

re- / “Can Poetry Hold Us All?: A Journey Out of Trauma- Based Writing”

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Abstract

re- / “Can Poetry Hold Us All?: A Journey Out of Trauma- Based Writing”

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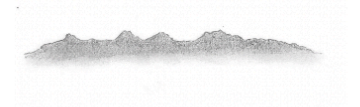
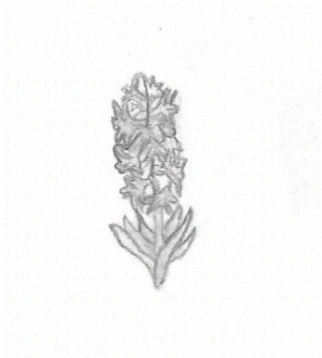
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Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences

re- and the accompanying essay “Can Poetry Hold Us All?: A Journey Out of Trauma- Based Writing” explore the complex relationship between trauma, creativity, and recovery through a poetic and reflective lens. It chronicles the author’s journey from writing that was deeply entrenched in personal trauma to a re-imagined creative practice grounded in healing, presence, and self-renewal. Initially trapped in cycles of repetition and emotional exhaustion, the author confronts the limitations and mental toll of trauma-based writing. Through intentional disengagement from past themes and the development of new coping mechanisms, the author begins a process of creative re-discovery. The resulting poetry collection, *re-*, deliberately omits contextual details and instead emphasizes the emotional and thematic aftershocks of experience—loss, uncertainty, and hope—allowing readers to engage freely and empathetically. Influenced by experimental poetics, the gothic tradition,

and writers such as Aase Berg, Orlando White, and Ross Gay, the work prioritizes fluidity, ambiguity, and the power of the present. The thesis is ultimately a testament to the ability to re-build a sustainable and life-affirming writing practice, one that moves with—and not against—the self.



re-

Natalie Mannino

re-

/rē/

prefix

1. once more; afresh; anew.
2. used to add the meaning “do again”
3. returning something to its original state.

- Oxford English Dictionary & Cambridge Dictionary

erasure i: entrance

[REDACTED]

try to write some
thing else.

sunrise

I was up before the sun this morning and instead of writing I lay awake in bed, twisting and turning and letting the re-resentment build up inside of me until my spine was ringed with it, all brown and steel and sludge, until I could not sit still and instead of going outside to walk it off, instead of reading a book, instead of grabbing the pen, I squeezed my eyes tight and re-fused *re-fused*—

The sun came orange and pink through the slats, the first sunrise I'd seen in many a week, and not just because it's fall in Seattle, but because I will always choose to sleep in late and miss the morning, swollen with promises and expectation, in favor of the night where time and place cease to exist and I can imagine what words on a page would look like—

But I can't bring myself to pick up the pen so my dreams are littered with the remnants of poems that never came to be and my notebook sits empty on the nightstand and I lay paralyzed because I am full of ideas yet I am empty of possibility and I write about how I cannot write cannot write *cannot write*.

giving tree

when I write,
lungs fill with
rocks, needles
slide under nails.

words born
red-faced,
screaming,
self left
smoking,
raw, vowing:
never again.

price

Even now your pen pauses. Even now you shrink from the idea, the memory
fading as your hand stills. Only a moment ago, so eager, so hot, so ready
to be pushed out from between your legs, blue and red and crying
and yet—the ink is blacker than you re-member. The paper
savage, feral with potential possibilities. Your hands
are weapons of your own destruction. How does
one proceed? How does one hold the knife
and chop the hand laying on the
block? What will the price be
this time? What will you
sacrifice for this,
this wild
art?

choke

smell of snow led me

 here

hot concrete and bloody ink

a slow march

 back back back

 to self's chains

to last year's voice

this

 is a giving up

this

 is a surrender

to cloudless black

dirt

under fingernails

 grave dust
to choke on

self, prior

re-turn re-turn
 to me

slip from your bed
out to the woods
behind your house

wipe the blood
 from your eyes

find me draped
in white

find me caked
in dirt

find yourself
as you left her.

victim

sap the color
from the eyes

pull the smell
from the nose.

spiral
down

the sink drain

into pipes
that can try to
hold
you.

search for semblance of

p - e - r - s - o - n

amid rust,
re-dact meaning
from reason.

float on
to days no
less

haunted,

eyes no less accusing,
and
search search search search search

child wound

I am still
swimming,
hands out
in front of
my face,
pushing away
water.

I am still
shivering
in summer
sun.

I imagine
the muscles
around
the wound
are gray,
textured,
covered in
pinkish film
of hurts
never
to be healed.
My evolution
stays tied up
in that scar
tissue.

An infant
ouroboros,
choking,
crying,
a small
mammal
looking for
shelter
in the rain—
I try to finish,
but she is still
swimming,
still
drowning,
still
retching,
I am still
searching,

still
searching
still
searching.

rivers

There is no language
to shove into wounds
you did not make,
to buffer hurt
that will always
come your way.
They have bled
long enough
to form rivers,
rivers that I re-turn to
again and again,
gripping tree trunks
and broken branches,
trying to cross,
never knowing if
the hug of the current
will smother
or guide me.

october penance

I took a walk today.
I saw two slugs,
a red-headed woodpecker.
I saw an owl that turned—
blinked at me.

I sat on a bench and let the mosquitos
flutter around my face. For my quiet
and stillness, I did not get bitten.
I would have almost given my blood
out of thanks.

I watched a pair of mallards
dunk their heads underwater.
I saw driftwood rock
back and forth, bark smooth
and silky in the gleaming sun.

There was a time when this meant
nothing to me. There was a time
when October made me cry.
There was a time when I thought pain
was fate, and fate a promise.

But now the waves of the lake
lap so gently, and the sun is so soft,
the leaves so beautiful in their dying,
that I wonder.

I wonder.

the reason

cohesion is not
glue.
satiating of reader
comes at my expense,
 a slumbering beast
watching on the horizon

*

i starve words of meaning,
gather husks,
weave and weave and weave

*

to create a something from the nothing

to let the absence speak for itself

to try again

*

re-

*

knock the pillars down.
put out the signal fires.
eat up the breadcrumbs.

this is not supposed to guide you.

there is no predestination.

this is a step, and another, and another,

until the path
 is the reason.

skies so blue

and it's past
it's past it's past it's past

shell leaking
amniotic fluid
can breathe now
never saw skies so blue
mountains so snowy
cradled in a bowl
a rugged pair of hands,
backed up to the ocean—

it's past, it's a back door an escape
a perpetual disappearance
that never stays the same
is me is sound is past is
to bend to curve to be
ramrod straight and sway
to circle to eat myself again and
again and again roll my head
on my spine again—

a brand new mattress a bloodletting
a sacrifice a plane
flying loudly overhead voices
no longer working and no reason
no reason no reasons anymore
an open interpretation based on reader's perspective
no story no through-line hand not held
hint not given reins loosed
path unwavering in its ambiguity no sense
to be made anymore because lungs
are pink healthy working and life is
living here now then—
and—

new year

meaning loosens its grip on me.
all of me sees all of it.

*

beloved—birds fly above, and rain runs down the window.
balsam hangs in the air, and plastic pine sits in the corner.
I want to write an ode to new January afternoons,
to music that makes me pause at the sink,
to the furry body clumped against mine like a chick
fresh from the egg.

*

in a manner of speaking I love and I mourn
and I've let (who I understand to be) God
sit undisturbed in the corner of the room.

*

and it could be age or distance from those whose hands
are different from mine, but in spaces left in my heart
from the excavation and scrounging are shapes
that I re-call, formations that I've waited for,
things that I have always known.

*

meaning loosens its grip on me.
all of me sees all of it.

drive thru

I won't show the colors I've discovered inside of me yet, as the words *god* and *grace* were once careless things, useless and frilly, but I think about things differently now, I do things differently, I know what ube tastes like when it's in boba tea, all purple and wonderful, and I love wistful music, not for the tears, but for the liminality that I've grown to accept within myself, accept and not attach meaning to, and I finally told my mom how I felt, cried and cried and cried it all out, and I've been trying to slow my heart rate while I drive, I even got a Vince Guaraldi CD to listen to before work, and I still miss the sun but I forgot how much I used to see it so it doesn't bother me anymore, it doesn't bother me it doesn't because it's not me anymore.

edmonds beach in january

My pen moves slow,
hesitating, contemplating.
This is one of those poems
where the sun is warm
on my cheeks, the waves
rhythmic and glimmering
in front of me, and the ink
of my pen is a cranberry
so beautiful that I write
slowly, savoring the curve
of each letter. I nibble
on words, letting the juice
trickle down my chin
on to the page. I write only
for that sweetness, the taste
of it in my mouth. I write
only for that cranberry,
the feel of it in my hand.
This is one of those poems
where I write for no one,
where I am here and I am there
and I am trying—asking—
re-mem-bering—but the waves,
the sun and the ink have nothing
to give, I nothing to take
but this—this—

 this.

farewell to michigan

I could've stayed
 if you let me.
Had that blue
 rush out of me,
rock and sand
still grinding
in my teeth.

I could've stayed,
never gone to gray.
But the evergreens are mine
now, and I write to you
 from an edge—
a cusp, a lip,
from a chip on my shoulder
 that I willingly cut myself on
 again and again,
lapping up the blood
 every time.

The west has pulled the plug,
24 has never tasted so wet,
 so raw.
Rain has never sounded sweeter,
 the air smelling
of marshmallow and apple.

I could've stayed,
but mountains rise
 every way I look,
blue and white,
and safety is a feeling
that settles
on my shoulders.

Dead people stay dead
and loved ones stay
 like sleep lines on Saturday morning.
I have a paned window,
a living room
 that faces the sun.

I haven't seen snow in a year,
I have no need for air conditioning,

and I can move with it all now.

I can glide
and run down it like rain,

because this life is
different,
separate,

not an act,
not a survival.

apple juice

The missing is sweet, like apple juice coating my teeth.

I'll sit here, wrapped in April's memory,
seeing an upturned face, the curve of a nose, blue denim eyes.

I'll get drunk on switchback memories
of looking for crabs on the pier, pizza at my place, a goose-bumped
afternoon at Green Lake. I may be sitting here,
but inside I'm on the I90 bridge, July air rushing through the window,
and I could cry fat, honey-crisp tears
because I haven't had memories ringed with such sugar in years.

february

and the sun

thesunthesunthesunthe

sun

shines down
in rivulets of gold

and i feel romantic
i feel descriptive

i feel
 that writing comes to me naturally

is a gift a pleasure a coveted jewel
that i wear shyly
 entwined with hyacinth and twigs slowly growing

in a pink pot
on the kitchen table
that i water with love
 withlovewithlovewithlovewith

love

because i am loved
i am loved
i

am.

grape sugar

Paper trail, drop / of blood,
a pinch / a grave, a hug / all
twenty four / of me
sprawled / out in the back /
seat, sun orange / in the
back window / high off
grape sugar / concentric
rings / glaring in the lens / a
song hummed / not known
— / can poetry / hold us all?

carrie

I can't see mountains today,
but the salt smell of seawater
will do. High tide speaks
to me. The welling blue
of the Sound a blanket
for the chattering teeth
in my mind. I fly above
waves, fingers skimming
the water, turning blue
green to crystal. I speak
to you. I thank you,
again and again. I explain
that I can move with it all now.
I can roll with it over
and over, until I empty
out into the Pacific.
I'll bring a piece of it
back for you—a shell,
or a pebble. A crab claw.
A piece of a place
you've never seen,
but showed me
the path to.

april's return

it's a re-ceding, an arm
reaching out
a caul
a slow slipping
into muddy ponds
eyes blinking above
the waterline,
gasworks glowing
crow feathers falling,
a hug of sorts
a time no longer
lived, hated and yet
yearned for
a battering over the head,
pages damp and moldy,
a phone call
on the front steps,
sip taken, it's time
looping back through
the same stitch to
undo and re-create itself,
to shed the insides
and wear them
out in the rain,
out in the air,
new and old and
that beautiful gray
again.

erasure ii: exit

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] layers of [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] silver [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] sun [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] whispered to me [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] barefoot [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] in the dark, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] risk [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] breath [REDACTED]

spring

I plucked out all the feathers

Sun is warming my body

I am nervous to write

I try anyway

Cherry blossoms bloom

It is light when I wake

Is it okay that I am scared?

Is it okay that I have hope?

for the first time

I want to drive fast back and forth on I-5
I want to take the turns recklessly and
barely see the cars in front of me
because the window is too far down
hair blowing in my eyes yearning
yearning to get picked up and
out of the car into the sky
into the clouds into the heart
of the Olympics where I can melt
run down in streams and waterfalls
back into the Pacific to roll and turn with
the seals the clams and the orcas and breach
my body on to your shores for the first time
again—tell me, will this summer be the same?

summer has come

I could do what I've done before,
But summer has come.

Summer has come,
and some of the pain

has leaked out of me
in small pebbles and fibers.

Summer has come,
and I re-fuse to re-turn.

I could say so many things—
so many things—

And yet I re-fuse to give
what the past commands,

For summer has come
and I desire nothing.

giving tree, re-grown

when I re-write,
ocean shines
with salt crystal,
mountains
glow blue.
words born
squealing,
flying,
self joined
in poetry,
ink pulsing,
promising:
again.

references, in conversation with, and dedications:

Page 7: written to “Punish” by Ethel Cain from *Perverts*

Page 9: “return return to me” is a lyric borrowed from “Funeral Singers” by Sylvan Esso

Page 17: “all of me sees all of it” is a lyric borrowed from “All of Me Wants All of You” from Sufjan Stevens’ *Carrie & Lowell*

Page 17: written to “John My Beloved” by Sufjan Stevens from *Carrie & Lowell*

Page 20: written to “Venice Bitch” by Lana Del Rey from *Norman Fucking Rockwell!*

Page 22: epigraph from “Fill in the Blank” by Orlando White from *Bone Light*

Page 23: for RRDIV

Page 25: “Can poetry hold us all?” is borrowed from GV Hicks

Page 26: for Carrie Gregg

Page 28: written to “Spring 1” by Max Richter from *Recomposed By Max Richter: Vivaldi, The Four Seasons*

Page 29: written to “Summer 2” by Max Richter from *Recomposed By Max Richter: Vivaldi, The Four Seasons*

can poetry hold us all?: a journey out of trauma-based writing
Natalie Mannino

The Trauma is all I can write about. It sits atop my pen, haunting my sentences. I try to find new prompts, get inspiration from other writers. I try to write about happiness, the beauty I see everyday, the things I love, but everything I create comes out—not right. It's almost as if anything I create that isn't tinged with the Trauma, that isn't lined with hurt, isn't good enough for me. All I do is re-turn to the same places, trying to write my way out, but I can't do it anymore. I can't write anymore, if this is all it's ever going to be—if pain is all I'll ever create.

I. Context: *try to write something else*

Writing through trauma is hard, dark, and lonely. For most of my time as a writer, my traumatic experiences had me in a vise, keeping my creativity locked in a dark place where I could only take inspiration from painful memories. Most of my work was an attempt to find different ways to explain certain situations and their impact on me, while trying to create connections, symbolism, and metaphors that made my trauma “make sense.” It was difficult for me to create work that didn't align with heavy themes, such as loss, abuse, and death, and even harder to find satisfaction with the few pieces that did. However, when I would eventually re-turn to writing from places of trauma, I was also unhappy with what I was creating. I felt that my pieces were getting re-dundant, that I wasn't experimenting enough, and that I wasn't growing as a writer. Not to mention, continually re-hashing my trauma was taking its toll on my mental health. This resulted in a vicious and never-ending cycle of needing to write, as it was my strongest coping mechanism, yet hating what I was creating, finding myself continually triggered, and living in a mental space that wasn't allowing me to heal and move forward.

As I still wasn't satisfied with pieces not dealing with trauma, I turned my attention to the negative feelings of frustration and entrapment I was having towards my writing practice. I began to write about my re-relationship with writing, the power balances I felt between myself and my creativity, and how I felt that all of my pieces would inevitably end up being about the same thing and making the same point. The work that came out of this period was dark, gory, commanding, and angry. While I wasn't writing about trauma itself, I was still writing about its fallout and the effect that it had on my creativity, and this culmination resulted in intense burnout. I ultimately decided to stop writing, as I was unable at the time to override my coping mechanisms in lieu of something healthier. I was done.

When I picked up the pen again a few months later, I made the decision to stop writing about trauma altogether. If I was going to start up my practice again, I was going to do it in a way that prioritized and protected my mental health, and this meant that I was not going to reference my trauma in any of the ways that I used to: metaphors, symbolism, visual motifs, color, etc. In this way, I felt that I was writing with no source material. I no longer had any scaffolding for my writing, nothing that I could anchor myself and my words to. I had all of the tools to write, but I no longer knew how to use them in a way that felt both satisfying and safe. Trying to find something to write about, instead of ways to write the same thing, was new to me.

I started small. I brought a journal with me everywhere. I prioritized healthier coping skills, like going outside, listening to music, and reading the work of others. I tried to associate writing with moments of peace, re-flection, and contentment, instead of sadness, fear, and hopelessness. I tried to observe my feelings and environment instead of figuring

them out. I attempted to force a scheduled writing practice, but found that it added too much pressure to perform, so I tried to hone my listening skills instead. When did my inspiration perk up? Did I always have pen and paper nearby for these moments? Did I set aside the time in those moments to write, and not turn away in fear? Did I find gratitude in the act of writing? Was I content with creating something just for the sake of creating?

Over time, writing got easier. The more I listened to and wrote on my creativity's schedule, the more I *wrote*, and the more I got out of what was I creating. I didn't feel bogged down and depressed after writing—instead I felt fulfilled and satisfied at the fact that I had created something from what felt like nothing. My work felt precarious, delicate, and unreliable at the time. I didn't know what I was doing. I didn't have a grand outline, or an end product that I was working towards, and I felt unprepared. I wanted to know what I was going to get out of my new practice, but that simply wasn't possible, and I had to be okay with that. I had to just keep writing.

II. Culmination: *to create a something from the nothing*

re- is a collection of poems about re-discovery, exploring themes such as loss, uncertainty, trust, and hope. It is intended for the reader not to know what events this collection is the effect of. Unlike my past work, *re-* re-fuses to delve into contextual details, observations, and emotions of certain situations, choosing instead to discuss the feelings that come in the wake of such experiences. It starts after the climax has passed, within the fallout, and begins almost as afterward. However, it slowly becomes a standalone entity rooted in its separation of and independence from traumatic themes, morphing from an afterward into its own source material, referencing and re-reflecting upon itself rather than past events. It is a re-composition of sorts, like Max Richter's album *Recomposed: Vivaldi, The*

Four Seasons, in which Richter re-composes and re-interprets Vivaldi's violin concertos, giving them his own unique sound and structure. *re-* takes certain events and works them into an entirely new and independent experience, re-freshing and re-newing both the past and the present.

The decision to omit context was made for a couple of reasons. From a writing perspective, I didn't want to return to old habits and crutches, as I felt they were hindering my work and holding me back creatively. From a personal perspective, I needed to find something healthier to turn my attention to. The lack of context not only let me stay true to my own desires, but I hope gives the reader more freedom to create their own connections and fill in the absence with whatever they need to re-late to these pieces. Instead of sympathizing with a certain situation and its effects, I hope they can empathize with the emotions and thoughts that emerge in its wake. I hope that this collection invites others in.

re-'s themes grow and change as one reads on, mirroring the changing of seasons. We start in late fall and winter where pieces are heavy with the feelings of entrapment, resentment, and resignation. The atmosphere is dark, sometimes angry, and there is a stress writhing under everything, daring to be acknowledged, seen most clearly in "night drive," "price," and "giving tree." Interspersed among these thornier moments are small gasps of breath, pieces where I re-assess my poetics ("skies so blue") and attempt to root my writing in my physical environment instead of old, unhealthy mental landscapes ("october penance"). This tentative questioning and exploration of new ways of writing continues throughout winter and early spring, sometimes quietly, as in "new year" and "edmonds beach in january", or more boldly, like "creation" and "february." The collection currently finds its end in summer, where my mental and physical landscapes, poetics, and everyday experiences

blend and bounce off of each other to create pieces that feel genuine and have a distinct and sure voice (“grape sugar”, “summer ii”, “giving tree, re-grown”).

re- is encased by “erasure i: entrance” and “erasure ii: exit”, which I imagine as bookends, or doors. Symbolically, they are the only two unchanged pieces from my previous work, and details have been purposefully blacked out in order to create something new from something painful. This idea of re-creation is central to this collection, and is why I chose to title it *re-*. I found myself frequently using the prefix when trying to describe to others what my thesis was about, tacking it on to words like build, imagine, and define. I thought I had done all of these things already— that I had built, imagined, and defined my creativity and poetics, and that I knew what my thesis was going to be about. Over time, the security of this perspective became re-strictive and constricted my growth as a writer, ultimately leading to me abandoning my old writing habits and trying something new. That journey, that re-discovery and re-kindling of my creative practice, is central to my thesis, and why I chose to title it *re-*. I included the definition of the prefix as an epigraph to frame the collection for the reader, and to ground them in the perspective I was taking: this is a re-learning, a re-building, a re-writing, a re-turn of my creativity and writing practice to an original state, free of the traumatic.

III. Conversation: *showed me the path to*

I have always been able to find a home for my writing and poetics within the gothic, and I’m happy that *re-* was able to continue my connection and exploration of the genre, albeit in a different and more ambiguous way than I’m used to. My previous work has more traditional and foundational aspects of the gothic, as it was dark and haunting, featured a lot of gore, body horror, blood, and trauma, and strove to create a sense of uncertainty and

unre-liability within itself. As my work at the time was constantly in conversation with or about the past, there were constant underlying themes of fear and distrust of place, time, and presence. I used a lot of the same words and phrases that continued to loop my writing back in on itself in order to create a hazier, unsettling atmosphere that re-flected my mental and creative state. I pushed myself to abstain from my impulses of writing within the gothic that I was familiar with while writing *re-*, as utilizing these styles felt like a re-turn to ways of writing that I was trying to unlearn and move past. However, while these typical markers for the gothic are not present, the heart of the gothic—the unknown—is at the core of this project. The absence of context, and the intentionality of writing around it, is the point of *re-*. While the reader has the option to make connections and form a narrative for themselves, I hope they accept the unknown element of this collection for how it creates space for new growth and exploration. I don't believe I would have been able to fully embrace the fact that this was the point of the project had I not known, explored and read of the gothic. While *re-* might not fit into the gothic as I have previously known it, in accordance with its themes of re-visioning, this collection re-works the gothic elements that I love in ways that can continue to grow with me.

One of the most impactful gothic writers for my poetics is Aase Berg. Berg's book of poetry, *Mörk Materia*, turns time inside-out, exploring worlds new and old, archaic and futuristic, hopeful and despairing. Its experimental nature, joined with Berg's fragmentary and unforgiving voice and lack of linearity continually drew me in, and was crucial for the development of *re-*. Berg's decision to force the reader into spaces where context and circumstances are unclear or ungraspable was entirely new to me, and helped me to force and keep open ways that I oriented myself, and consequently my reader, in my pieces. By

not re-lying on the past, facts, and context, my work was able to coexist in both liminal and physical spaces, untethered by a desire to explain.

I found a model for the space that some of my pieces needed in Orlando White's *Bone Light*. An analysis of language and syntax, broken down letter by letter, characterizes the distinctive nature of this poetry collection. White cuts through words with haunting precision, making each letter as important and invaluable as words are to sentences, and pays special attention to both punctuation and space. White's use of the entire page, and the separation between his words, lines, and stanzas, validated some of the new formats I was exploring in the early stages of *re-*. Pieces such as "the inevitable," "victim," "february" and "the reason" are places where I was trying to untangle and grapple with some of the more intense themes of this collection, and I couldn't find a format stable enough to hold my observations and thoughts. By pulling and pushing apart my words and lines, as White does, I found a format flexible and malleable enough to reflect the gravity of my emotions and what I was trying to convey.

Finally, I found Ross Gay's *Catalog of Unabashed Gratitude* to be influential in my journey to find new ways of writing. This poetry collection bursts with life, love and loss, with Gay never apologizing for the immensity and strength of his emotions. His ability to find beauty in even the smallest of details, and his determination to praise and appreciate moments that others could easily forget was something that I needed to read about. I had never encountered a collection dedicated to joy, and hearing Gay write line after line about the garden in his backyard, or the plum tree on the corner, gave me the permission I needed to write about my own surroundings, such as in "october penance", "edmonds beach in

january,” “skies so blue,” “apple juice,” and “new year.” I needed to stop and notice the things around me that I told used to tell myself didn’t matter.

In addition to other poets, music was an essential part of the creation of *re-*. Auditory stimulation puts me in a very creative state almost instantaneously, and many of these pieces were created while listening to specific songs. I’ve credited these in the back if any readers are interested in having that experience for themselves. Sufjan Stevens’s *Carrie & Lowell* and Max Richter’s *Recomposed Four Seasons* created beautiful soundscapes that brought forth words I otherwise don’t think would have found their way out. Stevens’ lyrics are so simply honest and poignant that I found myself emulating them, and even borrowing them as starting off points for writing. I’ve credited these words at the end of *re-* as well.

In trying to strengthen my listening skills and create a healthier relationship with my creativity, I found that my environment was just as important to what I was reading and listening to. It was difficult for me to explore different themes and ways of writing when I was still physically in a place that had old memories attached to it. Therefore, I attempted a more ethnographically centered practice, following poets like Eileen Miles and Cedar Sigo, where I made it a point to bring a notebook along whenever I went outside, hoping that new sights, sounds and smells would bring about inspiration (“drive thru” was actually written in a drive through). It was a challenge at first, because even if my creativity did perk up more outside, that didn’t necessarily mean I found it easier to write about different topics. This is where the combination of music and the possibilities I had read in *Catalog of Unabashed Gratitude* came together, and I attempted to write about the present moment, something that was very new to me. Over time, I found that the peace I found while in

nature allowed me to take greater steps into my new poetics space, and it ultimately strengthened my comfort level with my work, as well as helping to re-juvenate my creativity.

The environment that I surrounded myself in, the Pacific Northwest, contributed significantly to the atmosphere and setting of *re-*. My pieces follow the seasonal arc of the region, which is still quite new to me as I grew up in Michigan and have only lived in Washington for two years. The lack of snow, endless rain, mountains, and closeness to the Pacific Ocean are characteristics that stick out to me about my environment and inform the work I make. Spring and fall feel drawn out, and summer and winter are much gentler, that Washington feels more languid than the tempestuous weather patterns of Michigan, and that slowness reflects in the gradation of *re-*, with its seasonal and thematic highs and lows.

IV. Continue: *i can move with it all now*

Towards the end of *re-*, I use the phrase “I can move with it all now.” This came about early on while writing as a way to sum up what I couldn’t (and didn’t) want to say. “It” was a simple two-letter word that allowed me to compartmentalize my past, and not get snagged on and caught up in it when I felt the need to address it. The longer phrase became my way of telling myself that yes, I acknowledge what happened, but I am not getting stuck writing and thinking about it. I can move forward. After completing this collection, I find that the word “move” is what I focus on, not “it.” I can move within my writing and poetics, and I have a flexibility that I did not have when I first began my MFA program. I don’t feel the need to re-hash old trauma and have worked hard to create a practice that grounds itself in the present, and isn’t afraid to leave out topics that I once would have deemed necessary. Time used to be such a focal point in my work, in that it felt like a circle, where I would always return to the past. Now, I feel that I have mentally broken out of this circle, and

create paths of my own that can address and acknowledge the past, but not get trapped there. I can move from topic to topic, idea to idea, and still create work that feels authentic and gratifying. I can re-work and re-visit, but that doesn't mean I have to stay.

With this radical poetics shift in mind, I anticipate that my poetics will undergo another shift in the future. I expect to have to re-create and re-imagine my poetics, just as I did with *re-*, numerous times throughout my life. I hope that the flexibility that I have worked hard to strengthen will be able to carry me through these situations, and that I'll be able to move with them. I hope that I'll be able to continue sharpening my listening skills, and that I'll be gentle when my creativity is quiet or needs rest. I hope that the lessons that I learned while creating *re-* will continue to impact my work and poetics, and that re-composing, re-freshing, and re-newing my creativity will be something that I welcome, not fear.

re-turn re-turn to me