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"And While We Were Here"

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“And While We Were Here”

Benjamin Rader

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
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Thesis Mentor

Angela from Word for Munkh Svornild

Second Reader

Narrative Design and the Aesthetics of Collage

in Ben Rader's "Picked Me a Plum" and "The (re)Witnessing of Disenfranchised Grief"

"Imagine [the composer's] feelings...if he were forced to employ the meaningful noises of every day: bird calls, sirens, screams, alarm bells, whistles, ticks, and human chatter. He could plead all he liked that his music was pure, but we would know that he'd written down sounds from a play unseen, and we would insist that it told a story" (Gass 31).

"So [the writer] makes his book from boards which say *Ladies* and *Gents*. Every scrap has been worn, every item handled; most of the pieces are dented or split...He may [not] pretend that every syllable he speaks hasn't been spit, sometimes, in someone else's mouth" (Gass 31).

These fragments from William Gass's "The Medium of Fiction" embody what I believe to be the single most productive concern I as a budding writer have had to consider: How do I shape a medium that is commonplace to every professional field and discipline, every recreation, hobby, and personal interest, a medium used everywhere, all of the time, without much care or concern by its users, into Artifice? How do I, in Donald Bartheleme's words, "restore...freshness to a much-handled language" (11)? There are, of course, as many answers to this question as there are published writers alive and dead, but this essay's aim is to discuss two stories of my own, specifically "Picked Me a Plum" and "The (re)Witnessing of Disenfranchised Grief" in order to define my aesthetic and show how it handles the question of newness and originality. Along the way, I will discuss other elements that I think important to quantifying a writer's approach, such as influences, stylistics, thematics, and, to borrow Madison Smartt Bell's term, factors that formulate my "narrative design" (Bell 13). I will start by discussing how the work is familiar to Bell's notion of a linear and modular narrative form, then I will introduce critic James Wood and discuss his interpretation of Free Indirect Discourse in relation to my stories, and,

finally, I will make a few observations about a particular aesthetic of mine, which is the collage technique known as media layering.

Madison Smartt Bell discusses in his book *Narrative Design* two central forms a work of fiction can take, each with an inherent difference in how the material is conceptualized. The first and most common is a work of fiction which takes the form of a “linear design”, a story that “start[s] at the beginning, traverse[s] some sort of middle, and stop[s] at the end” (Bell 27). A linear structure usually parallels the Freitag triangle, a paradigm used to chart the structures of Elizabethan drama, whereas the explanation/exposition of the characters, setting, plot, and conflict is staged in the first act; the second act propels the conflict towards the climax; the climax occurs in the third act, followed by the lull in conflict via the falling climax in the fourth, and, finally, the resolution (or implosion) of the conflict in the fifth and concluding act. However, as Bell notes, what propels this type of narrative design can be more or less simplified to the question of conflict. He states, “conflict...is what generates the energy to ascend the rising slope of the triangle...toward the peak where the conflict will be...resolved” (Bell 29). He also makes it a point to say that the climaxes found in most modern fictions are placed closer towards the conclusion; a point that is demonstrated in my story, “Picked Me a Plum.”

“Picked Me a Plum” — a story of a heroin addicted musician named Cal, who, on returning home to his parent’s house for the day in search of a guitar, finds little in the way of material, emotional, or spiritual fulfillment (what Kurt Vonnegut has called a story that goes From Bad to Worse) — follows a dramatic arc similar to Bell’s discussion of linear design because what drives the story forward are variations on the question, Why? For example, the story opens with the declarative statement, “Cal’s ma takes one look at him through the storm

door and puffs up like a blowfish” (Rader 1), which posits a question of conflict to the reader: What has transpired in the past for a mother to either literally or metaphorically “puff up” into a blowfish, all things considered a defensive act, upon seeing her son? Then, a stylistic question, does the mother inflate literally (i.e., our we in a cooky world where mothers turn fish?) or is it a metaphor for the feelings that Cal projects onto her—which brings up the question of Cal and his perception: what’s wrong with Cal that he’s seeing some visual equivalent of his mother turned blowfish? We find out through the next series of actions that something is a bit off about Cal’s perception of the world, and there is quite a bit of friction between him and his mother. On the same page, the question of why he is there is answered: because he secured a jazz gig in Philadelphia and needs a guitar that he left months ago at his parent’s house. While this question is answered, simultaneously, another question is asked: What does he need the money from the musical gig for? And, still on the same page, the financial question is answered: because he is a drug addict. His drug addiction, then, offers a clue to the question of perception asked earlier. And so on and so forth until the story concludes.

Further, if I were to apply the Freitag triangle to “Picked Me a Plum”, I would find that the first page might act as the first, expository act—Cal and his mother introduced, the main tension demonstrated; pages two to four, then, serve as a way to move the story towards the climax by way of smaller dramatic moments—Cal’s surrealistic “butt fire” episode, breaking in the house, his mother pressing a shotgun to his back; pages five through ten walks us to the climax—wine drinking, bathroom, dancing; the point when his father returns home, misinterprets what Cal has done, and causes Cal to mentally implode; and the final pages would be a combination of the falling climax and the conclusion, where, because of Cal’s somewhat

hopeless disposition caused by his heroin addiction, the conclusion shifts empathetically towards his parent's experience of having a son as lost as Cal. With all of that being said, I do not believe simplifying a story into a graph or a chart is the most productive of exercises, so I will move into Bell's second narrative form, the form my second story, "The (re)Witnessing of Disenfranchised Grief", takes, that of a "modular design" (Bell 214).

According to Bell, the process of formulating a narrative that fits his definition of modular design is more akin to a method of creating mosaics than a method of sculpting a linear design. He writes:

"in the [modular] case, the task of the artist is not to discover the essential form of the work by whittling away the dross, but to assemble the work out of small component parts. This breed of artist is not so much a sculptor *as mosaicist*, assembling fragments of glass and tile to form what can be understood, at a greater distance, as a coherent, shapely image. In narrative art, this *mosaic method* is the basis for modular design" (Bell 215; italics mine).

The process of forming a linear narrative is "subtractive" because the goal is to pare the work down into the parts most essential to its whole; however, in creating a modular narrative, the process is actually "additive" as the writer adds disparate blocks of text, differing in voice, style, point of view that "clarif[ies] the overall design of the text as a whole" (Bell 214). The narrative blocks are balanced "in symmetry as shapes are balanced in a geometric figure" (Bell 214). So, the primary difference between the modular conception versus the linear conception is the way that narrative events unfold: in a linear design, the future events bloom from past events; in a

modular design, the events are not organized by “linear logic”, but are organized by some other concept, such as an overall mood, argument, or philosophy.

In *The Art of Fiction*, John Gardner dedicates a few pages towards a similar discussion of modular design, though he defines it as an “argumentative approach”. He writes, “in this case events occur not to justify later events but to dramatize logical positions; thus event *a* does not cause event *b* but stands in some logical relation to it—some logical sequence that, like any other interesting argument, keeps us reading” (165). The first ‘case’ he speaks of can be understood in terms of Bell’s linear design, while the second, the argumentative, can be understood in terms of modular design.

In “The (re)Witnessing of Disenfranchised Grief”, the overall concept that unites the different narrative sections is a case study documenting a type of Grief counseling taken on by Erin, the female protagonist. Each narrative block paints a different but equal picture of the death of her son. The work is presented to the reader as a case study might be presented to a psychiatrist or psychologist, thus placing the responsibility of analyzing the narrative information given about character, plot, tension, et, on the reader (what Vonnegut has called a Which Way is Up story). “The (re)Witnessing of Disenfranchised Grief” breaks from the linear logic of “Picked Me a Plum”, of the “string of dominoes always falling forward”, and replaces the cause and effect movement with a series of impressions that form the experience of multiple characters at the same time (Bell 215). As Bell states, “modular design is a...way to show relationships between events or people or motifs or themes which are not generated by sequences of cause and effect and so are somehow atemporal, perhaps even timeless” (Bell 216). The timelessness comes with the freedom from the cause and effect organization, an organization which will

always be rooted in temporality. The modular narrative is a way to get past the question of story time because it is not a series of events that unfold over a time axis but a “fixed geometric form” (Bell 216).

For example, “The (re)Witnessing of Disenfranchised Grief” can be split into five narrative sections that differ in character, style, and tone, all of which occur in various places and span across different moments in time. The wide range in setting and point of view allows the story to explore multiple characters and their grief, while simultaneously creating an impression of the person they grieve over (taking what Denis Johnson has said in an interview with *Yale Magazine* personally, “When I was an undergrad I took courses from the poet Marvin Bell, who said, “‘Don’ be committed to one voice”” (*Yale* 5)). The first narrative section introduces the main conceit of the modular conception (thus introducing the main character, Erin, and her dilemma, that she is grieving over the death of her son). In Gardner’s terms, what is at the form’s center is an argument: Because Erin lost her son, she attends a Grief counselor who requires her to write fictions about him and his death, and those fictions become the literal art object the reader is presented; in Bell’s terms, a type of narrative symmetry is at the center, perhaps measured by the length of the sections (each section is under 1200 words, give or take), or measured through the ironic interplay between Erin’s authorial voice and the characters she aims to represent (her son, her husband, and, herself)—an irony critic James Wood discusses in his book, *How Fiction Works*.

For Wood, the ability to inhabit the same world that the character sees while being filtered through the goggles of authorial omniscience, what is known as free indirect style, is inherently a form of dramatic irony because the reader can “see through a character’s eyes while

being encouraged to see more than the character can see” (11). Keeping in mind that, denotatively speaking, irony is the distance from what is said and what is left unsaid, the question of narration, then, becomes, “do the words these characters use seem like the words they might use, or do they sound more like the author’s” (Wood 25)? Sometimes the narrative will be borrowed from the language of the author, the protagonist, or from a collective body of people, what Wood calls a “village chorus” (23). Generally speaking, all forms of free indirect style offer a tension between the distance from what the character does and does not know. While offering important examples of Joyce, Chekhov, James, and Wallace’s use of free indirect discourse, he discusses how the artistry found in narrative art can be measured through the writer’s handling of this authorial irony.

In “The (re)Witnessing of Disenfranchised Grief”, the type of narrative irony that Wood speaks of is focused around Erin’s voice and the voice of the character she either imitates or tries to represent in the different narrative sections. As an example, when the therapist asks her to reconstruct her current living situation, her opening sentence is, “all afternoon the letters, mostly vowels and consonants bordered in white, sat at the bottom of the computer screen opposite her.” Because Erin is being asked to reproduce (mimetically) her self, voice, world, and all, we can be sure that her voice (whether fictional or “actual”) is coming through as sincerely as the free indirect style allows. However, in the next sections, when Erin creates representations of characters she actually knows, we see the authorial irony at its most elastic. The third section begins, “most tattoo artists have really anatomically accurate heads, Aaron decides, all of a sudden.” As compared to the first section’s voice/character neutrality, we can see that Erin’s voice is completely overtaken by Aaron’s (or at least Erin’s projected memory of Aaron’s voice).

In fact, Erin's authorial tag, "Aaron decides", and the adjective, "anatomically", seem to be the only two bits of language in the sentence that might be safe to call her own. The rest, "most tattoo artists have really accurate heads" sounds awfully different from the narrator who delivered the calm, focused image of a scrabble game starting on a computer. As the events unfold, though, the reader finds out through her exposition that Aaron attended a prestigious Art college in Baltimore (M.I.C.A, probably), which explains where he would have encountered the word, anatomically. Wood's notion of authorial/narrative irony is one of the ways in which, in Bell's words, a narrative symmetry can be measured against the whole.

The narrative irony in "Picked Me a Plum" operates more or less in the same way as it does in "The (re)Witnessing of Disenfranchised Grief". The difference is that the voice/consciousness of "Picked Me a Plum" is attached to only one character, Cal, as opposed to multiple voices rooted to one authorial (albeit fictional) narrator in "The (re)Witnessing of Disenfranchised Grief". As Wood states, "on the one hand, the author wants to have his or her own words, wants to be the master of a personal style; on the other hand, narrative bends toward its characters and their habits of speech" (30). If we return to the first sentence of "Picked Me a Plum" as an example, "Cal's ma takes one look at him through the storm door and puffs up like a blowfish," and we consider the word *ma* as opposed to mom, mother, mamma, mommy, et, the reader is uncertain whose language is actually being used. Would the author be so lazy as to let his/her own word for his/her mother seep into the first sentence of a story? Or is this how Cal refers to his mother? The question is really one of consciousness: are we watching the images inside or outside of Cal's head? The questions answer themselves as the story is read, but the possibility of the questions (like Bell's notion of suspense) is what the free indirect style allows.

Another element of authorial irony and narrative voice that Wood does not discuss is the friction created by using autobiographical (i.e., factually documented) events within a fictional, narrative frame. Via the literature of the past century, the first work I encountered in which the author fictionalizes a version of himself was Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as Young Man*, then *Ulysses*. I then encountered the approach again when Wallace picked it up with *The Pale King*, then again in Ben Lerner's *Leaving the Atocha Station* and *10:04*. Louis. C.K., television side, uses a similar technique in *Louie*. And musicians have incorporated themselves as part art object (on stage) for as long as they have performed live. My point is that the line between memory and fiction, and fiction and non, is essentially nil, thus writers and artists have been exploiting it since (I am sure) the line's inception. If my stories share similar thematic strains, it is because those themes come from factual events of my and my family's history.

Both "The (re)Witnessing of Disenfranchised Grief" and "Picked Me a Plum" center in different ways around the drug overdose of my brother. Or, said more aptly, both stories center in their own way around the permanent absence of my brother. I do not so much intentionally write about these events, rather these events, in one way or another, end up in my work on their own merit. I learn to acknowledge them and try to include the strains the way I might any other device that offers a narrative depth (such as Wood's F.I.D.). As James Salter states in an interview with *The Paris Review*:

"The notion that anything invented wholly and that these invented things are classified as *fiction* and that other writing, presumably not made up, is called *nonfiction* strikes me as a very arbitrary separation of things. We know that most great novels and stories come not from things that are entirely invented, but from

perfect knowledge and close observation. To say they are made up is an injustice in describing them...I would rather be in a room with someone who is telling me the story of his life, which may be exaggerated and even have lies in it, but I want to hear the true story, essentially” (Hirsch 65).

When discussing thematics, then, I think it is safe to say that they all find their connection in death, Grief, ambiguous loss, drug addiction, (a lack of) redemption, the “demimonde” as Poet Mark Svenvold might say. Already the authorial irony in “The (re)Witnessing of Disenfranchised Grief” and “Picked Me a Plum” extends itself towards new developments.

Another formulating principle of my work that differs from Bell’s theory of narrative design or Gardner’s theory of argumentation comes from an aesthetic usually associated with the surrealists who employed it in the early 1900s, the technique of collage or media layering. Traditionally what is meant by collage as technique is the layering of several disparate objects (across all mediums) into one unified whole. As poet Maureen Seaton states, “[collage] implies relationships between two or more (often) disparate images and allows us to leap across the gap(s) and make our own associations” (114). In slightly more antiquated terms, Max Ernst writes, “I am tempted to see in collage the exploitation of the chance meeting of two distant realities on an unfamiliar plane” (Sierra 158). Regardless of time period, the idea of conveying two realities (or more) at once is a notion that stuck with me.

My story, “Picked Me a Plum”, uses lyrics from Frank Sinatra’s 1964 same titled pop-song as a device for the psychological layering of Cal’s consciousness and as a way to externally comment upon the events in the story as they unfold. Saying nothing about the socio-historical associations that go along with the lyrics, they function within the narrative in a couple of ways:

on one end, the fragmented lyrics recall a distorted chain of (physical/mental) associations for Cal that occur on different levels of his consciousness; on another, the lyrics occur externally to Cal and internally to the scene, meaning they arise naturally out of the fictional world and, to the reader's own world because the lyrics come initially from pop culture.

The collage aesthetic operates on more of a stylistic level in "The (re)Witnessing of Disenfranchised Grief" because the style of each narrative is especially different, as I have said, ranging from a James Salter-esque handling of domestic relationships, plus his lyrical but fragmented sentencing, to a David Foster Wallace type hyperbole, with his hallucinatory, vivid prose. The design of this story, the modular organization which allows various events and characters to be explored over an indefinite period of time, fits Ernst's idea of two (or more) separate realities. Each narrative section of the story as a solitary piece is offered to the reader as an object: a family home and its relationships, an apartment, a tattoo parlor, a letter, a journal entry, that together create a structural (and narrative) whole.

I have already named Wallace and Salter as influences, so I will add that much of the theoretical framework for "The (re)Witnessing of Disenfranchised Grief" was already set out for me in Ben Lerner's collection of poetry, *Mean Free Path*, which forces the reader to organize each preceding and succeeding line into their own subjective, personal stanza, i.e., one grammatical unit may work with another grammatical unit on a separate line, and so on. Lerner states in an interview about the book, "lines are often out of order or belong to several possible orders simultaneously: there's a kind of choose-your-own adventure element to most stanzas, enlisting the participation of the reader in the structuring of the poem...a way of refusing closure" (Lerner 226). The responsibility that this conceit places on the reader is probably the

biggest influence of Lerner's on my work, though his attempt at forcing any one, off the shelf reading out of possibility is an attempt I am in awe of and have hopefully handled through the aesthetics of collage.

As for influences, the conception of both stories can be attributed in one way or another to these writers and composers: James Joyce, most of the dadaists, surrealists, and deep imagists of the modernist period, Franz Kafka, Thomas Pynchon, James Salter, Steve Kimock, Charles Simic, Denis Johnson, Charles Wright, Mark Strand, Donald Bartheleme, Don DeLillo, William Gass, Bill Frisell, John Scofield, Max Richter, Phillip Glass, Raymond Carver, David Foster Wallace, Andrew Hudgins, Ben Lerner, Mark Svenvold, Nathan Oates, and Nils Frahm.

Bell's linear and modular forms, Wood and Gardner's narratives, and the aesthetic of collage and media layering: I have detailed my narrative design, very aware of the irony imbedded in the task of performing exegesis on my own stories. I hope to have carried the task without too much awkwardness. While reading them, keep in mind Bartheleme's words about how the art object is only tested through interpretation: "Its artistic worth is measurable by the degree to which it remains, after interpretation, vital" (20).

So?

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“Picked Me a Plum”

By Ben Rader

Cal’s ma takes one look at him through the storm door and puffs up like a blowfish. Her azure robe swells; its white dots stretch across the fabric until the blue-and-white sphere of her body fills the entire door frame. Cal rubs his eyes and smiles.

“Your teeth are becoming yellow,” she says through her fin.

Thunderstruck, he moves across the wooden porch in a jig of heel turns and lock steps. If only she’d move to the side or, better yet, invite him in. But the patches of blue and white don’t budge. He falls to his knees, out of breath, with his hands clasped together.

She peers over him and pulls a plug from behind her head. *Pffftttt*... She deflates.

Wait, he tries to say. It’s too late. Into the living room she leaks, slamming the door in her wake.

He scratches his beard. Now he’ll have to find a different way. Stashed somewhere in the house, hopefully in his room, is a Mexican Strat, a copy of a copied series by Fender pre-1970. The body’s laminated Ash; the fret-board’s hollowed Maple. He hasn’t seen it since before he’d moved to Philly with Falcone and Joey Lindsey, where Cal knows he’s near bottomed out.

He also knows he can’t get right without the money from a gig, and he can’t get the money from a gig without that Strat, especially since he’d sold his Classical off already. At his last audition he showed up without an amp or a guitar or a pick. This pissed off the owner and the owner’s son so much they told him he’d five minutes to either find a six-string or shove the hell off.

So here he is. On his knees. Jiving with a blowfish.

He flips over on the porch. Immediately a hot spasm shoots from his ass to his stomach. He smells burning plastic. He hears pops and hisses. He's on fire!

Another jolt hits him and he's on his feet. He slaps at his back and at his knees, and with every slap the smoke rushes from his jacket and his shorts, hiding them in a gray-blue.

He twists his head behind his shoulder, widening his eyes. Jesus Christ. A dark red ember glows from his back pocket.

He moves his hand slowly towards the slip, fully expecting to sear his fingertips on the coal, but what he grabs instead undoes the smoke piling and the hot gnawing at his gut. Cold hard metal. His key...He almost forgot about the copy of his key.

He holds it up. Each edge down to the shoulder is bent the opposite way. The silvery stuff that got him there's fading. He's got to move this along, he knows.

He goes around to the side of the house. The house itself is four floors, each floor smaller than the last, rising into a pitched roof. A blue tarp with a company name in the center covers the right side. Too far to read. Parts of the house look freshly painted, or recently sided. Other spots on the first floor are brown and wet.

Renovation means tools. Tools mean a way in.

He goes to the backyard in search of a wrench, a hammer, something. He finds nothing but weeds. He pushes on, finding a couple of bricks at the base of the rusting play-set. Right where he figured he would. Cool and dry to the touch.

The edges of the brick crumble on the second swing. He raises it above his head on the third, coming down hard on the door pane. The glass snaps and shatters out towards him. Shards

catch the sun and fall onto his hoodie and in his hair. He shakes out like a wet dog and buries his arm in the door up to the elbow. The bolt slides out of place. The door opens inward.

Cal crunches over the glass. Arpeggios from a guitar fingerpick their way from speakers to over the laminate floor and around the island in the kitchen, passing the broom and pan and cleaning supplies. Bleach and cinnamon slide into his nose; his eyes water. Willie Nelson's voice. You *crunch* always *crunch* my mind.

The room suddenly blurs into pink walls, brown servers, tan drapes...He clenches up. She might be slithering around, ready to pierce him any time. His stomach can't handle much of any surprise.

Willie's music grows clearer and louder. Where the living room becomes the kitchen, Cal stops, bends an eye around the corner.

Woodbridge. It sparkles to him the way Falcone's gold tooth does when he does the flashlight and the mirror thing. The wine could zap his stomach bug, no problem. Cal begins to salivate.

Maybe I didn't hold you all those lonely, lonely times... He hates the fact that he knows the lyrics to the song, even more than he can play it in his sleep. So much sentiment. An annoyance. All of the magic sucked out and — *Click*.

He turns around and just about doubles over.

His mother's squinting an eye down the slick barrel of a shotgun. She's got one finger tickling the trigger, with the gun's butt pressing into her blue shoulder.

"The door was open," she says.

Cal turns and slowly faces her. She looks deflated, hard and cruel. He sees now that she wasn't wearing a robe at all, but a blue-and-white striped dress.

She spins him around and pushes him into the wall, pinning down the side of his face. She nudges the shotgun into the small of his back. Then she presses harder, as if asking a question. Her hands are steady, not shaking, he knows, because his back is straight and rigid as all hell, and he'd be able to feel any vibrations coming his way.

"Ma," he says. "Jesus."

She digs the gun in harder. Her breath is heavy.

Then Cal feels the gun drop.

"If you're staying take your shoes off," exhaling. The blue tail of her dress flutters as she disappears into the kitchen.

Cal hears the thud of the shotgun on the table, and he starts to regain himself a little. He'd had to swallow a bit of bile, and still has that acidic taste in his mouth. His vision refocuses on the hard angles of the room, the walls. He unlaces his boots, placing them in front of the dining room table. A deep breath brings up more bile.

You were always on my mind.

"Should I even ask how you're doing?"

She's on the floor with her legs spread in a V, scooping up crumbs and dirt into a trash bag. Next she'll swipe her hands over the same portion of floor until the surface's smooth. This is all too familiar to Cal.

"You won't believe me even if I told you. Would you, ma?"

He sits down on the floor, rests his back against a wooden cabinet, and finally, for the first time today, looks her in the face. Wrinkles and hoop earrings. Shifting jaw muscles. Pale, gray eyes. Hair blonde at the tips and gray at the roots.

Little things I should have said and done.

“Try me,” she says.

“Ma, I got a gig, finally, a real one. Over on Sansom, you know that café with the wine you like.”

Then, he hesitates. He can’t get away with a big lie, she’ll see through it, but a tiny lie, a stretching of the truth he can do.

“They hired me three nights a week, at 11, before the spoken word guys go up. We’re talking actual money, Ma.”

“...”

“Ma?”

“I heard you, Callum.” She scoops, looks at the floor, pauses. “You’ll get paid?”

All at once his stomach churns both ways, causing him to clench up before he feels an explosive need to either sneeze or shit, not sure which it’ll be, knowing that it could be both.

“When was the last time?” She asks.

Cal lies. “Sixteen hoursish.”

“For God’s sakes Callum.” She grabs the bottle of Woodbridge and unscrews the cap and hands it to him. “Before you’re sick all over the floor.” She peers around the kitchen.

He stares at her and then the bottle, before snatching it and tilting it back. He feels the cold wine warm his stomach. A second sip he takes for his mind. His mother watches him drink.

He goes for a third... Within minutes the bottle's empty, and he feels himself loosen up. Some color comes back into his way of seeing.

But not enough.

Another burst in him and he's off and running into the laundry room, past the sloshing of water, into the bathroom where he sneezes and shits, way more than once.

Once he's on to the dry heaves, he hears his mother say from the laundry room, "Callum you have to get out of here."

His arms are propped up on the toilet's rim. His head's down between his arms, towards the espresso colored rug at his feet. It feels like someone's sticking a hand where his ribs curve, yanking on them. He fidgets on the toilet.

Minutes later, the bathroom door opens a crack. In his mother's hand is an orange bottle of something. It's from the time he'd had his wisdom teeth taken out, he guesses.

"Your father had his hip replaced some months ago," she says from behind the door. "Take it and do your thing. And then go. There's probably something for your stomach under the sink."

He takes the bottle from her hand and looks. 10 mgs. Yellow buses. Three or four and there'll be no need for the Imodium. Expired in 08. Can't snort them so he'll have to rush it cold.

His mind empty of everything, he sets three pills by the sink and crushes them beneath his license. The thicker edges take the longest to work the plastic through until everything's fine and powdered. He takes a cigarette from his pocket and tears the filter from the tobacco and places it by the cup he found under the sink. Mixing water in, he stirs until the clumps dissolve. Then he takes his Gear from his jacket and unrolls the bag. He finds a needle. He sticks the

needle into the tip of the filter and dips that into the cup and draws. The chalky liquid fills the tube near the 10 μm mark. His jacket slides to the floor. He rolls up his left sleeve and lets his arm hang limp. When a vein ropes up he enters himself, easing slow on the plunge. It's less than what he usually does.

Instantly wonder slants down like snow. Like snow still and falling. Like all the snow there ever was vibrating through his body. All of everything. Like Jacuzzi streams from his finger-tips to his balls, sloshing in, out, near, far — The silvery stuff comes back to his eyes.

The bathroom door gives way...

Cal smiles and laughs and tap dances from the laundry room into the kitchen. The CD player shifts. A minor third opens the tune. A melody. A key-sweep. The tats of a snare. Frank Sinatra's baritone: *Out of the tree of life, I just picked me a plumb*. A tenor sax on the downbeat.

She's standing below the door frame on the other side of the kitchen, looking out to the living room and front door.

"Don't you still have a key?" she asks.

He's not listening. He's throwing his head back. He's kicking his legs out. He's spinning. The corners of his jacket whip to the left and right.

"Callum, if you lost your key that's something you need to tell me."

Frankie needs a guitar in the background with a little reverb, something floaty, Cal thinks. Every other on the ones and threes. Sixteenth notes. Once Cal gets his six-string he can mess around with the big Tenor himself. He's dancing...

She takes a deep breath in, staring at Cal. "We'll have to change the locks."

...The way he thought he forgot how. Up, left. Left, right. Right, back...

“Who knows who has it at this point? One of your friends.”

...to the side...

“I’ve seen *Crash*, Callum. I know what’s happening.”

She approaches him and puts her hands over his shoulder, forcing him to stop shaking with the music. Her jaw muscles shift. Her mouth opens.

“Callum, give me the key,” she says.

He stares back. Where is that six-string, anyway? He’ll need it to mess around with. It’s key for. Crash of a snare. Key...his key...in his jacket.

“I got it, Ma.” His fingertips rustle the bag in his pocket. “I got it right here.” Plastic bag. Plastic bag. Metal, he feels. He hands it over. She holds it up to her face, inspecting.

“It’s practically bent in half.” Tilting her head back. Her mouth open. The key between index and thumb, releasing. It falls. The key flashes for a second as it falls in her mouth. She chews. He watches. She swallows. *You think you’ve seen the sun....*

Now he wants to dance, to move. Before his ma can puff up broad again, he corners her with a beckoning finger in the air.

“Ma, what’d’ya say. Like old times?”

She wriggles around him, looking for an opening. He closes in and puts his hands around her waist and tightens. There’ll be no puffing of her body!

“Callum get off of me.”

Shuffling back to the laundry room one, two-two; up to the living room, two, two-two; to the side by the dishwasher, three...up, back.

“I can dance still Ma. I remember how.” He tightens his arms around her.

The stripes on her dress start rotating again, so, scared that he'll lose her, he slides his hands behind her back and laces them together. She's standing totally still with both of her hands at her side looking for a way out from the left of him, above, to the right of him.

"I remember," he says, following her stare.

He picks her up, carrying her in circles that widen with each rotation. Wooden cabinets. Island. Sink. He's laughing and throwing his head back. Wooden cabinets. Oven. Window. She's squirming in his hands so he tightens. *You ain't seen nothin' yet.*

The CD player catches on the lines *you ain't seen it*, looping and speeding up. The kitchen blurs into whirling tables, cabinets, and doorways. You ain't seen it. You-ain't-seen-it. You ain'tseenit.

They dip. They dive. Water splashes his cheeks. His eyes must be tearing because everything feels so wonderful and so right. Crash of a snare. She remembers too, he knows she does. They just had to touch one another again.

"You're fixed to nothing when you're like this," she says. "I don't know where you came from."

With that, stomach to stomach, her chest to his, he spins her onto the Oriental rug, by the table with the shotgun. He lets her float apart from him towards the shattered glass, pausing, breathing deeply, and waiting for him. The skinny lady in the blue dress... He runs towards her and takes her up again.

He peeks at the door over her shoulder before the rotation. The curtain's being sucked in the space where the glass was. *I'm going to teach you to fly.* They wind up around the living room, once, twice, where Cal releases her towards the table.

She slides on the rug directly into the boots where he'd left earlier. The ends of her dress lift towards her and her feet come up from underneath. She slaps her head on a corner of the table with a yelp. Blood streams from her nose.

"I remember." Where's she...Holy shit, Ma.

"Eshhokay," she says beneath cupped hands. "Eshhokay," she says through red knuckles.

He bends down, trying to lock his hands in her armpits, trying to pull her up.

She slaps his hands away. "Esshokay, damn't."

Backing off, he goes to the kitchen searching for paper towels or napkins or anything that might be of use. *You ain't*... He has no idea where anything is, not anymore, turning instead towards the CD player. He presses buttons that do nothing. *You aint*. He pulls out every plug from the wall but the right one. *You aint*. His fist comes down on the silver top, again and again.

The best is yet to come, Frankie evens out.

He stands in the kitchen behind his mother who's still bent over and bleeding. The shotgun's next to him on the table and, from where he's standing, he can see glints of broken glass by the door. There's a faint closing of a car-door in the distance...

Cal looks up again: his father's standing behind his mother, breathing heavily with the brick in his hand.

On him's a forest green suit and a tan tie. He's squat and muscular with black hair, a shaven face. And he's already made up his mind about what he's seen. He charges, limping slightly.

"You. We told you what would happen if you came back here," he says, looking down.

"Jesus, to your own mother."

Cal waits for him to fling the brick in his face. If he can dance with a blowfish, he can definitely dodge a brick.

“Whatever you’re selling we don’t want it. No fucking way. We’ve heard your pitch before. We don’t want it.”

He drops the brick and pushes Cal.

Cal accepts it, waiting for his mother to stand up and place a hand on his father’s shoulder, waiting for her to say that it’s not what it looks like, that they were dancing and having fun and she tripped on her own account. He waits for her to say that it’s all a misunderstanding. Because he knows that she still remembers and is really on his side. He knows she remembers the dancing. All they needed was the contact. She’ll back him up here.

“You remember.” Cal looks at her, seeing the hands over her mouth, the drying blood. “Don’t you Ma?”

Her eyes. Narrowing, cruel and judging.

“You know what, fuck you. Fuck you both,” he shouts. “I’m here for my Strat, that’s it. You’ll never see me again in two minutes. For forever.”

The floor gives way to the stairs, the landing, another staircase, the hallway, his room. Just his Strat. The fret-board Maple. The body hollow. That’s why he’s here. He turns on the light.

Except for a slept-in bed, a night stand and a wall full of trophies, the room’s stripped. His amp, cables, Strat gone...His strat’s gone. Out of breath he falls to his knees. Everything. Gone.

“What’d you expect, Cal?” his father approaches from the hallway. “We’d just leave it there rotting away? We took what we could. You weren’t going to use it again.”

“You’re wrong,” Cal says. “You’re just wrong. I need that stuff.”

“Go ahead. Throw a tantrum.”

His stuff. He looks up quickly at the trophies and stands up. He walks towards them, touching the shiniest one to make sure. Gold or bronze. Some kind of metal. Ignoring his father, he runs down the steps and grabs the first trash bag he finds in the kitchen. He turns it inside out. He pounds each step from heel to toe until he’s back in the hallway, in his room. His father’s on the bed, with his knees pulled up to his chest.

He’s up in a flash. “I’m taking my trophies,” he says. “They’re mine.”

He stands on his tippy toes to reach the trophies. He drops the bag and grabs the shelf with his other hand and lifts himself an inch off the ground. The weight of his body knocks the shelf loose. His hands slap at the bases, trying to knock them over. One falls past.

He adds a little more weight to the shelf, knocking over another. The shelf tears from the wall. He collapses to the floor. Down goes the shelf with the trophies.

A baseball player bent at the knees, a ball releasing from his hand; a swimmer atop a diving block; a quarter note slanted on a podium. All set in gold.

“Honey,” his father shakes his head. “Jesus.”

Before Cal’s out the door and down the stairs, he looks up at his father sitting on the bed, and sees a different version, twenty years younger, his hands on the steering wheel. They’re both in his father’s green Lincoln with the leather seats and the cushioned air-suspension, somewhere

on 95 near Virginia, rolling down towards one of the Carolinas. “Still Raining, Still Dreaming” coming soft from the CD player.

Traffic. In the island between the north and the south side, over his father’s lap and out the window, is a car smoking against a hulk of trees. The car looks tiny beneath the pines.

“You know,” his father says. “Stuff like this’ll be in your head. For forever. You’ll never forget it.”

As they get closer, Cal sees a flame bloom through the heavy smoke. The first flame.

“What if I try really hard to?”

“You just won’t.”

The flames climb the trees and the bushes surrounding the car. The tires explode. A rush of red sweeps through the weeds. Cal watches, mesmerized. As they pass, he unhooks his seatbelt and climbs to the backseat, leaning his stomach on the leather, staring out of the rear window until the smoke is just above the horizon.

The asphalt turns as they leave the blaze behind, but the smell of the smoke, rubber and pine needles, other things, stays. He turns around, sliding into the bucket seat. He watches his father drum the steering wheel, then his knees. The fields turn in the windows. The sun tilts.

The smell inside the car makes him feel sad, like the place he’d called home all this time was really just live music on a stage. And his parents came out and said thank you for listening to our song.

The (re)Witnessing of Disenfranchised Grief:

Erin Sweeney & her stories

—————, PhD, RN

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Background: “The dead remain because they have been observed, the literature tells us. Like the white stones of the river they are pared & polished, smoothed of debris, until they are placed behind the the jeweler’s glass. We all have the ability to become immortal in our relationships, & it is in these relationships that I dedicate this book to” (Rader, 2015, p. i).

From, *The Witnessing of Disenfranchised Grief*

“It is even possible that if he hadn’t accepted the flowers Aaron wouldn’t have died. Mike and I were at the department store. It was summer and I’d finally convinced him of a new tile for the kitchen. It took some energy. We’d more or less been tramping over the same floor for, god, thirty years.... Ben was there. For the news, the stupid thing. Aaron’s friend came to the door with those sickeningly bright flowers you find at drug stores and said *These are for your mother*. Can you imagine? No explanation. No introduction. *These are for your mother.*”

—E.S.

Keywords: Grief measurement; fiction; witness; self; loss; other; instrument, Rader

Let us begin with a clarification. In certain psychiatric circles Grief is known to be treatable.

It is not. Grief is a permanent result of emotional and psychological trauma, a result that may fluctuate in its presence and degree but will not, under any circumstances, flee the consciousness of the survivor. What we have seen in the conclusions of recent studies are flexible emotional responses read, and concluded, as symptoms of change. Our study disagrees. In the case of Erin Sweeney and her stories, the study illustrates her acceptance of grief as a living thing. We present her stories, alongside a brief apparatus containing a few reading principles placed after each story. Much of the methodology are quotations taken from Rader's book length study, *The Witnessing of Disenfranchised Grief*.

1) **Context:** "The Phenomenology of Meaningful Coincidence: Stage One, Mimesis"

(Rader, 2015, p. 22).

I think it's very unfortunate that they buried my ex-husband there. Because he was the one who wanted Aaron more or less after he'd finished with his doctorate. He was so convincing.

Think about your mother, he used to say....If he were around still I'd remind him that his mother was too scared half the time to call herself Italian, and where was she when we had Aaron? His family really was one big disappointment to Aaron our entire marriage.

But so we stopped buying condoms and the rest and we were pregnant, some time in the early 80's. In 81, 82...83. 1983. We'd just moved to Roxborough, in Philadelphia. It was the kind of place where the neighbors, Irish usually, put dead cats on the steps of the people they didn't like. You know I've always had this image in my head of one of the neighbor's kids crawling around on all fours, calling, *here kitty cat, kitty cat, kitty cat. Here kitty cat.*

And Mark would always be so friendly to them. It didn't seem so at the time, but it was pathetic. It was. He'd offer to mow their lawns and edge and do just about everything for them that he wouldn't for us. I remember he used to call my name and hold Aaron's waist in the air and bring it to his face and blow a little bit, and when he'd stiffen up Mike's face would brighten and he'd say, *It's like Darwin's worm!*, whatever the hell that meant.

I found out pretty early in his life that Aaron wasn't going to be an easy child. Or typical. He was more or less fine until he turned two and then he started with his temper tantrums and slapping fits. All of that stopped when he learned to walk, and that was when we found out it wasn't going to be as easy as it'd been anymore.

There was a stretch when I didn't know where Mike was all of the time. Because of Aaron's tantrums we started to fight. He'd stay in a cheap hotel on the other side of rt. 80 for two, three days. We didn't take it all that seriously. We tried it. We tried it more or less until we divorced shortly after Aaron died.

On one of those days I was on our couch with a crossword puzzle in my lap, I set the living room so the furniture aimed away from the front hall and I couldn't see the stairs or the door. Not that I really think I would have looked up from my puzzle. But he was napping, and what I remember most about the day was the mosaic we made earlier out of paint soaked napkins.

I'd had to take Aaron's hand in mine with a foam tipped paint brush and hold them both to the napkin and see how the paint would spread. We'd jab at the napkin really fast and see what colors were made. He liked moving the different colored napkins around, and he would giggle and kick his legs out a little whenever I rearranged them. We went from Red to yellow to blue to green, to yellow to red to blue to green, to blue to green to red to yellow... I remember I looked at it after I put him to sleep and wondered if he had any natural talent in painting or drawing or working with color, not that it mattered to me, really, but I sort of daydreamed for fifteen or twenty minutes about the man he'd grow to be.

Then the storm door made this really terrible metallic sound and I turned and saw the door bounce off the frame. I thought maybe Mike had come back. He hadn't, and I remember feeling sick to my stomach because I knew.

I was past the storm door and the front door and saw Aaron in his blue pajamas in the center of the road, maybe five or six houses down, half walking, half waddling, a tiny blue thing against an enormous amount of road. One of the neighbors was calling from the sidewalk.

You know who the mother is?, the woman said. *He coulda been kilt.*

Method A: The voice-centered relational method should involve three readings of the transcripts: (1) reading for the overall plot of the story, including the context, the drama, the players and so on. During this reading, the researcher should also attempt to place herself, with her own history and experiences, in relation to the narrator—how she is responding emotionally and intellectually to the person, particularly if what is said does not resonate with her. The use of colored pencils is appropriate.

- 2) **Context:** “The Laughing Mechanism Beneath the Dying Gene: Stage Two, Hyperbole and Humor”

(Rader, 2015, P. 43).

Most tattoo artists have really anatomically accurate heads, Aaron decides, all of a sudden.

The man’s bald head was bent down over his wrist in deep concentration and Aaron saw the early indicators of sweat beading on the crest of his scalp. He isn’t sure whether or not his slick shiny freshly shaven scalp has anything to do with the shapes’ aesthetics, or if the waxed white floor and the halogen fueled light strips hanging above them bounced off one another as a trick, an affect of the store, scenario hijinks...but seriously his head is perfect, just perfect. If he drew still he’d whip out his wrinkled miniature sketch pad he’d probably, definitely be carrying, lick his graphite clean and sketch the hell out of the man’s head. Does he know what having a head like that *means*? The boys at MICA would shit themselves. Figuratively of course. Maybe literally in some avant garde hipster sense of the phrase.

galore, she'd said in that hushed baby sort of way, in between the tiny slits in his teeth that by the way a toothbrush could never reach. Because she could tell when he didn't floss and when he did, and he most definitely, didn't, like at all, since their last visit.

Come to think of it, he hasn't flossed again in nearly nine months This makes him reach out again to touch the man's head.

The man jerked his head sharply, more confused this time than annoyed, placed the tattoo gun on a tray covered with white wax napkins and said, real deeply, "We're taking a break."

He got up from the chair and swung his body around to the left so as to avoid Aaron's glance and walked out of the room; the door clanged shut after him. Aaron heard the little annoying bell that 'doo doo, doo doo' d as the front door swung open, which means his tattoo dude went out for a smoke. Aaron wants to go out for a smoke, but the bastard with the beautiful head beat him to the punch and now if he goes out there it'll look like he's following him. Or maybe that he was copying his ideas or something.

It'd definitely be better to stay in the chair and wait for the guy's break to end. The thing is, Aaron's still all swollen and stiff and uncomfortable, and he's pretty sure the tattoo guy could see it because, before he made the swing for a smoke, he'd wrinkled his eyebrows like a samurai and shook his head. So Aaron sticks his hand down his jeans and tents his worm towards his stomach. He swings his feet to the floor in search of a closet or bathroom or office. Why be uncomfortable for the next who knows how long when something as natural and easy could be rendered nada by simply shutting the door, dropping his pants, working the forearms and triceps for five, maybe ten minutes, grabbing a few squares of T.P., the squeeze, the dab, pants back over his knees, soap and water, the works, throw in a hot air dryer and it's a date.

He passed by tall hanging posters glossed in laminate, about fifteen of them stacked atop the wall to his right, showing the tattoo artist's not so unique flash illustrations of hearts wrapped in barbed wire, oriental tribe decor, the phoenix and the ash, yin and yangs, sun, moon, stars, and countless other images trampstamping their way into popularity. Which is of course why anyone gets a tattoo, Aaron doesn't necessarily realize, to permanently remark on a specific time period with hopes of making it seem more important than it actually was, hoping that the yellow and blue and red inks will stain their failures right out....

The tattoo shop is recently under renovations, so the bathroom, Aaron assumes, being that he hasn't found it yet, must be way back beyond the blue tarp and the ladder, so he dips his body behind the blue tarp and is instantly hit in the face with a scent brick of turpentine and dry wall and dust. He sneezes. He sneezes again.

Coils of wire splintered out from the hole in the torn out ceiling, pulled tightly by the weight of the hanging light strips. Stacks of cellophane wrapped ceiling tiles were in fours on his left. Empty paint stained buckets, rollers and brushers, extenders...took up the floor on his right. A royal blue door with heavy brush strokes, slightly open, sat 12:00 of Aaron. He hooks his thumb around the closest belt loop and pulls his jeans out like the spout of a milk container. The hot damp area was instantly flooded with the cold draft of the room's exterior.

He eases the door open with the tip of his foot and sees the renovations did not leave out the bathroom. A sharp rug of corners and sides and chips of porcelain tiles spread out across the floor. A sledgehammer sat in the middle on the top of a pile of ceramic tiles. The toilet was ripped out completely, except for the plumbing which nudged just past the hole. The same types of wires he saw in the other room hung a few feet above him, given back above and below him

in the vanity mirror flat on the floor. He sneezes. He sneezes again. He turns his head from side to side, listening, waiting. He wrinkles his denim down just past his knees, his green boxers follow, and he relieves himself, thinking about Megan or who knows what else time tramps over.

Method B: Readings for relationships—This reading stage emphasizes listening for how individuals speak about their interpersonal relationships, both with close family and friends as well as the larger social networks they live and work in. This reading reveals how these relationships influence the individual’s perception of their experiences. The use of tense is especially relevant to their network.

- 3) **Context:** “Howl away the Holidays: Stage Three, Interpersonal Truth Through Identity Transference”

(Rader, 2015, p. 101).

January 3

Dear Aaron,

This has been a strange holiday season and I’m not sure you understand exactly what happened that made it end up the way it has. I’ll put it right out there: I just didn’t want to be with you given the way things have been. I haven’t disowned you, as you seem to have told anyone in the

family South of here who will listen. I've just stopped wanting to spend time with who and what you've become.

Thing is, I have no idea *what* you understand. Your increased lying has made it virtually impossible for me to know you. As you know, I've always found it difficult to understand you. Perhaps that's the way you want it. Perhaps, too, I have always wanted to believe, for example, that your sudden and frequent desperate pleas for money have all been on the level. I know now they have not. Whatever else comes with this realization just makes me sad.

I know, too, that I can't have a relationship with you the way things are. I have tried to tell you lately that every contact with you over the past few months has come with increasing demands for money. For this reason in particular (there are others), contact with you has become particularly unpleasant for both your mother and me. We talk, Aaron. You show up at her place of work with zero regard for how you come across. All that seems to matter to you is leaving there with any amount of money at all. But I should only speak for myself...

Fine. You repeatedly bring up the notion that we should give you whatever you want because we're your family. Frankly, your treatment of your family has always been one of convenience. You have a family only when it suits you. Have you ever thought about what responsibilities on your end the idea of family involves? For now, how about making contact for contact's sake, to ask how we are, to have a simple conversation rather than making up some story to get money from me? Aaron, it's always the same. I think we both know why.

Even though it sounds like it, this is not really about money. It's about the message you give to us that nothing, no matter how big, is ever enough for you and you always need more... whatever. The more contact with you I have, the louder and more insistent the message is:

GIVE ME MORE. *I need a ride to the liquor store.* GIVE ME MORE. *I'm out of cigarettes and have no money.* GIVE ME MORE. *I'm all out of food and haven't eaten for days.* GIVE ME MORE. *If you don't what do what I want, I'll kill myself* (this one, by the way, is a particularly nasty one that pushes me away). Aaron, I just can't listen to that message anymore.

In case you're interested, what I've wanted to hear for years is things like: dad, you're getting old and I've noticed you're slowing down some. How about I mow the lawn, help paint the house, trim some trees, rake some leaves for you? No strings attached. No pity party, no sad song about how you're broke. Please, keep these things to yourself.

If you want to respond to this, please write a response. You can mail it or send an email. I probably won't answer your call. The advantage of a letter is that I can read it when I'm able to give it all of my attention.

love,

Dad

Method C: Reading for self and the voice of the “I”— listening for how the individual experiences, feels, and speaks about herself, by watching for use of pronouns (I, we, you). This allows for understanding how individuals speak about themselves before attempting to speak for them. Pay attention to repeated phrases throughout each section.

4) **Context:** "The Mark of the Sociopath: Stage Four, The Indecision of Witness"

(Rader, 2015, p. 178).

These were how Aaron's summers were spent, lifeguarding and getting high.

Hardly anyone ever actually swam there. It was a place for the old people who laid *by* the pool but never went in. Hey, it was a job—it meant he could dash behind the shed or lock himself in the pump house whenever he wanted a puff. He liked the way it slowed things down.

Two things had already made this day an outstanding day at the pool: 1) Vince something or other, the head of the community's board member, was treading water on the far side of Aaron and the lifeguard's table, in the deep side. His back hair and chest hair floated there at the surface like algae. There was a red cup in his hand that Aaron ignored, and he was more or less singing along with a Springsteen tune that played from a mini radio by his lounge chair and towel. The second outstanding thing was that, while Vince got drunk and floated there with his hair/algae halo and sang, from the pool's entrance, Aaron saw a brown squirrel run along the curved edge of the pool and disappear beneath the surface.

"I'll kill it for you," Vince said to Aaron. He was out of the pool now and standing next to his table. "If you want. We've had problems before. Let me call my brother."

Aaron waved him off and pointed to the fifteen foot long skimmer tacked to the fence.

The wind had picked up, blowing through the trees. A three piece skimmer could extend more than half way to the center, he calculated. A few feet closer and he'd have the thing. Under the

water, up, breath, under the water. He positioned the net above where he thought it'd go; up burst a flash of gray and down went the blue skimmer. He pulled it towards him, letting the weight of the water and momentum of his pull immobilize it. All he had to do was keep the net straight and scrape it up the wall. He could fling it into the woods over the fence, it wasn't that far. He'd seen squirrels land bigger jumps before.

He felt someone else's hands grab at the skimmer. It was Vince coming up from behind him. He felt Vince's fleshy belly press against the small of his back. Vince was a lot shorter than him. He considered his options.

"What are you doing Vince?"

Vince tightened his body around him, his bare feet on the outsides of Aaron's sandals, and with both hands he guided their hands and the skimmer together back down below the water.

"Vince?"

Vince held on tighter. "Come on kid" Vince said. "We can do this."

He was reminded of a scene in a gangster movie where a kid had to 'make his bones'. His father or older brother would take his blindfold off and there a guy would be, bloodied and bruised. Then the camera would cut to the gun exchanging hands. A bead of sweat on the scalp. The flash of the gun shot from the road.

Vince was showing him the way. He was giving him a shot in a hundred. A Noir's wet dream.

But he didn't know if he could do it. And the two of them stood together like that for longer than they had time.

Method D: Reading for the larger cultural and social structures in which individuals are embedded, in order to understand how basic forces influence the individual's process of making sense of his or her experiences. Read for basic analogy and metaphor. Pay attention to repeated phrases throughout each section.

5) **Context:** "The Banality of Anticlimactic Staging in Concluding Bereavement Cycles"

(Rader, 2015, p. 219).

All afternoon the letters, mostly vowels and consonants bordered in white, sat at the bottom of the computer screen. The long rows of empty squares appeared above. A new game began.

In the wide space behind her, a tired place where many parties had been thrown, the faint brilliance of a fire glowed. It was too far to warm her back, but she liked listening to the soft cackle. It was one of the few sounds that still calmed her.

It was hard now to think of other noises which once acted in the same way, the dinging of Katie's collar on the fair grounds in Autumn, the crunch of the leaves beneath her.

But she really did enjoy playing scrabble. It was, at this point, one of the only things that fully occupied her mind. At night she had her wine and during the day she had her game. They couldn't take that from her. But she was sure they would try.

When her husband would come home from work the door to the outside would open and close, heavy footsteps would travel through the wooden floor, stopping somewhere behind her, for a

moment, his breathing being the only thing said between them before he'd shift into the kitchen to open the mail.

Sometimes she left notes on the kitchen table asking him to go to the liquor store.

Her eyes were getting bad, she told him thousands of nights ago, I'm not comfortable driving in the dark. Just won't do it.

So he did it. He did mostly everything. He chipped and painted the wood siding in the spring and mowed the lawn in the summer. On Sunday mornings he went grocery shopping, filled her thyroid prescriptions, mailed manuscripts, et. When it snowed he woke hours early to shovel and, even though she hadn't used her own car in months, just in case, he'd break her car from the ice and snow and clean off the windows.

She felt wronged by her opposition. She was sure the game cheated in more ways than one, using words in other languages and titles of films. That just isn't right, she yelled. That's just not fair.

The computer came out with a fifty point move with the word Xu-

That night she left a note on the table for her husband.

M,

Plain Scrabble dictionary; two bottles of

Woodbridge, you know the kind.

J

He bought her the special anniversary edition with the cover wrapped in reflective material and the extra pages on game theory, leaving it on her desk late one night when he came from running his support group. On Thursdays he stayed at the hospital late, sometimes past ten. He had been leading the group for over a decade. It became just as important for him as it was for his patients; he needed it and looked forward to it, only canceling once in the past two years. He didn't have a choice. There was the viewing, funeral, mass.

And then when they showed up at the viewing, all thirteen of them, he cried and hugged them and felt truly touched and knew he had found real, compassionate friends, the kind everyone hopes to find, and if he were lucky he'd know these people for the rest of his life, of course, nothing the irony that he would find them only through such a tragic time such as this. He wrote that down on the thank you cards he had taped to bottles of scotch and sent out to each of his patients. The part about the irony.

In the wake of their son's death, she had agreed with her husband to see a colleague of his, a well known psychiatrist specializing in grief. They went together for the first couple of meetings until it was decided that progress could only be made individually.

Method E: Identify meanings that individuals attached to their experiences and how they spoke of changes they underwent as a result of these experiences. Keep in mind, the voice-centered relational method should involve three readings of the transcripts: (1)

reading for the overall plot of the story, including the context, the drama, the players and so on. During this reading, the researcher should also attempt to place herself, with her own history and experiences, in relation to the narrator—how she is responding emotionally and intellectually to the person, particularly if what is said does not resonate with her. The use of colored pencils is appropriate. After applying each method, mark the letter in a different color in the margins.

Let us conclude on a note of possibility. There are five narrative sections presented in this study. There is one basic reading tool per section (A-E). This means there are twenty five different combinations of reading tool and narrative (A-E can be applied to each section one time + five narrative fragments = twenty five combinations). The results that can be generated from combining the information discovered from each initial reading / the possibilities each new reading influenced by each past result are vast and infinite. The use of colored pencils is recommended.