be the catalyst that would allow me to work towards unifying my memory, ultimately allowing me to someday piece together a unified narrative.

When I set out to continue this process years later, I eventually began referring to the writings from this period of time as dealing with the “moment of impact.” This concept was influenced in part by Olga Botcharova’s cycle of reconciliation in the process of healing from trauma. Beginning with the trauma at the center, it is essential spiral to progressive outward rings in order to transcend trauma (298). This image has

remained resonate with me through the years as each additional step in the process of healing comes from those previous until the bounds are no longer visible.

Several works emerged from my writing in the months after my mother's illness and death, the most significant of which I have included in chapter two. The first work to emerge was "Epitaph." In my experience writing poetry, very seldom have I successfully used the sonnet form. However, as the first piece of writing that I attempted on the topic of trauma, memories, and mourning, I felt that I needed some sort of structure of help provide order to the multitude of ideas that competed for space on the page. Fredrick Turner and Ernst Pöppel, proponents of New Formalism, and contemporaries of Fredrick Feirstein, in their attempt to put neuroscience in conversation with literature, argue that the brain's processing is primarily rhythmic in nature. Accordingly, these rhythms can create subjective states through the use of repetition, such as meter and rhyme scheme (215). Therefore, the use of form in the production of poetry allows both the reader and the writer to tap into a more primal state of memory – one in which sequencing and repetition open up a deeper state of recall and a more thorough understanding of time (209). At the time that I chose a sonnet format for "Epitaph," I knew nothing of New Formalism, nor did I have a clear grasp upon the link between rhyme, meter, and time; however, I did know that I needed a structure to begin my journey in writing about this very recent trauma.

In adhering to the aaa bbb ccc ddd ee rhyme scheme, I was forced to think beyond the initial images of trauma that I later write about, and instead use the images of my mother's and my shared past as a means of beginning to explore the present. The pastoral imagery characterized by "autumn chaff," the allusions to the seasons in the passing of

time, and the description of the coolness of my mother's touch become key metaphors in later writing. In addition to the advent of resonate images, this poem also sets up a brokenness in the narrative to come. While it is standard for the couplet of a sonnet to resolve the problem established in the preceding lines, in the case of "Epitaph," rather than a resolution, the final line leaves the reader with the image of broken dreams and lies. When viewed in terms of the psychoanalytic framework that I outline in chapter one, this work does not imagine a future. Instead, it is an indicator of the unreconciled present that will be addressed in the section "Beyond the Bounds" that immediately follows it.

The layering of past with present appears in all the works in section one. When viewed through the lens of Freud's definition of repression, such a layering provides a means of representing the way in which I was able to make sense of my experiences in the early days. As a result, many poems in this section establish the predominate metaphors that guide the poems in sections two and three. In chapter one I reference Modell who asserts that metaphor is the "currency of mind" through which the mind can detect patterns and subsequently assign emotional meaning to those memories that are accessed through the use of metaphor (555). Through the unconscious (and arguably conscious) creation of metaphors, I was able to begin to order my memories. Eventually, through the process of writing, the creation of metaphor sparked memories that I had not subsequently been able to access.

In section one, "Midnight Matriarchs," "Mother's Ring," and "Letter to a Dead Musician" are some of the earliest work that I undertook. These poems utilize pointed and specific images as a means of accessing deeper meaning in the narrative. In "Midnight Matriarchs," the key imagery in section I is the quantity of food that flooded

the hospital and our home during the days of my mother's illness and in the weeks following her death. Initially, I sought to capture the small-town ethic that obligates others to respond to tragedy, for both altruistic and ulterior reasons. Therefore, my initial goal was to create a metaphor using the food as a tenor. However, as the poem emerged and was subsequently revised, the metaphor that emerges instead is that of a pseudo-religion in which the stove becomes the altar and the food serves as the vehicle for offerings and prayers in recompense. Such is the cycle of obligation in a small town. As a writer, however, the lasting imagery of this poem is in part II which lists the physical remnants of life – the reality of mourning that is not accessible by those on the outside – which drives the narrative forward.

Donald Hall focuses on these remnant images and the role that they play in the healing process throughout *The Painted Bed*.¹⁷ In "Sweater," Hall meditates on the objects that continue to occupy his home, even after he donates Kenyon's belongings to charity.

but I keep on finding
 things I missed –
 a scarf hanging from a hook
 in the toolshed, a green
 down vest, or a sweater (4-8)

Hall lets these objects stand on their own, resonate in their own rights – simple vehicles for a simple tenor – Kenyon is gone yet each of these objects are a piece of her life that remains. Similarly, the second part of my poem focuses on the reminders of my mother's life that had the power to draw a past memory and subsequently a layered memory of the

trauma of her loss on top of that. For example, each image in lines 25-30 alludes to a story, simple in its existence, yet powerful due to the fact that the objects' owner no longer lives:

small parts of a life: a sock, a list, a necklace charm,
 a single strand of hair (chestnut, long, wound
 round and round a Christmas bough) a gold stud
 buried between carpet fibers below where
 her bed once sat, a Bell jar, spaghetti sauce
 2007 scrawled in her hand, pantry's bottom shelf.

The fact that these objects create a metaphor through which the lost may still “live” especially since, as Feirstein has established, time does not exist in the unconscious. When viewed through the lens of the healing narrative, this formation of these metaphors allows for the layering of present emotions onto objects that no longer maintain value beyond their role as a vehicle for capturing memories of the deceased. The process of composing these poems resulted in the emergence of several distinctive images. Among them are the significance of soil, the image of hands/fingers, and biting cold of winter.

While much more narrative in form, “Mother’s Ring” was the first poem I wrote in this sequence that centers on one object. In appealing to Feirstein’s concept of “life narrative,” the ring in this poem serves as a central object around which the narrative may be built. Because, according to Feirstein, time does not exist within the unconscious, poetic elements are needed to mediate the connection between the past and present. In this poem, each stanza stands for a distinct moment in time. Stanza one acknowledges the recent past – a time somewhere between my mother’s funeral and the present of the

poem. The second stanza, while still contained within the observational moment reflected in the first, acknowledges a span of time before this moment, “the years of wear” (11) which included the allusion to activities farming or gardening, “shrouded by a film / of Dakota soil” (13-14). Time shifts to the poem’s present in the third stanza with the present verbs “drop” and “slip.” By creating a trifold space within this poem, I am allowing experiences to juxtapose upon one another, thus creating connections between the past that I know and emotions that exist in the poem’s present moment. Feinstein calls this connection “reattachment and reconciliation.”

Despite a number of revisions to this poem throughout the years, the final two lines has always remained the same: “replaced the shaded / resonance of time” (21-22). When examined within Feinstein’s framework, this somewhat obscure closing line takes on a deeper symbolism, especially when considering Feinstein and the other New Formalist’s connection between physics and time. Turner and Pöppel’s set forth their interpretation of the International Society for the Study of Time’s major postulates. This interpretation acknowledges that time is not linear; it is composite, and “time is a hierarchy of more and more complex temporalities” (209). Therefore, in order to understand the “real world,” one must view time as multi-modal. Or to put it in more simple language, moments resonate against one another. While the relationship between two moments of time may not ever be fully actualized, by putting them into conversation with one another, I will achieve a deeper understanding of the emotions that emerge.

While I was not cognizant of the strategy of layering time in “Mother’s Ring,” I did consciously apply it in my revision of “Letter to a Dead Musician.” An early draft of this poem was among the first works that I wrote after my mother’s death. However, after

engaging in a rhetorical reading of Donald Hall's letter poems in the second half of *Without*, I decided that this work needed a global revision. The first step in this revision was to add a direct address by the subject of the poem. The opening line establishes a distinct time, "It's been a month / since you died." The immediate establishment of time is something that Hall does in several of his letter poems. In "Letter in Autumn," Hall writes in the opening line, "This first October of your death." Similarly, in "Midsummer Letter" Hall writes in lines four and five, "four months from the day / your chest went still." Such an overt establishment of time is important to the subsequent stanzas, each of which encapsulate a different time. In "Letter in Autumn," Hall moves from "Yesterday" in stanza two to "last night" in stanza three. He also takes the readers to the day of Kenyon's death in stanza four before ultimately using the structure that he establishes to shift geographically rather than temporally in stanzas five, eight, and nine. In my poem I use similar marking words to guide the reader through my layering of time as I refer to "yesterday" in stanza two and "last night" in stanza four. While there are no specific marker words in stanza three, the phrase "as a child" signifies a flashback to a time distinct from the narrative present of the poem.

For many years, these four poems and three common images were all that existed of my healing narrative. There were other ideas that begged to be written on the page; however, no matter the form, the work did not do the heavy-lifting of emotional ordering that I had come to expect. There were four significant moments that I consider key to my own and others' understanding of this story. However, these were four moments that only existed in fragmented sequences until recent drafts and revisions of my work.

The poem “Schrodinger’s Lie” tells the story of a chance conversation with an older woman while waiting for my flight out of Ireland the morning I learned of my mother’s illness. Striking up conversations with strangers is not something that I typically do. I remember the cracked vinyl of the seat I occupied in more vivid detail that I remember this woman; however, she is a significant figure on my journey because of the lie that I told her. From the time that I received the phone call at 4 a.m. to the time that I sat in this terminal at 10 a.m., I received no updates on my mother’s condition. For me she existed in both a state of life and death. However, explaining an idea of this magnitude to a stranger in a foreign country was beyond my capabilities at the time. To simply say that my mother was ill did not capture the magnitude of the situation. So I lied. I told a woman who had come to Ireland to spread the ashes of her late husband that my mother had died that morning. I remember being struck at how thoroughly I believed the story that I told. For all I knew in the moment, I might have been telling the truth. For years this moment that embodied my feeling of uncertainty has haunted me. Weeks later, after my mother had died, I could not shake the irrational thought that the premature assignment of the word “dead” upon her story had the power to affect the trajectory of her illness and death. I have searched for many years for a frame to contain this story. Ultimately I decided upon the concept of Schrodinger’s Cat from physics.¹⁸ The concept of assigning a narrative value to the unknown relates back to Janet’s theory of *narrative memory*. The conversation with the widow in the airport was my first attempt at creating the narrative thread of my story. Because there were key elements missing from my understanding, there was no ownership. In many ways, I was spinning a work of fiction – one that was ultimately proven to be true.

Revisiting the Moment of Trauma: Mimicking Narrative Memory

While my early writing was able to identify and explore the key metaphors that would eventually allow for the partial recovery of repressed memories, the poems written in this model were not adequate vehicles to portray the moments of trauma themselves. While I retained insight into some of the most difficult moments of my experience, I was not able to assign any sort of meaning to them. There was also no sense of narrative order to the events. In order to achieve the next stage of *narrative* memory, it was essential that I found a framework for the telling of my most repressed memories, therefore leading the emergence of the emotional connection that I felt was missing. It was through the rhetorical reading of Brian Turner's *Here, Bullet* and *Phantom Noise* and later Carol Muske-Dukes' "The Call," that I was able to find poetic model to capture the images and memories that Eagleman calls "flashbulb-like."

Over the years, I have attempted many times to represent the complex emotions that surrounded the call from my father informing me of my mother's illness. Initially, I wrote poem from only my perspective – a one-sided phone call. It was only after I found Muske-Dukes' poem "The Call" that I was able to find a structure that would allow for me to fully portray the experience. In chapter one I analyze how Muske-Dukes creates two distinct spaces in her poem: her home where she is making and receiving phone calls concerning her husband's accident, and the space of the emergency room where her husband lies dying behind the nurse with whom the speaker interacts. In applying this model to my own poem, rather than mediating the event through the call itself, I establish two distinct events that do not share a connection in the first stanza. It is through the adoption of a common language of sleeping and waking in stanza two that I am able to

forge the connection between my emotional processing of this news and the disconnection on the other side. Just as I am incapable of reconciling the amygdala flashes of memory with linear narrative telling of the story, the reader is only allowed small flashes of images, ““We’ve got her.” And a crackled tone. “Code team report.” And my father’s voice” (7). Despite the length of the lines, the thoughts are short and contained by numerous full-stop punctuation, leading the reader to move quickly between ideas, thus mimicking the quick and disconnected flashes of memory.

I revisit this same strategy again in “Premonition.” However, in this poem, rather than relying on punctuation to achieve the quick movement between ideas, I instead employ the short line and strategic enjambment. This strategy is based in part on the short, pithy lines that Bidart employs in several of his poems. For example, in “Mourn” he writes:

Then withdrew
lazily
as if to
teach you how
you must live
short of breath.
Still now crave
sudden air. (17-24).

The short lines in Bidart’s work are breathy in nature, leading to a gasping or sobbing effect. Further evidence of this fact is found in the references to “short of breath” (22) and “sudden air” (24).

In the opening lines of my poem, “Premonition,” the short lines mimic the sharp and spreading sensation of sensory engagement that accompany a premonition:

It works like this:

the sharp points

of panic begin

at in my scalp

and wash to shoulders,

kneecaps, big toes. (1-6)

Although the thoughts are short, I try to maintain momentum through the lines by drawing consonance with the *s* and *p* sounds. The short thoughts cause the reader to move quickly, but the repeated sounds create a unity between the lines, thus slowing the pace considerably by the end of the sentence. This quick movement is essential to establish the immediacy of the moment, thus drawing attention to the three narrative elements at play in this poem: the story of anticipating a loss two weeks before my mother became ill, the story of my husband’s anticipation of our pregnancy and my indication that we would almost lose our son before he was born, and finally allusions to historical figures who experienced strong indicators of important events.

The Metaphorical Center: Grounding Imagery and Temporal Exploration

In chapter one I explore Judith Harris’s concept of finding the “center of gravity” in a work. In her argument, Harris explains the process of how language resonates with what is unconsciously absorbed. In order to access this latent power, however, the writer must begin in the present. Therefore, through the process of revision and reimagination, the writer is able to revise his or her own agency in the situation. Often times, such

revision leads a re-centering in the poem that allows for a new perceptiveness on the topic, thus uncovering what may have otherwise been repressed.

My poem “Tender Remains” best represents this process of revision and re-centering. This work originally existed as a narrative description of my mother’s garden. While the original piece did take place on separate temporal levels, it marched on as a chronology of that space in the five years after my mother’s death. Through the process of revision, I created a strong framework that relied on a narrative present. The poem opens with physical and temporal indicators. I write, “June. I squeeze / brown soil through bare toes\wringing winter from organic loam” (1-3). In subsequent stanzas, I juxtapose this scene with the winter after my mother’s death and flashes into the past illustrating my mother’s versus my father’s interaction with the land. Through a concentration on contrasting images, I use stanzas two and three to establish the character of both of my parents, describing my father in terms of “mechanical precision” and “doctored soil.” In contrast, my mother works her garden manually. The focus on the “blistered hands,” “hoe handles / worn smooth” and “crooked furrows” demonstrates that each of my parents approaches the concept of working the land differently. In stanzas four and five this conflict is transferred to the speaker of the poem (in this case, me) and my father in our approach to clearing the remnants of her garden.

The power in the re-centering process comes from the new space that is created, within which the writer may gain a new insight. James Moffett posits that such acts of writing “. . . require synthesis of firsthand and secondhand knowledge into a full and harmonious expression of individual experience” (Harris 181). Through the act of placing seemingly isolated instances in conversation with one another – in this case the early

lessons that both of my parents taught me about working the land and my personal mourning process in relation to my mother's garden – the space for meaning is created. By taking a step back, I was able to realize that without a meditation on these early experiences – or my “firsthand knowledge” – I would not be able to access and portray emotions – the “secondhand knowledge” – necessary for this poem.

Extending the Metaphors: Researching to Healing

The layering of experiences provides a framework for assigning meaning in the space between. In applying DeSalvo's model for writing to heal, this is a component of the “deepening” stage. In this stage, DeSalvo encourages writers to do both personal and external research to find the stories, symbols, and ideas that will mediate the larger work (141). Therefore, in order to create the essential links in my poetry, I needed to expand the metaphors, enabling a greater space for discovery of memories and emotion.

Several of the works that I examined in my study made strategic use of bird imagery as an intermediary between the living and the dead. Carol Muske-Dukes goes so far as to title her collection *Sparrow*. However, the inspiration for “Concerning Owls” came long before I encountered any poetry on the topic. In the days after my mother's death I was awoken on three consecutive nights by what I was sure was an owl right outside my window. I never found any evidence of an owl. The event has always stood out as significant, despite the fact that I was unable to assign meaning to it. Years later, I recounted this story to a Lakota student in a conversation about spirits and death traditions. She told me several owl stories that solidified the link between owls and death. This conversation led me to investigate the role that owls play in several plains cultures. Through the layering of these different elements I am able to create a framework that I

can use to examine this previously unexplainable occurrence in the grieving and healing process.

I also used research to create a framework in the poem “Three Seconds.” For many years I was not able to access events of the final moments of my mother’s life. It was only recently, through my research about the ways in which poetry mimics and furthers the functioning of the human mind, that I was able to access the metaphor that allowed me to access these repressed memories. Turner and Pöppel argue that a “parcel of experience,” or the minimum amount of time that it takes for a human to process and plan a response is three seconds. Therefore, the authors conclude, the human moment is three seconds long (236). This piece of information led me to think about the most important moments from the trauma my family experienced. It was through this line of thinking that I was able to finally access and begin to explore the moment of her death. Because the disease was causing her capillaries to burst, the flesh in her hands and feet began to die. It became essential to amputate these appendages. She suffered a stroke while undergoing this procedure, and in the hours after, my father and I realized that it was unlikely that she would ever regain consciousness. In these hours we began the discussions about signing a “do not resuscitate” order. We had not reached a conclusion when the nurses rushed us into the ICU where she was coding. The trauma team was already performing CPR and preparing to use defilation by the time the charge nurse asked us what we would like to do. My father froze. In my memory, I was the one that gave the answer to discontinue care. This exchange was a split second. By building a framework using the theory of Turner and Pöppel, I was able to examine the lasting impact of making a decision of this magnitude in such a short period of time.

Accessing the Future: A Final Step in the Healing Narrative

In chapter one I explore Freud's work "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming." In it Freud explores the concept of "phantasies" or wishes that extend like a thread, drawing together the past, present, and future. When I set out on this project, I had no concept of a future as it related to my emotional life. In many ways, this project was stalled because of this fact. It was not until I learned that I would have a child that I was able to work with purpose. I want to someday be able to find the words to explain to my son the story of his grandmother and how her fight changed each member of his family.

Working with this goal in mind, I was able to more clearly imagine the elements of the narrative that needed to be included. However, as I began to envision this future, my anxiety about another impending trauma began to rise. Perhaps such preparation was a result of the trauma of losing my mother in such a way or perhaps it was a premonition. No matter the impetus, I feared that the experience of carrying and birthing my son would be traumatic in its own right. And I was correct.

The writings in section three reflect the process of writing through the potentially psychologically traumatizing emotions that accompanied the physically traumatic birth of my son. While there were no indicators of distress during early labor, at four in the morning my husband and I were hastily awoken by a labor and delivery trauma team because our baby's heart had stopped. In the matter of the seven minutes it took for the emergency cesarean section, his heart stopped and started three times. While he was ultimately healthy, and my resulting physical side-effects are minimal, combined with the foreboding feeling that I had about his birth, this experience has become an additional lens through which I view my journey towards healing.

Feirstein writes about the interplay between traumas in his essay “Trauma and Poetry.” For him, the events of 9/11 became the catalyst through which he was able to explore previous traumas from his life. By utilizing the metaphors that emerge from the national tragedy, he was able to “make bridges between this event and the fantasies it generated with split-off earlier ones whose full meaning and emotional landscape were becoming clearer as I wrote” (257). By viewing one tragedy through the lens of another, Feirstein argues that the suppressed emotional connections that might otherwise remain repressed suddenly become accessible. Donald Hall illustrates this process of discovery in his poem, “Kill the Day,” where he reacts to the explosion of TWA Flight 800 within the framework of mourning his wife’s death. In stanza fourteen he writes:

How many times will he die in his own lifetime?
 When TWA 800 blew out of the sky, his heart ascended
 and exploded in gratitude, finding itself embodied
 and broken as fragments scattering in water. (133-136)

While not directly affected by this tragedy, the vicarious trauma of the situation stirs the same emotional centers of the brain that store the memories of his trauma, thus resulting in a neurological link between the events. For Hall, because this experience activates such emotional centers in the brain, such a connection reminds him that he can feel and that he is in fact amidst the “deaths” that he feels he experiences each day. The power in this description lies with the word “gratitude.” This event, while terrible, awakens an emotional response from the speaker who has otherwise fallen into an emotionless monotony. In stanza fifteen, Hall writes, “Each day identified itself a passage to elsewhere, / which was a passage to elsewhere and elsewhere” (141-142). In viewing this

tragedy through the framework of his own grief, Hall is exploring the complexities of empathy and the isolation that comes with grief and the process of recovering from trauma.

My experiences assigning meaning to my experiences with the loss of my mother allowed me a greater framework through which I was able to examine the physical and emotional trauma of almost losing my son in childbirth. By placing these experiences in dialogue with one another, I am working within the variable space of Freud's past, present, and future principle. Through the juxtaposition of these two experiences, I am able to reconcile my fear of loss – a fear that has the potential to significantly color all my future experiences.

Poems in section three address the intersection of these traumas and explores how the reconciliation of these two events provides space for an imagined future. In "Almost" I juxtapose the images of my own garden with that of my mother's. In the first stanza, the tenor of the metaphor is my unborn son, which is explored through vehicle of the doomed plants. I illustrate this connection as I write, "as I nestled seeds into the too-cold ground, / crumbled root balls that screamed / for the protection of their nursery" (4-6). In this metaphor I am exploring the helplessness that I felt in the weeks leading up to the birth of my son – a helplessness that reminded me of what I felt as I watched my mother suffer.

I also explore the layering of trauma in "Birth Announcement." In the second stanza I make a direct connection between my mother's death and my son's birth, counting the days and hours between their last and first breaths. This connection sets up the conflict of the following lines as I explore the dynamics that come with my new identity of mother. Central to this stanza is the fact that one of my greatest fears as a

mother is causing trauma to my child. The irony, however, is contained in the image of holding on too tightly because the fact that the umbilical cord wrapped around my son's neck did cause him physical trauma.

In "Police Wife" I move beyond the context of healing from my mother's illness and death and instead look briefly at the other possible traumas that exist in my life. As the spouse of a police officer, I understand the potential for tragedy is ever-present. This potential is even more troubling when viewed within the larger context of cultural trauma as a result of many cases of police brutality drawing attention in 2016. I address the current conflict in stanza four with the lines:

How to breathe again,
 after a friend from Dallas PD
 Tweets "Alive"
 and I watch distraught
 widows on the television
 cradle their babies (21-28)

This scene was the impetus for this poem. A close friend of my husband and I works for the Dallas Metro police and is assigned to the downtown area. When the shootings occurred on July 7th, we waited, terrified to know whether he was involved in the shootings. We later found out that he was just coming on shift, and he was never involved with them directly. This experience, among others, reminds me that the potential for trauma exists, and that no matter how much any of us may heal from previous traumatic situations, these experience always remain a part of who we are. New experiences will

always be funneled through the lens of past traumas; however, that fact is not an impediment.

From a Healing to a Living Narrative

As I define it, the healing narrative is both a process and a document. This project is a snapshot of both. The final step in this process is the examination of the work as not as an artifact of the journey, but as a piece of art on its own merit. Therefore, it is essential to examine how the structure and sequencing of the work contributes to overall statement of the document.

In pursuit of this goal, I begin the narrative with the frontispiece poem “Concentric Circles.” So much of my journey is dependent upon the imagery of the concentric circles. By establishing this imagery in the opening lines of this poetic narrative, I am able to set up the metaphor that defines the sections and the imagery that emerges throughout the collection. In this short poem, “moment of impact” is innocent in its initial existence:

from the shock tremored perfection,
 measured waves rippling and lapping
 against gravel bounds and I imagine
 the moment of impact
 that would radiate me beyond (7-11)

This key metaphor, however, serves as the title of the first section, thus establishing each of the poems as a separate “moment of impact” that captures a snapshot of the trauma moments. In most cases, the moments represented in this section are those that were

initially repressed. Only through engagement with the healing narrative have they been uncovered and developed.

Just as “Concentric Circles” sets up the predominate metaphor of the work as a whole, the final two poems in the series, “KALOS” and “In Eden” capture the imagined future that is accessible only because of writing process that uncovered the moments in the previous poems. Like the other poems in section three, both of these poems intertwine the two key traumas that I explore in this sequence, imagining a future that contains both my mother’s memory and my son.

The title “KALOS” stems from the Greek term for beauty. Within the context of scientifically ordering ideas, however, this word serves as the root of all adjectives that might be used to describe the mind’s desire to order ideas and emotions. Turner and Pöppel make overt links to this concept in their discussion of monocaustaxophilia, which is the desire for a single cause to explain everything. These authors write, “The human nervous system has a strong drive to construct affirmative, plausible, coherent, consistent, parsimonious, and predictively powerful models of the world, in which all events are explained by and take their play in a system” (219). Within the context of an imagined future beyond trauma, such an ordering places the key components of my healing in direct contact. In order to accomplish this, I draw from the concept of story truth versus happening truth that I explored in earlier poems. Central to this is the idea that through the repeated and detailed telling of stories, individuals, particularly young children, come to believe that they have experienced situations and known individuals that may have never met. I use this idea to capture images of what interactions between my son and my mother may have looked like.

The final poem of the sequence, “In Eden” is a play on my son’s name, Adam. While I did not consciously associate his name with the concept of a new beginning when he was born, a friend recently pointed out this obvious connection. Drawing from this idea, I use the imagery of “building” a child:

she imagines a tree. Under it a woman,
neither old nor young, who builds
with calloused hands a boy,
fair-skinned, from the soil. (1-4)

As the two definitive traumas of my life have coalesced in this project, such an image provides an appropriate conclusion to this process of healing. By representing both my mother and my son interacting in the same space, I am representing the unification within the unconscious, thus leading to a unification of the previously disparate. Adam becomes an appropriate metaphor for the future that I have worked towards for so long.

Conclusion

It is late. My infant son fusses in the next room. Soon I will rise, soothe him to sleep, singing her songs in my broken voice. Words are missing here and there; I improvise bridges between the remembered bits. But these songs are his – ours – perfect in their imperfection, their deletions, their delicious slipperiness.

Ten years later it is hard to remember the days after my mother died. I remember the physical effects of trauma – the moments that would leave me gasping for breath in the grocery store or the dark edges that would creep into my vision as I sat helplessly in a college lecture. Still today, I can look at those I love, and, for the briefest of moments, lose the most basic details – their name or relationship to me, how long we have known one another, or the last words we just spoke. While these moments happen less and less often, they are still reminders that the physical effects of trauma are real.

A few weeks ago, a close friend, whom I have known for nearly five years, asked to hear the story of my mother's illness. For the first time, I was able to access the language to tell this story without gaps and holes – there were no long pauses, waiting to access the memory that I know should fit in a certain spot. Such a telling is a victory on the road to healing, for it is through language that we are able to exert control over the memories and images that can otherwise control us.

Stolorow is correct in his assessment; this moment in history is defined by the personal, natural, and national traumas that surround us. Increasingly, individuals are carrying with them stories without a language – pain without an outlet. Through the process of the healing narrative, these stories can find the words necessary for their telling and their tellers can find relief.

I know that my process is not complete. There are stories from this period in my life that remain untold, pieces to which I have not yet assigned words and emotions. There are also pieces of this story that remain in my unconscious, locked tight, waiting for the key necessary to release them. In the coming years, I will continue to write. The stories, images, and metaphors that I have unlocked in this project will remain an undertone, for they are a part of my life story, essential to my understanding of who I am. I will also continue to revisit this work, revising and reviewing until I am ready to present my writing and my story – this piece of my *life narrative* to the world.

Notes

¹ According to Freud, *neuroses* occur when the ego fails to effectively repress or displace desires. He differentiates *traumatic neurosis* from other types of neurosis because traumatic neurosis stem from a real event rather than an unconscious or psychological conflict (Felluga).

² I choose 9/11 as a starting point for analysis because for all intent and purposes, it marks the advent of the contemporary period of literary and cultural analysis (Butler 5).

³ This is a term that I borrow from Louise DeSalvo's *Writing as a Way of Healing*.

⁴ Jason Thompson posits in "Writing about Trauma: *Catharsis or Ruminatio*n" that the widespread use of memoir writing within the field of psychoanalysis may in fact stall the patient in his or her journey towards healing rather than provide a means to bring about further understanding or ultimately, closure (275-276).

⁵ Kaplan uses this term to encapsulate traumatic experiences in history, including, but not limited to World War II, the Holocaust, and the postcolonial existence of some indigenous people (1).

⁶ According to Freud, children in the process of playing are able to distinguish the imagined world from the real one. The linking of these "imagined objects and situations to the tangible and visible things of the real world" constitute what Freud deems the phantasy. He explains that creative writers take part in this same process, investing great deals of emotion into writing while keeping it separate from reality (*Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming* 421).

⁷ Dervin, Daniel. *A "Strange Sapience": The Creative Imagination of D.H. Lawrence* (30).

⁸ This idea is furthered examined in Adams 28.

⁹ This idea is furthered examined in Adams 29 and Larsen 187.

¹⁰ Bidart, Frank. "Ellen West." *In the Western Night: Collected Poems*, Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1990.

¹¹ Among the most commonly cited side effects of those suffering from what Gibb's deems "insidious trauma" are nightmares, flashbacks, and memory loss or fragmented memories (13-15).

¹² Gibbs references Roger Luckhurst who explains that trauma freezes or transcends time, thus ruling out the possibility of narration within the trauma narrative.

¹³ Louise DeSalvo's *Writing as a Way of Healing*, Susan Zimmerman's *Writing to Heal the Soul: Transforming Grief and Loss Through Writing*, and the anthology *Healing and Writing* edited by Charles Anderson and Mariam MacCurdy were the first and most resonate texts that I explored.

¹⁴ In this context, I use this term to signify my reading of a text as an analysis of the stylistic and rhetorical moves a writer makes in the construction of a work of literature.

¹⁵ One of the assigned readings for the course "Disunited Kingdom: Conflict and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland."

¹⁶ However, I did not adopt this term until much later in my process.

¹⁷ The section of the poem that I am referencing did exist in its present form before my discovery of Hall's work. I point out the similarities here, however, to illustrate how the focus on such images is a key step in the progression of the healing narrative.

¹⁸ Erwin Schrödinger's famous experiment in quantum mechanics is commonly known in popular culture as Schrödinger's Cat. In his experiment, Schrödinger placed a cat in a

steel box along with a Geiger counter, a vile of poison, a hammer, and a radioactive material. When the radioactive material decays, it registers on the Geiger counter, which then triggers the hammer to break the vile of poison, killing the cat. Because radioactive decay is a random process, the observer does not know if the cat is alive or dead until the box is opened. Therefore, according to Schrödinger, the cat exists as both alive and dead until observed (Kramer).

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