A Necessary Ambivalence:

Narratives of Violence in Life and Language Arts

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Abstract

Secondary language arts curricula may or may not include stories of love or faith or forgiveness; on the other hand, such curricula are all but guaranteed to feature narratives of violence and the suffering that violence entails. Consider some of the "greatest hits" of the North American high school English canon: *Lord of the Flies*; *To Kill a Mockingbird; Macbeth*, to name but a few. This observation about the narratives that we teach and learn in secondary language arts might, at first glance, seem almost banal: We live in a violent world, so of course we're going to read and teach stories about violence. However, such seeming banality underscores the necessity of examining the prominence of narratives of violence in curricula more closely. If violence and suffering are so common, then it follows that teachers and students are bringing narratives of violence—including lived experiences with violence—into the classroom and to the texts that that we read. This *nearness of violence* has profound implications for teaching and learning, especially when there is a persistent impulse by teachers, students, and society at large to simplify narratives about violence and suffering into such discrete categories as "good" and "evil." Therefore, my inquiry begins with exploring this *intersection* of narratives of violence in the language arts classroom. I ask, *How do narratives about violence inform curriculum in a secondary language arts classroom? By narratives is meant the curriculum texts as well as the stories originating with and brought by the teacher and students.* Drawing on the narrative theory of Ricoeur as well as *currere* (the various curriculum theory works of Grumet, Pinar, and Strong-Wilson), I employed a polyvocal, autobiographical narrative methodology to map my own narrative identity where violence is concerned, as well as my personal and professional encounters with others' stories of violence, those of family members, students and another secondary language arts teacher. The "polyvocal" nature of this methodology meant that the narrative writing that comprises my data includes excerpts transcribed from research conversations that I held with family members, friends, and a colleague in an effort to ethically and truthfully represent their stories as they have intersected with my own. Encountering others' stories of violence raised compelling ethical concerns regarding how one approaches stories that are not one's own. Thus, I also ask, *How might recognition, rather than understanding, help negotiate these intersections of narratives? What implications might such recognitions have for teaching and learning secondary English language arts?* "Recognition" implies truthfulness and being seen for who one truly is and is capable of becoming (Ricoeur, 2005); recognition does not tolerate falseness, as to do so is to misrecognize (Yoder & Strong-Wilson, 2016). From the narration and analysis of my own and others' stories of violence emerged several key findings, all of which counter the gravitational pull of simplification where narratives about violence are concerned. The way that we tell stories—our own and others'—matters profoundly as our narrative stance is also an ethical position. Strong-Wilson's (in press) concept of the "concerned subject" who is both emotionally invested in a narrative in as well as "entrusted" with its telling creates a necessary tension for the narrator, and by extension, for the reader and the teacher. This tension underscores the importance of ambivalence (Bauman, 1999) in narrating and teaching about violence, where such ambivalence is located in the figure of the stranger, someone who is not—and cannot be—at home and comfortable with the world as it currently is. However, such tension and uncertainty does not preclude the work of recognition (Ricoeur, 2005) as a response to stories of violence, where to be recognized (by oneself, by another) is to be seen for who one is and who one is capable of becoming, in all of its myriad contradictions and complications. Uncertainty and caution about one's self and one's perception of the world find a necessary ballast in orienting of oneself towards

recognition. In so doing, we might more honestly and reflectively work towards a less violent society.

Résumé

Les programmes d'éducation secondaires des arts du langage peuvent inclure ou non des histoires d'amour, de foi ou de pardon ; d'un autre côté, ces programmes sont presque assurés de présenter des récits de violence et de la souffrance que cette violence entraîne. Examinez quelques-uns des « plus grands succès » du canon littéraire anglais des écoles secondaires nord-américaines : *Lord of the Flies [Sa Majesté des mouches]* ; *To Kill a Mockingbird [Ne tirez pas sur l'oiseau moqueur] ; Macbeth*, pour n'en citer que quelques-uns. Cette observation sur les récits que nous enseignons et apprenons dans les arts du langage secondaires peut, à première vue, sembler presque banale : Nous vivons dans un monde violent, alors bien sûr nous allons lire et enseigner des histoires sur la violence. Cependant, une telle banalité apparente souligne la nécessité d'examiner l'importance des récits de violence dans les programmes plus étroitement. Si la violence et la souffrance sont si courantes, il s'ensuit que les enseignants et les élèves apportent des récits de violence -y compris des expériences vécues avec la violence- dans la salle de classe et dans les textes que nous lisons. Cette *proximité de la violence* a de profondes implications pour l'enseignement et l'apprentissage, en particulier lorsque les enseignants, les élèves et la société en général ont une impulsion persistante à simplifier les récits sur la violence et la souffrance dans des catégories aussi discrètes que « bien » et « mal ». Par conséquent, mon enquête commence par l'exploration de cette *intersection* de récits de violence dans la classe d'arts du langage. Je demande, *Comment les récits sur la violence façonnent-ils le programme d'études d'une classe secondaire d'arts du langage ? Par récits, on entend les textes pédagogiques ainsi que les histoires provenant de et apporté par l'enseignant et les élèves.* En m'inspirant de la théorie narrative de Ricœur ainsi que du *currere* (les divers travaux de théorie du curriculum de Grumet, Pinar et Strong-Wilson), j'ai utilisé une méthodologie narrative autobiographique polyvocale pour cartographier ma propre identité narrative en matière de violence, ainsi que mes rencontres personnelles et professionnelles avec les histoires de violence des autres, celles de membres de ma famille, d'élèves et d'un autre professeur d'arts du langage du secondaire. La nature « polyvocale » de cette méthodologie signifiait que l'écriture narrative qui comprend mes données inclut des extraits transcrits de conversations de recherche que j'ai tenues avec des membres de la famille, des amis et un collègue dans le but de représenter de manière éthique et honnête leurs histoires telles qu'elles ont recoupé les miennes. Rencontrer les histoires de violence des autres a soulevé des préoccupations éthiques impérieuses concernant la façon dont on aborde des histoires qui ne sont pas les siens. Ainsi, je demande également, *Comment la reconnaissance, plutôt que la compréhension, pourrait-elle aider à négocier ces intersections de récits ? Quelles implications ces reconnaissances pourraient-elles avoir pour l'enseignement et l'apprentissage des arts de la langue anglaise dans l'éducation secondaire ?* La « reconnaissance » implique la véracité et le fait d'être vu pour qui on est vraiment et est capable de devenir (Ricœur, 2005) ; la reconnaissance ne tolère pas la fausseté, car le faire revient à méconnaître (Yoder et Strong-Wilson, 2016). De la narration et de l'analyse de mes propres histoires de violence et de celles d'autres, ont émergé plusieurs résultats clés, qui tous contrent l'attraction gravitationnelle de la simplification en ce qui concerne les récits de violence. La façon dont nous racontons des histoires -les nôtres et celles des autres- compte profondément car notre position narrative est également une position éthique. Le concept de Strong-Wilson (sous presse) du « sujet concerné » qui

est à la fois investi émotionnellement dans un récit et « confié » de son récit crée une tension nécessaire pour le narrateur, et par extension, pour le lecteur et l'enseignant. Cette tension souligne l'importance de l'ambivalence (Bauman, 1999) dans la narration et l'enseignement de la violence, où cette ambivalence se situe dans la figure de l'étranger, quelqu'un qui n'est pas -et ne peut pas être- chez lui et à l'aise avec le monde tel qu'il est actuellement. Cependant, cette tension et cette incertitude n'empêchent pas le travail de reconnaissance (Ricœur, 2005) comme réponse à des histoires de violence, où être reconnu (par soi-même, par un autre) c'est être vu pour qui on est et qui on est capable de devenir, dans toutes ses myriades de contradictions et de complications. L'incertitude et la prudence à l'égard de soi-même et de sa perception du monde trouvent un lest nécessaire pour s'orienter vers la reconnaissance. Ce faisant, nous pourrions travailler plus honnêtement et de manière plus réfléchie vers une société moins violente.

Preface: On writing.

For the first time in twenty years, I can really see the stars, unmolested by lesser lights.

When I was a child in rural Saskatchewan, we regularly consulted *The Field Guide to the Stars*. It is a small book bound in dusty turquoise and filled with beguiling diagrams of the night sky from different hemispheric positions. During winter's brightest nights, my father and I bundled up and stood on the deck, pointing out the different constellations. There was a particular triumph when a new one was identified, a very arrogant sort of triumph because of course the stars and galaxies that comprise the night sky did not arrange themselves for our 'discovery' and delectation.

I've spent the last two decades in assorted American and Canadian cities, but I returned to my parents' Oregon farm in 2016 in order to help my mother in her recovery from cancer, and my father and brother in supporting and caring for her—and to write this dissertation. What began as a year's sojourn has turned into something permanent. I am immured—much like my maternal grandmother, about whom I write in Chapter 5—"deep in my kingdom," among the lilies and roses and oaks of the temperate Willamette Valley.

I look at the stars and trace the stories through which I know and have known the night sky. The same is true for the constellations of stories in which this dissertation is grounded, through which I trace what I know or have known about teaching literature and violence. There is some urgency here: I have returned to the classroom. Once again I

stand before 150 or so students, and talk with them about language and narratives and violence, and suspect myself of blundering, of being so overwhelmed with the sheer numbers of students for which I am responsible as a secondary English language arts teacher that I am unable to reflect, to recognize the patterns and/or the singularities that make change possible.

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I feel small, profoundly insufficient, next to the subject of violence, in life, in literature, in language arts.

What right have I to approach it? I cannot claim to have been a survivor in any personal sense (although I know and am near to those who are) so I bring no testimony for you to witness. Neither am I an 'expert' (although I come from a long line of Mennonites and pacifists who might claim an expert's certainty) so I offer no science—social or natural—and no faith.

Yet, smallness does necessarily preclude me from approaching this subject, vast as the Milky Way. I look up into the night sky, and the gleam from some far distant inferno meets my eye. I cannot explain why it is so, but here we are, this distant photon messenger and I, meeting in time and space on the gravel lane of some small Oregon acreage while frogs sing and bats swoop. Our chance meeting reminds me of Thomas Hardy's poem "The Man He Killed" (as a very serious teenager, I memorized it, doubtlessly also imagining the occasion for a dramatic recitation and ensuing applause):

Had he and I but met
By some old ancient inn,
We should have sat us down to wet
Right many a nipperkin!

But ranged as infantry,

And staring face to face,
I shot at him as he at me,
And killed him in his place.

They meet on the battlefield, two small and disposable men. However, it is the possibility of what might have been, the conviviality of a pub, the conversation over a mug (as imagined by Hardy) that renders their chance meeting tragic. So smallness does not constrain the imagination in the face of vast and complex subjects; indeed, it might be a vital element of such representations. In *The Rule of Metaphor,* Ricoeur (2007) argues for the necessity of symbolic language in the face of what defies simple comprehension: "I could not speak of bad will or evil without a hermeneutic" (p. 375). And yet, a hermeneutic is troublingly hollow without the appeal to judgment—why this and not that?—in reading, and especially for this project, in writing. With Ricoeur's words as a starting point, an earlier version of this preface extended my metaphor comparing the vastness of the night sky with the difficulty of writing about violence, to admittedly rather comic ends. My infatuation with this metaphor was truly a conceit, in both senses of the word.

How do I know? Because at the end of my conceit I was earnestly trying to tack on the thoughts of another scholar and writer to whom my thinking is indebted, those of W.G. Sebald, and it just wasn't working. His essay, *On the Natural History of Destruction* (2003), is starkly critical of how destruction, suffering, violence is represented/mis-represented/un-represented and I am gripped by one passage in particular, in light of my topic:

> The ideal of truth inherent in its *entirely unpretentious objectivity*…proves itself the only legitimate reason for continuing to produce literature in the face of total destruction. Conversely, the construction of aesthetic or pseudo-aesthetic effects from the ruins of an

> annihilated world is a process depriving literature of its right to exist. (p. 53, emphasis added)

This passage exerted a rather uncomfortable judgment on my efforts. My extended metaphor about violence was clearly the result of some mental gymnastics performed by someone pleased with her skills, and Sebald's excoriation of just such aesthetic indulgences rendered it incompatible as a conclusion. I spent a couple of days trying to meld the two. In the past, when I have thought about this passage from Sebald, I have always focused on 'objectivity'. What does he mean, objectivity (remembering, as well, that this is translated from German)? But then it occurred to me that perhaps the more important word was 'unpretentious.' Pretentions—that is, to being something that one isn't—impede honest thinking, honest judgment. The subject of violence demands humility, cautiousness and vulnerability—not mastery, not even eloquence with its connotations of audience, of the adjudication of others, even as this dissertation will be adjudicated. Furthermore, combatting such pretentions must recognize that we are reliant on other people, events and histories for our understandings and interpretations. Strong-Wilson (2015), writing about Sebald, reminds us that "…[T]he impetus for writing about a subject often has its source in life events, either our own or those of people we know or have heard about and whose stories have touched us; their stories leave behind 'phantom traces'" (p. 616). These traces point to the delicacy, the contingency of our subject(s). Ricoeur (1992) takes the imprint of others (people, stories, events, etc.) one step further. We are, he notes, at best "co-authors" (p. 160), even of those stories to which we are most attached, to wit, the stories of our lives.

In the end, of course, there is no substantive conflict between Sebald's demand for unpretentiousness and Ricoeur's defense of symbolic language, only that the

imagination of the writer does not become more important than the lived experiences—of the people about whom she is writing, including herself. Thus, in writing this dissertation, may I remember that truth is unpretentious.[1]

[1] One final note: This quotation from Sebald's *On The Natural History of Destruction*, regarding the "ideal of truth," reappears in Chapters 4 and 5; truth has become a considerable preoccupation in this exploration of violence, and the significance(s) of this passage has continued to evolve over the course of my writing.

Chapter 1: Introduction

I. The Subject of Study

Macbeth.
Lord of the Flies.
To Kill a Mockingbird.
The Lottery.
Beowulf.
Maus.

Class, it's going to be exciting. There will be stabbings, stonings, tramplings, shootings, more stabbings, decapitations, an arm will be torn off, 'Sinews split/ and bone-lappings burst,' (Beowulf, lines 816-817, Heaney, trans.).

And genocide.

But be forewarned: Don't arrive breathless to my class, tardy because "Miss, there was a fight!" I don't want to hear about the throbbing crowd or the bloody nose or the torn hair. You bystanders, voyeurs, are the reason they fight. If you didn't watch, they wouldn't be hurting each other.

This was not an actual introduction to any syllabus from my eight years of teaching secondary language arts at an urban high school in the Pacific Northwest[2], but it could have been, and would have been more honest than what was: "Students will read and critically engage with a variety of texts from the canon of British Literature" (Yoder Syllabus, Senior English/British Literature 2010-11). And while I prided myself on my emotional restraint, rarely using anger as a management weapon, I had no compunction in revealing my deep disgust and disappointment when students were late and bursting with stories of adolescent bravado and blood. I do believe, quite deeply, that they fight because we watch. Does a similar logic apply to violence in texts, in curricula?

[2] To clarify: For much of dissertation, I was reflecting on these eight years of teaching, from 2003 to 2011, after which I returned to McGill and graduate studies for six years. I resumed teaching high school language arts in the fall of 2017.

When David[3], a teacher-participant, and a secondary English language arts teacher who, like me, identifies as a pacifist, admitted during our first conversation that he mostly taught "sex, violence and rock 'n roll" (Teacher Participant Interview 1), I felt gleeful recognition. I used to snicker that *I* taught "the sex and violence class." I enjoyed this gloss of transgression, while conscious that my Mennonite and family histories absolved me of any real impression of unseemliness. In addition, as the above list testifies (in this chapter's opening), I mostly taught from the canon, and who can argue with the appropriateness of the canon? David's nickname for his curricula also gave me a feeling akin to relief: Here was a veteran teacher and fellow pacifist making choices similar to my own, and admitting the same general thematic tendencies, albeit rather ruefully.

There are galaxies of texts: Why these violent ones? Is it just for shock value, or do we hope students are learning something more, something about life?

Among the "Bedrock Beliefs" of the National Council of Teachers of English is the "transformative power of language," elaborated further by the claim that "Literacy education supports all students in the use of language to interact, imagine, reflect, think critically, and create knowledge in order to make a difference in their lives and in the lives of others" (http://www.ncte.org/mission/bedrockbeliefs). Such sentiments seem, on the one hand, to comprise common knowledge. Of course literacy education and language is powerful! Of course it can make a difference! I chose the flagship for SELA (Secondary English Language Arts) rather than a more 'scholarly' version of these same sentiments in order to emphasize their ubiquity.

[3] Pseudonym

But on the other hand, unless we're strictly talking about the literacies involved in securing employment or reading a recipe[4], the "differences" that the power of language might enjoin would seem to be ethical as well as pragmatic. There is a striking resonance between the 'Bedrock Beliefs' of the NCTE and Ricoeur's (1992) definition of the "'ethical intention'" which he defines as "aiming at the 'good life' with and for others, in just institutions" (p. 172). Let's compare the two statements directly. "In order to" echoes "aiming at" by establishing an intention; "a difference in their lives and in the lives of others" might be replaced with "the 'good life' with and for others" with no substantive change in meaning. We could try it, just to make sure:

> *Literacy education supports all students in the use of language to interact, imagine, reflect, think critically, and create knowledge, aiming at the 'good life' with and for others, [in just institutions].*

Is the "ethical intention" (understood as the pursuit of what it means to live a 'good life') another, perhaps more accurate, name for the aims of the study of SELA, its "bedrock"? Is it (one of the) reason(s) we select the violent texts we do? I can hear the very justified protests that we English teachers are not ethics teachers, that we already have enough to do, that we are not trained. Yet, recall my canonical list at the beginning of this chapter and David's quip. When exploring the popular themes/concepts of "power" or "in/justice" or the oft- (and perhaps over-) used "empathy"—by which we plan to support students in their uses of language to make a difference in their lives and others'—it's hard to overlook the centrality of violence and its natures, mis/uses, and legacies, as subject and catalyst in the texts we select. Where is the study of power, without

[4] Even these "practical" literacies contain a palpable ethical dimension: Food and employment are critical in living one's beliefs about what makes a "good life." One need only think about food rituals and practices in various cultural traditions.

considerations of its abuse (*Macbeth, Lord of the Flies*) or the study of injustice without the necessary violent infractions (*To Kill a Mockingbird, Maus*)? To English teachers' hypothetical protests that "It's not our job," I would answer, "We're already doing it."

In my preface I raised the tension inherent in how to tell of/narrate human suffering and human evil where the speaker/writer is inevitably a human being with his/her own life histories and aims. A corresponding question is: How to teach these same kinds of stories, where the local and particular "biographical situation" (Pinar, 2004, p. 36) of the teacher is analogous to the local and particular lived histories of the speaker or writer of stories? The text that a language arts teacher selects to teach might offer opportunities for ethical inquiry and reflection, but such a text is not some neutral vessel that is independent from the teacher him/herself. A narrative text might be considered an ethical laboratory (Ricoeur, 1984, p. 59; Ricoeur, 1992, p. 170) wherein the reader, exercising his/her imagination, might experiment and draw conclusions about what it means to live a good life. However, Ricoeur's metaphor for narrative evokes the discipline, writ large, from which laboratories as concept and practise emerged, namely natural science. As historians of science argue (e.g. Daston & Galison, 2010; Shapin and Shaffer, 1989), the material, social and historical conditions of any laboratory frame, constrain and, on some level, produce its experimental findings. Likewise, one's "biographic situation" (Pinar, 2004, p. 36) forms some significant part of the material, social, and historical condition of a teacher's curricula, and shapes the learning experiences of her students, including their ethical experimentation with narratives, their own and others'. The curricula the teacher plans and enacts around texts are necessarily informed by his/her own life experiences and self-understandings, and these are therefore

an integral element of the classroom experience for all. Troubling—perhaps even intolerable—tensions might emerge between the ethical dilemmas presented in the text, and the ethical dilemmas that emerge from working with such a text as an individual human being in a particular place and time, with a particular group of young people.

For example, if you noticed a rather uncomfortable contradiction in my imagined syllabus introduction, you would be absolutely right. This contradiction is real. It exists between a conventional, perhaps even canonical attitude towards violence in texts of all kinds, to wit: "Violence is exciting, interesting, relevant, illustrative;" and an alternative, rather moralistic stance: "Violence is wrong and disgusting, you little voyeurs." There is still another perspective revealed in my imagined syllabus, one that students might acknowledge: "Violence is a part of my life in and out of the hallways." This last, we should not forget, also applies to teachers. We must acknowledge, as Rothberg (2009, 2011) does about collective memory, that these stories and perspectives might even compete with one another, consciously or unconsciously, in the public sphere of the classroom, in teaching and learning.

The research questions for this doctoral study emerge from these concerns.

1. How do narratives about violence inform curriculum in a secondary language arts classroom? By narratives is meant the curriculum texts as well as the stories originating with and brought by the teacher and students.
2. How might recognition, rather than understanding, help negotiate these intersections of narratives? What implications might such recognitions have for teaching and learning secondary English language arts?

II. The subject doing the study

I am, as I have said, a language arts teacher. I am also a Mennonite and a pacifist.

My father is the youngest of three brothers born into an Amish-Mennonite[5] community in the Willamette Valley of Oregon. Their grandfather was an ardent pacifist and Mennonite activist during World War I, even (allegedly) meeting with the Secretary of War on one occasion. My father's brothers, especially the eldest two—my uncles Eric and Chris—came of age during the war in Vietnam, were drafted and entered alternative service. The eldest brother, Eric, eventually went to Canada, and in time the other brothers and their wives (including my mother, Zoe) migrated, too. It has always been near the front of my consciousness that I was born in Canada because my family fled the United States because of the draft. It was a position, relative to violence and war, that had determined where I was born, so distant from family members in Oregon.

My father was also a minister in a Mennonite church for about 12 years.

Yet my understanding of what it means to resist violence has never been particularly satisfactory or confident. When I was in Grade 12, back in the United States, my English teacher asked us to write short stories. My short story, told from the point of view of a daughter in a traditional and conservative Mennonite family, recounted the family upheaval that ensues when her brother decides to join the military. I imagined the

[5] Briefly, the Amish and Mennonites are Anabaptist sects of Christianity. Usually they are lumped in with Protestant sects, but do not identify as such: "We are neither Catholic nor Protestant, but we share ties to those streams of Christianity" (Mennoniteusa.org). They originated in central Europe during the Protestant Reformation, but were convinced that the Reformation didn't go far enough, leading to persecution at the hands of both Protestants and Catholics. Among their basic beliefs is a commitment to non-violence.

tearing apart of a family, the testing of its integrity, and the limits of love. Most of all I was concerned with our human impulse to cast out or cast stones on those who challenge our most precious convictions. The "hero," if such a word might be applied, was the young man joining the military. The "antagonist" was his father.

Another vivid memory: During my first philosophy class in university, my professor proclaimed that pacifism was philosophically unsupportable. I was upset (I liked him, even if he was a bit of a fop) and wondered what he meant, "philosophically unsupportable." So I asked. In retrospect, his argument was not based so much on reason as on a failure of imagination, for he had rolled out that old chestnut, so beloved by folks to whom non-violence is perversely threatening: "What would you do if your (mother/sister/daughter…it's always a lady-folk) were being attacked by a (man) and you had a (gun/knife/club/light sabre)? Would you just stand by and pray?" I was disappointed and angry at his callow dismissal.

In the context of this doctoral study, my questions concerning violence and language arts serve as a subject of inquiry, but the memories shared above (and in the foregoing chapters) should make clear that I am also *the* subject, through my "human capacity to understand the world and its personification in our subjectivity" (Pinar 2011, p. 21). "Subject" here is not to be conflated with "individual," in the sense of any sort of me-first ethos. Rather, this is the subject who, as Pinar notes, seeks to understand, learn and remember from one's necessarily provisional, limited, and contingent position in the world.

III. On being subject to

In Guernica the dead children
Were laid out in order upon the sidewalk,

In their white starched dresses,
In their pitiful white dresses.

On their foreheads and breasts
Are the little holes where death came in
As thunder, while they were playing
Their important summer games.

Do not weep for them, madre.
They are gone forever, the little ones,
Straight to heaven to the saints,
and God will fill the bullet-holes with candy.

"In Guernica" by Norman Rosten (reprinted in Baez, 1968).

By far the most significant text from my childhood, indeed what now I identify as a 'touchstone' (Strong-Wilson, 2008, p. 78) was Joan Baez' collaboration with Peter Schickele, entitled *Baptism: A Journey Through Our Time* (1968). It's a combination of spoken word, song, and evocative tone poems. My parents had the album (vinyl). It is explicit—in its vivid rendering of the vicissitudes of life and death—and explicitly anti-war. It wasn't "meant" for children, but I listened to it over and over, such that I memorized great portions of it, and would (and still do) recite fragments. When I was old enough, I bought the CD.

Baptism is the carpet, the wallpaper, the window coverings of my world in words. Whenever I re-read the lyrics, I feel time collapse. My body still knows my four-year-old self's fascination and horror at Ferhlengetti's "Song in the Blood" or Henry Treece's "Who Murdered the Minutes." I can still recite William Blake's "London." It firmly places responsibility for suffering at the feet of the great institutions: church and state:

How the Chimney-sweepers cry
Every blackning Church appalls,
And the hapless Soldiers sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls. (Blake, 1794, reprinted in Baez, 1968)

It was never lost on me, even when I first started teaching, that I represented another of those great institutions, and such a consciousness made me all the more strident.

I used the poems and excerpts from this album frequently in my curricula and as decoration on my classroom walls, and most frequently I used "In Guernica" by Norman Rosten. It's a short poem with accessible language. Sometimes I also included Picasso's famous depiction of the same subject, for a multi-modal taste-treat. On the album, Baez reads the poem with sing-song irony, echoing the naïve and utterly bizarre suggestion that God is going to "…fill their bullet holes with candy." When I stood up in front of the class and read the poem (always twice), my voice imitated hers, but with an extra quiver of emotion. I was preaching.

"What do you make of that line, about God and bullet holes and candy? What do you think the writer is trying to say here? What does it make you think about?" I asked my class.

Their answers were never satisfactorily critical. There were times when I followed it up with an excerpt from Pierre Bayle's (1738) *Dictionary* that I found in Neiman's (2000) *Evil in Modern Thought,* especially if I was teaching seniors. It was heavy, controversial. Bayle doesn't mess around with the "comfort" of a God who can offer candy but can't stop bullets. I enjoyed this passage in all its inflammatory glory, even as I ensconced it in the trappings of "best practices," explaining the context,

reviewing the vocabulary, providing sticky notes for pre- and post-reading reflections. Here's the passage:

> God is either willing to remove evil and cannot; or he can and is unwilling; or he is neither willing nor able to do so; or else he is both willing and able. If he is willing and not able, he must then be weak, which cannot be affirmed of God. If he is able and not willing, he must be envious, which is also contrary to the nature of God. If he is neither willing nor able, he must be both envious and weak, and consequently not be God. If he is both willing and able—the only possibility that agrees with the nature of God—then where does evil come from? (Pierre Bayle, Dictionary 1965/1738 as cited in Neiman 2000, p. 118)

"What sort of connections can you draw between Bayle's descriptions of God, and the God in Rosten's poem?" I asked my students.

But what I really wanted to ask them was (and maybe I did… I can't remember clearly), "What sort of God is this, what sort of deranged, sadistic monster fills the bullet holes of children with candy, declining to prevent their massacre in the first place? *Who is this God?"*

It is not a question for them; it is a question for me. It's my question.

My students were—and are—*subject to* the subjects that preoccupy me. This 'subjection' is especially troubling in the context of teaching about violence because of the unequal distribution of power and resources (psychic, intellectual, social) in the classroom. Indeed, my own small narrative here is uncomfortably reminiscent of focusing on the sliver in your neighbour's eye and avoiding the log in your own. I suspect the *circumstances*, the very temporality (Pinar, 2011) of the imposition of my preoccupations on my students rendered my lesson— designed to provoke thinking about what it means to 'live the good life' as a human being—incomprehensible and perhaps even uncomfortable. To cadge some of Marshall McLuhan's famous five words, the

"how" and "why" of my curricula—the medium—rendered my intended message, at best, inert, and at worst, distressing to my students. Britzman's (1999) wonderful exploration of similar territory, entitled "Monsters in Literature," has long served as an inspiration for taking up this conflict between one's own preoccupations with a subject, and the expression of those preoccupations as a teacher with students who are different than her/him. Britzman writes, "My first curriculum, I now understand, had a knowledge of monsters matched by a terrific ignorance of what is monstrous about our preoccupation with them" (p. 258). The disjuncture between her curriculum as she imagined it and the experience of teaching it to a particular group of secondary students presents an important occasion for later learning: "The events that we take as `what happened' are already worked over through the lens of a later time. Yet this very act is creative" (p. 253). In taking up the past, this act is also necessarily narrative, for it is through narrative that we construct our changing-yet-enduring understandings of who we are that mediate between "the immutable identity of the *idem*, the same, and the changing identity of the *ipse*, the self, with its historical condition" (Ricoeur, 2005, p. 101). The teacher who teaches is him/herself a discrete and singular person, who might make promises and be held accountable. However, her/his experiences in time and the significance thereof is understood through narratives—and narratives might be revised, making available new meanings that can change the way one sees oneself and the people with whom one lives and works.

IV. Un/ravelling the subjects.

In approaching the intersections of narratives, violence and curricula in the context of SELA, this doctoral project is descriptive and narrative, rather than prescriptive and expository.

This dissertation is primarily a work of autobiography. That said, as it is also ineluctably connected with the narratives from my family, community, and teaching life, it is therefore, at times, biographical. My data consists of juxtaposed narratives: from my teaching life, from the formative stories I carry from my family/community, and from my conversations with a veteran teacher and fellow pacifist. My aim is to do what I have struggled to do as a teacher in the hurly burly of classroom life: to let the stories emerge, unhindered. In writing narratives first, followed by analysis with regard to the specifics of my research questions, I recall Pinar's (2011) appeal for distance, in necessary tension with 'engagement' as well as Ricoeur's (1981a) correlation of the act of writing with distantiation.

Using narrative writing to work through my questions about teaching, violence and language arts places a considerable burden on my methodological conceptualizations. How does such an approach help answer the questions I have posed? Why is this knowledge worthwhile, and how is it in service of making the world a more just—and less violent—place? While I make no claim to the generalizability of my "findings," I *am* offering this work as an entry into the scholarly conversations around how narratives of violence are taught and learned. Thus, whereas it might be more conventional to follow this introduction with a theoretical framework chapter, in order to lay out the my understandings of key concepts (e.g., violence), the peculiar centrality of methodology to

this inquiry entails that I start with two methodology chapters, in order to lay out what does and does not constitute knowledge that matters in the context of this dissertation. Not every narrative I write helps me answer my research questions; no concept of violence, no matter how finely put, overcomes this particular challenge.

Thus, in Chapter two, I make the case for narrative as a methodology in this inquiry, as well as narrative autobiographical writing as a method. I draw on the work of Ricoeur (1988, 1992, 2005) as well as scholars within the field of curriculum theory such as Pinar, Grumet and Strong-Wilson. I explain my research context, participants, and procedures, and draw on a hermeneutical approach to data analysis, whereby the meaning of my narrative writing "becomes embedded as an aspect of the writing of the narrative rather than following on its composition" (Strong-Wilson, 2015, p. 26). That is, meaning emerges from the process of narrative writing, not merely its product.

In Chapter three, "Tending My Weed Patch," I take up the question of which narratives have helped me work through my research questions. I explore and analyse excerpts from narratives that I wrote that *don't* work, from which emerges the question, how *ought* I narrate? In answering this question, I turn to Strong-Wilson's (2015, 2017) analysis of narrative form, in which she draws on the works of W. G. Sebald. Consideration of Sebald's oblique style of narration gives rise to the significance of *ambivalence*, as conceptualized by Bauman (1991) in my writing/working with narratives of violence.

In Chapter four, "Theorizing Violence, Recognizing Fragility" I conceptualize violence in the context of this inquiry. Violence is a capacious and elusive concept. I arrive at a phenomenological understanding of violence, including Ricoeur's reflections

on language and violence, before turning to recognition as a possible recourse to the nearness and intimacy of violence in our lived experiences and the stories we tell.

Chapter five, entitled “Landing,” takes the form of 25 juxtaposed narrative threads, comprising the stories of my family and family history, and my teacher-participant, and me that work through an intersection of narratives of violence. A narrative thread is an individual vignette.

Chapter six, “What Is Not Inferno,” reflects on these narratives in light of the changes that writing them has brought about in my understandings of both my own narrative identit(ies), as well as working with narratives of/about violence in the classroom.

Chapter seven concludes this dissertation. I reflect on my research questions, directions for possible future inquiry, and the implications of this project.

Chapter 2: Methodology

I. Introduction

> [W]hat unifies the problem of violence is not the fact that its multiple expressions derive from one or another form that is held to be fundamental, but rather that it is language that is its opposite. It is for a being who speaks, who in speaking pursues meaning, who has already entered the discussion and who knows something about rationality that violence is or becomes a problem. Thus violence has its meaning in its other: language. And the same is true reciprocally. Speech, discussion and rationality also draw their unity of meaning from the fact that they are an attempt to reduce violence. (Ricoeur, 1974, p. 89)

At the beginning of the previous chapter I made the case that we, as language arts teachers, are already concerned with what Ricoeur terms (1992) the "ethical intention," with "aiming at the 'good life' with and for others, in just institutions" (p. 172). "Aiming" reinforces the aspirational nature of this "ethical intention," for we live and act and suffer with and because of others, and in as much as we cannot control the actions of others (let alone our own in all or even most cases), we are ever engaged in figuring out what such a "good life" means under the mediated circumstances in which we find ourselves. The ethical dimension of the study of language and meaning is developed further in the passage cited above, because entering into a discussion—a meaningful exchange in good faith where the outcome is uncertain—requires the renunciation of violence.[6] One cannot hold a good faith discussion if one participant holds a knife to the throat of another.

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[6] I will return to Ricoeur's essay on violence and language and a lengthier theorization of violence in chapter 4, my theoretical framework.

For instance, in the previous chapter I wrote about a recurrent text in my curriculum, Norman Rosten's "In Guernica," and the *vigorous* responsibilities that I held were God's. While at the time, in that moment, I would have said that I was holding a discussion, it was hardly one in good faith, given the disparity in power between me and my students. Yet the purpose of recalling this example is not to jump into the intricacies of my research, but to point out the lived experiences that have given rise to my questions. It is in the process of narrating memories of teaching—like this one, with Rosten's poetry—that such memories become available for reflection and meaning-making. My actions in the moment were certainly heavy-handed, perhaps even irresponsible and careless towards my students' comfort, but it is after, and with recourse to language, that such a realization emerges. For this reason, returning to the concept of ethics mentioned above, Ricoeur refers to narrative as an ethical laboratory (Ricoeur, 1984, p. 59; Ricoeur, 1992, p. 170) where what is "dangerous, hot, or unstable" (Fowler, 2002, p. 6) might be considered, reflected upon, and discussed.

In short, I suspect that language and narratives, the subjects of my discipline as a teacher, might better serve their meaning and potential when conceived as the opposite of violence. In the discussion that follows, I recount and explain the methodology, methods and practices to which I have turned in order to address and (provisionally) answer my research questions.

But first, a nod to epistemology. In the passage quoted above from Ricoeur (1974) on language and violence, he notes the antithetical relationship between language (when not subverted by being lies) and violence, where "speech, discussion, and rationality also draw their unity of meaning from being an attempt to reduce violence" (p.

89). Some sense of what Ricoeur means when he says "rationality" in the context of hermeneutics is helpful, which Kearney (2004) provides:

> …[Rationality] must always presuppose the revealing and concealing powers of language. The ideal of rationality remains therefore a project rather than a possession…It corresponds to the recognition that there is no 'first truth', no 'absolute knowledge', no transcendental vantage point of consciousness where the dispersal into multiple meaning could be definitively overcome in one final synthesis. (p. 14)

To sit with family members, friends, colleagues, and students and discuss violence is not an investigative search for first causes nor an attempt to formulate positivist statements about "human nature." Neither is it the quest for some discrete genesis of human entanglement with violence. It is, instead, an engagement in the necessarily aspirational "project" of rational meaning-making around a subject that frequently defies understanding (Yoder & Strong-Wilson, 2017), the beginning of what I hope are more effective discussions—as teacher, as scholar, as daughter, etc.—that embody language as the very opposite of violence.

It may be surprising that I cling to such a déclassé notion as "rationality;" I would answer that the *ideal* of rationality, as Kearney—who was Ricoeur's student and is now a noted Ricoeur scholar—puts it, is required in this inquiry. I begin from the position that it is possible to make some sense of the narratives I carry and that I have received/created in the course of this inquiry. I am therefore relying more on the "revealing" function of language than its "concealing" function,[7] but this does not mean that I am naïve about the latter, nor the limitations of my own consciousness. It only means that I begin, as a

[7] Ricoeur (1999a) terms this "concealing" function the "hermeneutics of suspicion" (p. 17). Under the aegis of this "hermeneutics of suspicion" he includes scholars such as Nietzsche and Freud.

gesture of good faith and humility, with the former. Where narratives of violence and trauma are at the centre, in teaching, learning and life, it is incumbent upon me to be first critical of my own interpretations and actions in relationship with others and their narratives. It is not my role to suspect that others "know not of what they speak."

II. Methodology: Autobiography

A. Co-authorship of autobiographical narratives

I don't know how else to take up questions of how narratives of violence inform curriculum than by engaging in the writing of (and listening to and reading of) narratives. This may, at first glance, seem like circular reasoning; I would respond by noting the primacy of narrative in how we come to know ourselves and others. Or, put more eloquently by Fowler (2006),

> I learned that narratives were a place where people had freedom and responsibility to tell truth, however difficult. The power of good narrative, then, lends itself particularly well to the chaotic, contextual and complex matrices of educational research. (p. 12)

Fowler's use of "good" to qualify "narrative" deserves a pause. What does she mean here? I would suggest that the answer is contained in her description of what "good narrative" makes possible: good narrative evokes the "chaotic, contextual and complex." Where once I envisioned conventional autobiographical narrative writing—that is, the variety that purports to own and speak from a unitary "I"—as my primary mode, I have since come to realize that the narratives brought by teachers and students into the classroom, as well as classroom texts, defy such a simplistic approach. Furthermore, the stories that come from me are not just my own, conjured from memory: they are the stories of family and national histories; they are the stories behind the stories that are texts. Ricoeur (1992) notes, speaking of autobiography,

> When I interpret myself in terms of a life story, am I all three [author, narrator, and character] at once, as in the autobiographical narrative? Narrator and character, perhaps, but of a life of which, unlike the creatures of fiction, I am not the author, but at most...the co-author. (p. 160)

Ricoeur later adds, in the same vein, "By narrating a life of which I am not the author as to existence, I make myself its coauthor as to its meaning" (p. 162). Unlike the "creatures of fiction," my life story is entangled with the stories and life stories of others. Realizing such co-authorship compels me to acknowledge the reciprocity of such co-authorship through mutual narration, if you will—through telling some small parts of their stories, sometimes using their own words, and always with their explicit permission, where those same stories illuminate or evoke the stories I tell.

Furthermore, in the face of the inevitable changes and discordance that the passage of time (and human life) entails, narrative brings into focus or makes meaningful this passage of time, but only ever in the time of the telling, and only ever partially. The configuration of these stories might have been—and might still be—otherwise (Ricoeur, 2005, p. 101; Yoder & Strong-Wilson, 2016), with implications for our lives and actions. For instance, in "*And Yet": Storying Complexity in Teacher Narratives* (Yoder & Strong-Wilson, 2016), I took up telling and re-telling a troubling teacher story from my practise, with the aim of recovering "…some sense of 'the possible" (p. 147) in narrating about difficulty, where so often teacher stories tend towards the simple and heroic. These simple stories, oft-repeated, can shape expectations for a teacher's practise, for our understandings of what it means to be a good teacher. This sense of possibility (in narrating about teaching and in teaching itself) emerged *in the retelling*. Thus narrating a

story about the past is both saying something and doing something, both of which might yield other meanings in the fullness of time.

However, I can hear the critics: If narrative is itself provisional and subject to change, how might it be taken seriously, seriously enough to provide the foundation for an inquiry into, say, teaching and violence? Kreiswirth (2000) suggests that narrative theorists such as Ricoeur "…make strong claims about what narrative does, the ways in which it justifiably allows us to say and do things within and about our being positioned temporally in the world—things that cannot be adequately captured by other means, discursive or otherwise (say, arguments or experiments)" (p. 309). It is this last point—that narrative "allows us to say and do things…that cannot be adequately captured by other means" (p. 309)—that responds to my hypothetical critic. The significance of the dual function of "saying and doing in time" is, I would suggest, reflected in Grumet's (2006b) argument that

> …Autobiography barely recaptures the past or even records it. It records the present perspective of the storyteller and presents the past within that structure. It employs the past to reveal the present assumptions and future intentions of the story tell, an elaborate detour that travels through once upon a time in order to reach now. (p. 73)

Narrative autobiographical writing is thus not the end product, per se, of my inquiry, but the path into saying and doing that cannot be pursued by any other means. Indeed, it is the doing—in connection with other people, my "co-authors"—that renders autobiographical narrative methodologically significant in an inquiry that, ultimately, has,

as its goal, exploring the recognition of self and other in the language arts classroom, where experiences, memories, and stories of violence are present. [8]

B. Currere

Currere takes up, explicitly, the relationship between autobiography and educational transformation, and the very question of the self and its vision of the future. As Pinar (2004) puts it, "The method of *currere*...provides a strategy for students of curriculum to study the relation between academic knowledge and life history in the interest of self-understandings and social reconstruction" (p. 35). Drawing on insights from varied and various philosophical and critical traditions, including hermeneutics, literary criticism, feminism and post-structuralism, *currere* begins with the individual "student of educational experience", who is in a "biographic situation," in which "she or he is located in historical time and place, but in a singularly meaningful way, a situation to be expressed in one's autobiographical voice" (Pinar, 2004, p. 35). The question of retrospective meaning that arises from practicing *currere* is of key interest: it is not the precise events, but rather the reconstruction and reflection that matters most, i.e.,"what students make of it" (Grumet, 2006a, p. 116). This "gathering up of oneself [is] performed in order to transcend that self rather than to identify its essential form" (Grumet, 2006a, p. 116). As Strong-Wilson (2015) puts it (with an important extension), in an article discussing the work of German writer W.G. Sebald and the hermeneutics of autobiography in education,

> The purpose of *currere* was, and is, to accomplish a critical distancing that is at the same time an engagement with the self (Pinar et al., 1995,

[8] See later in this chapter, in the section for analysis and interpretation, as well as Chapter Four for discussions of recognition as theory and practice.

> p. 415). Sebald's example suggests, first of all, that writing about our own lives is implicated with learning about others' lives. (p. 21)

In essence, *currere* focuses the autobiographical lens squarely on educational experiences, while at the same time keeping the enigmatic past in tension with the unknown future. It is not enough to 'remember,' nor to 'imagine.' Systematically, the past-future is explored under the lights of reconfiguration and change. And this emphasis on reconfiguration (the word that Ricoeur (1988) also uses to describe the transformative nature of interpreting narratives) is at the heart of my inquiry.

Strong-Wilson's extension (see above) of thought around the project of *currere* to more explicitly consider the implications of "learning about others' lives" is highly significant. I suggest that Ricoeur's notion of co-authorship in matters related to autobiography is complementary with the one that Strong-Wilson identifies. The changes I aspire to—that is, a more responsive and responsible approach to working with narratives and/of violence in the language arts classroom—cannot spring fully-formed from my own head, in the manner of a scholarly Athena. By quite literally relying on the words of others and the stories that they tell about themselves (and more others, still) my "elaborate detour to now" takes me into discussions that I never would have had, eliciting narratives that would never otherwise be found in the same company. These are stories I could not tell by myself directly. They are stories about family and friends and history that also reveal my own preoccupations—important subjects and tensions—even as I am also telling about a life that is not my own. But there is a further dimension, too, one that I have learned about in the course of this study. Despite prescriptions and restrictions around the practices and interpretations of violence in the Mennonite community of my origins, my own conversations with family and friends reveal my own and others' deep

ambivalence about the subject(s) of violence. Indeed, this reckoning with and theorizing ambivalence has become an important element within the writing/recounting of narratives in the "data" sections of this paper. Although writing for a different context (class rather than culture), Steedman (1986) argues for the particularity of autobiographical narrative(s) in the recounting of history: "Personal interpretations of past time – the stories that people tell themselves in order to explain how they got to the place they currently inhabit – are often in deep and ambiguous conflict with the official interpretative devices of a culture" (p. 6). The grounds for my inquiry lie in narrating around and through this "deep and ambiguous conflict," admittedly amplified by the mentally and psychically challenging nature of my subject.

C. Method:

My method is comprised of writing and juxtaposing narratives.

1. Writing Narratives

The method of *currere*, along with Ricoeur's notion of co-authorship, demands a certain polyvocality as regards the narratives I write and/or share from my family, friends and colleague. Ricoeur (2010) writes, "…[the capacity to narrate one's life] is that of the plot of a narrative that remains unfinished and open to the possibility of being recounted differently, and also of being recounted by others" (p. 23). Given this inherent multiplicity and open-endedness, I have modified my method to include not just one subject of autobiographical co-authorship (that is, most immediately, my individual "life story"), but several: historical narratives, e.g. familial histories; cultural and/or literary histories; the histories of others with which my own histories have intersected, i.e., the story of memories of childhood or biographical writing about a person who figures in

these memories; and finally, teacher stories themselves, that is, my recollections from revisiting my curricula and artefacts from my life as a secondary language arts teacher.

2. Juxtaposing narratives

In "relating" these diverse stories—my own and others'—I am attempting to map the intersection of narratives that I brought into the classroom through the use of juxtaposition (Strong-Wilson, 2017), which, I would suggest, best exemplifies the intersections (rather than causal or explanatory connections, for example) that form the basis of my inquiry. Strong-Wilson (2017) explores juxtaposition in the context of W.G. Sebald's oblique approach to narrative writing and the subject(s) of human suffering: "The reader [of Sebald's narratives] gains a sense of the interrelatedness of the stories purely by their juxtaposition, as they slide over into one another, connected by a narrator who goes to a certain place, or encounters a certain person, or comes across a reference of some kind" (p.163). This approach entails a sense of responsibility, which "devolves to the reader who inherits a sense of concern" (p. 163) and on whom a kind of responsibility rests, for recognizing the connections and reducing the distance between what is seemingly coincidental, but in reality, is interconnected. Furthermore, the bringing together, or "nesting" of narratives may counter the sense of (narrative) inevitability (Yoder & Strong Wilson, 2016) that can accompany such stories in/about education, especially stories about teachers, who are routinely prescribed very narrow character arcs.

D. Challenges to/of Autobiography

Nevertheless, autobiography (even a polyvocal one) as a methodology is not without problems. If autobiography bears some relationship to the past as 'anchorage' (Ricoeur, 1991), how can those stories be constantly subject to the revisioning of the

psyche(s)?[9] There are lingering and particular doubts about the truth claims of autobiography, for an individual, in narrating her or his own story, has some serious and ever-present investments in how the past is told. One selects, edits, and otherwise creates according to extant literary genres, running the risk of "fall[ing] prey to overly schematized rendition of the past—ones that perhaps reveal more about extant ways of remembering and telling than about the particularities of the life in question" (Freeman, 2007, p. 141) The distinction between 'truth' and 'fiction' is heightened in research contexts—because there are other things involved, like degrees, fellowships and tenure. I don't mean to make such things sound trivial. LeJeune (1989) articulates the distinction as follows: “As opposed to all forms of fiction, biography and autobiography are referential tests: exactly like scientific or historical discourse” (p. 22). I bristle under the “exactly” but I cannot deny the claim he makes regarding the referentiality implicit in being “non-fiction.”

Gudmundsdottir (2003) does not see "fictionality" (p. 4) as being an existential threat to autobiography, but rather, as a "necessary part of the autobiographical process itself and not something external to it, or incompatible with it" (p. 4). He argues that the writer of autobiography must therefore constantly and consciously negotiate the "borders and boundaries between auto-biography and fiction" (p. 5). The author does this through "deal[ing] actively with the problematics of the writing process itself" (p. 5). This acknowledgement of the essential (while still challenging) quality of autobiographical writing resonates with Ricoeur's observation that we are not only co-authors of our own

[9] It is worth noting that this tension between the sameness—fidelity—and change is also fundamental to our individual identities, as we are not the same person today as we were in the past. See p. in this chapter.

lives, but co-authors of our autobiographies. To be a co-author is to immediately acknowledge that there are other 'authors' and therefore other ways of telling. Each telling, vis a vis precise referentiality, can only be approximate—but approximate can still mean 'very close,' though that is, perhaps, beside the point. Indeed, this is the ambiguity towards which the writer must adopt an ethical position. In her discussion of "close writing," Luce-Kapler (2011) speaks of the "kind of sensitivity that careful attention to language and its usage in the text invokes and the willingness to be troubled by the challenges" (p. 84).

Finally, however, my answer to the "truth" questions surrounding autobiographical writing must be made with recourse to Ricoeur (1992, 2005) who, after all, equates lies—the deliberate subversion of the possibilities of rational meaning in language—with violence. In the end, I am the writer of these autobiographical narratives; I affirm their relationship, as best as I can, to an enigmatic past, acknowledging the necessary plasticity of composition, and the ungovernability of meaning. And yet, I affirm. Ricoeur (2005) pairs memory, from which our narratives emerge—with the notion of promise. If memory evokes "sameness"—that is, I am the same person who experienced what I remember—the promise evokes the "who-ness"—that is, the capable being who may change but who honours her word. I am not doing sufficient justice to his argument here; however, I find this a moving place to rest. If I cannot honor my affirmation, then I am not who I think I am, in my life and in my research.

E. Role of Researcher

In the course of my inquiry, I have aimed—of course—to conduct my research in a manner that is both reflexive and ethical. Speaking of reflexivity, Luttrell (2000) says,

> I think of being reflexive as an exercise in sustaining multiple and sometimes opposing emotions, keeping alive contradictory ways of theorizing the works, and seeking compatibility, not necessarily consensus. Being reflexive means expanding rather than narrowing the psychic, social, cultural, and political fields of analysis. (p.18)

I see this definition of reflexivity as fundamental to my role as a researcher, and I have tried to understand and be conscious of, rather than try to control, the complexities of my research. Grumet (1989) phrases it slightly differently, and perhaps more aptly for my particular context: "Reflexivity requires thinking about your own thoughts. The auto-biographical narrative encodes that thought for critical and communal processes of interpretation. It is this phase of interpretation that draws the narrative of educational experience into public discourse" (p 15). How have I practised these understandings of reflexivity? First, by seeking out others, which necessarily expands my theoretical and narrative fields of vision. In entering into conversations about important stories, I place myself in a position of responsibility, caring and being cared for by the stories others have shared with me (Hasabe-Ludt, Chambers & Leggo, 2009). Part of this "caring" is not trying to make the stories something other than what they are, i.e., more uniform or saintly. As regards narratives about/of violence and non/violence, there are manifold contradictions and tensions, even (especially) within the same person.

As a further measure of holding myself accountable for my stories and the stories of others, I have sent chapters that mention participants by name, or attribute a story to them, for their review. Where they found the content or manner of my representation(s)

of them/their stories inaccurate, I have removed it from the foregoing. There were, indeed, some elements which they corrected and/or asked that I remove. Their commentary provided me with an opportunity to reflect not only on what I wrote, but on how I wrote it.

I am so very grateful for the generosity that my participants have repeatedly shown.

F. Data Collection

1. Time Frame:

Data collection in the form of conversations with my participants occurred over approximately one year, from late November, 2015 to late December, 2016. Data collection in the form of writing and revising narratives is ongoing up to the completion of this dissertation.

I received university ethics approval in August of 2015, and my certificate was subsequently renewed. I made an amendment in November of 2015 to include the Bible Study focus group, after receiving an invitation to come and have a conversation with them (about which more will be said later). I obtained written informed consent from all participants.

2. Participants

a) Named Participants:

Jon Yoder – my father

Zoe Yoder – my mother

Sam Yoder – my brother

Lois Yoder – my aunt (my dad's only sister)

Chris Yoder – my uncle (my dad's elder brother)

Tess Yoder – my cousin, Chris's daughter

Janet Yoder – my aunt, Chris's wife

Eric Yoder – my dad's eldest brother

Joan Yoder – my aunt, Eric's wife

Rebecca Funk – a very close friend.

Ray Funk – Rebecca's father, Eric's close friend in college, and close friend of my parents when we lived in Saskatchewan.

Why these folks?

Their stories, with and without me, were the stories I heard and continue to hear. While I wouldn't necessarily describe the extended family as close, I would describe our stories as intertwined—quite intricately at certain points in time, creating a multitude of narratives, elaborating, reverberating with, and challenging the stories that I tell about myself and my history and memories. What follows is a brief sketch of these connections.

My aunt Lois was my mother's best friend in high school. Three of four of my grandparents also went to Canby High School. All of my uncles and aunts on both sides of my family went to CHS. My siblings and I also attended this same school, and I did my student teaching there, with my old English teacher.

My father's father, Sanford, died suddenly of a heart attack in 1969.

My parents became a couple when Dad came back from university. My parents were married in 1973, and left for Canada in August, 1974. When my parents went to Canada they ended up in Peers, Alberta, where my Uncle Chris and his daughter, Tess,

were homesteading in the bush. My parents moved in with them, and I was born in Edmonton in 1976.

I used to sit on my Uncle Chris' lap at the dinner table; my parents had to put up a gate so that Tess had some private space because as a younger child, I only wanted to be with her, my older cousin. "The Farm," as it was known, broke up in 1977, and we moved to Carlton, Saskatchewan. Eric, his wife Joan (from an Ontario Mennonite community) and their kids lived (and still live) in Rosthern, Saskatchewan, about 30 minutes away from our house in Carlton. The land around Carlton was owned and farmed by Mennonites, the majority of whom had directly emigrated from the Danzig region of Prussia with later additions from the US and Russia. These included Abram Funk, his wife Helene, and his children, including Ray Funk, one of my participants.

Ray Funk met my Uncle Eric at Goshen College, in Goshen Indiana. They were close friends, and Ray was with Eric when Eric went AWOL from the Denver Hospital where he was doing alternate service during the Vietnam war. They went to Canada, and it was while working for Abram Funk in Saskatchewan that Eric received news that his father, Sanford, had died suddenly of a heart attack. Eric and Joan stayed in Saskatchewan, and when we moved to Carlton (and bought a small 10 acre plot from the Regiers) we saw them frequently in Rosthern and at Carlton.

Rebecca Funk is Ray's eldest daughter. She and I met when we were three. Maybe once a month or so my parents and I would drive up to their farm north of Prince Albert, or they'd drive down to our farm, and it would be very jolly. We would clamour to have the visitor spend the night, and then we'd stay up late, sometimes until sunrise, talking and playing.

My sister was born when I was 10; my brother was born when I was 14. He was only six weeks when we moved back to Oregon in June of 1990. Once in Oregon, my parents became involved with a church plant (or split) from my father's home church, Zion Mennonite Church. Within a few years he was pastor of this new church, and remained so until its dissolution, an end that was not welcomed by him. I have lingering feelings of bitterness and resentment towards some of his former parishioners, who, in the end, would rather see the demise of the church than demonstrate a more welcoming and less sectarian attitude towards non-Mennonites interested in attending the church.

In 1994 my parents bought a little acreage 3 miles east of Hubbard. The house was built in 1910 for a relative of mine, my father's great aunt. It's next door to the house (now gone, replaced by the Northwest Mennonite Genealogical Society's archives) where my father and his siblings were born. This same land was rented and then owned by my dad's grandparents, E.Z. Yoder, pastor of Zion Mennonite Church for 53 years, and agitator for the rights of conscientious objectors, and his wife, Alice Troyer Yoder. In the 1890's this same land was owned by Alice's grandfather, Peter Troyer.

Why is any of this important? Because these are the co-authors of my life in a very tangible sense, and make appearances in my narratives. Land also figures prominently in my writing, in part because of the layers of attachment that my family and I have to the land in Saskatchewan and Oregon.

b. Anonymous Participants:

David (pseudonym) – a veteran English teacher and department chair at a private school in a large city in Canada, also a pacifist.

Bible Study Participants: A group of eight mostly retired men and women, six of whom are Mennonite and come from a Mennonite community in Oregon. My dad is a member of this group (and the only non-anonymous member). They have been meeting weekly for 15 years and study a Bible chapter a week. They began with Genesis. As of this conversation, they were in Job. There are two married couples in the group. Three of the members are also closely related to me, by birth or marriage.

Why these folks?

Both the Bible Study Group, and my colleague, David, are actively working with interpreting and/or teaching, and therefore struggling with violence in texts and what it means for the understandings of themselves, their God, and their world. The Old Testament, in particular, is replete with genocide, fratricide and general mayhem. The New Testament is certainly not lily-pure. As I have previously mentioned, violence is a feature in many secondary language arts texts. These folks provided me with stories of interpretation and teaching. In moments of discussion, especially with David, who—like me—frequently selected texts with violent content—my own assumptions and interpretative crutches were laid bare, and along with them any sense of righteousness as a pacifist in a violent world.

c. Settings

Conversations with all named participants occurred in the homes of participants. I travelled to Saskatchewan for the conversations with folks living in Saskatchewan. Likewise, conversations with Oregon folks took place in Oregon, although I was living in Montreal, Quebec, at the time.

The Bible Study Group conversation took place in Oregon, at the home of two of the members.

The several conversations with David took place in person, and then after I moved to Oregon, over skype.

Frankly, the amount of raw data, in the form of recorded conversations with my participants, was overwhelming. To that end, the question of interpretation, indeed of choosing what to take up in my narratives, and then how best to articulate such matters through narrative, was of vital importance, and was both time-consuming and difficult. The question of "what matters most" has occupied much of my attention. It has been like peeling away the layers of a cabbage head, only I began believing that the very first leaf that I pulled off was the leaf that was the best, only to discover that it was rather tough, indigestible, and not at all what mattered most.

III. Interpretation and Analysis of Data

A. Hermeneutics

We make interpretations—of texts, of actions, of the tint and churn of the sky on a hot summer day—constantly. We make meaning(s) at meetings in between the world and ourselves, where both world and self are taken to be multiple and contingent on time, place, identity, memory. Hermeneutics grounds the making of meaning, of understanding, near the very core of what it means to be human, and asks, importantly, what, how, and why such interpretations come about (Porter & Robinson, 2011). In the context of educational research, Sumara (2002) suggests, "Hermeneutic inquiry seeks to illuminate the conditions that make particular experiences and interpretations of those

experiences possible" (p. 240). Fowler (2006), in speaking of using such a hermeneutic lens suggests that

> …[W]hen the living-words of my life appear on the page, as both writer and reader of self-constructed narratives, there can be re/cognitions and discoveries of such proportion, that I attempt (as Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth advised) to 'screw courage to the sticking point.' (p. 140).

These "re/cognitions" of which Fowler speaks arise from the "original difficulties" (p 140) which one encounters in this work—original difficulties that emerge from a "return in an ever-recursive enterprise of adding to our deep knowledge about any human action and situation" (p. 137). These are the challenges offered by (although not limited to) uncertainty, "flux" (p. 141), truth, and representation, for the writing of a narrative is itself an interpretation, and as Ricoeur notes, such a narrative might have been written, composed, configured otherwise.

Ricoeur's (2005) conceptualization of recognition also contributes to my interpretative approach, even as it also is part of my theoretical framework (see chapter 4). When Ricoeur elucidates "the passage from recognition-identification, where the thinking subject claims to master meaning, to mutual recognition, where the subject places him- or herself under the tutelage of a relationship of reciprocity" (2005, p. 248), I would offer that he is sketching out a hermeneutic "course," one that is complementary to that offered by Fowler above. This course is not limited to verbal meaning-making only. It can extend to human action as well. Ricoeur (1981) argues,

> [L]ike a text, human action is an open work, the meaning of which is 'in suspense'. It is because it 'opens up' new references and receives fresh relevance from them, that human deeds are also waiting for fresh interpretations which decide their meaning. (p. 208)

These human deeds, perpetually 'open' to new references, include both action and text, as Ricoeur notes. Yet the writing of narratives is itself an action, and so offers an additional layer of interpretative potential, especially when writing about others and/or including their words. In the case of my inquiry, these are the family and community others, the literary and historical others, and the colleague and student others. As Strong-Wilson (2015) suggests, "A hermeneutical approach to autobiography in education, as informed by writing like Sebald's, means that understanding becomes embedded as an aspect of the writing of the narrative rather than following on its composition" (p. 26). The writing of the narratives might serve as that transitional middle term, a means of recovering one's own agency (reminiscent, too, of Grumet), but oriented along a course of meaning towards the 'tutelage' of the other. Nevertheless, all this talk of the 'other' and 'mutual recognition' should not make it seem that the *quid pro quo* of recognition is sunshine and unicorns. Ricoeur speaks forcefully about "originary asymmetry [between the consciousness of the interpreter and the consciousness of s/he who is being heard or seen or read] …which even the experience of peaceful states does not abolish" (Ricoeur, 2005, p. 261). In leaning towards or taking up the stories of (an)other, such narratives might recall the fear of a violent death, and/or the dialectic of violence and non-violence, or, indeed (as I often experienced) of contradiction and ambivalence. Indeed, an awareness of the asymmetry of which Ricoeur speaks underscores the necessity that I share what I have written with my family-participants for first review, submitting to them the right to excise what they interpret as a misrepresentation of the stories they shared with me during the course of our conversations. This adds an additional layer to the process, an anxiety that what I have written might not be an interpretation that is in line with my

participants' understandings. And yet, amidst my previous discussion around the work of recognition as involving placing oneself "under the tutelage of another" (Ricoeur, 2005, p. 248), this is an opportunity to practise what is—at first, anyway—theoretical.

Such a hermeneutical lens demands that careful interpretative attention be paid to how such narratives are written, or put more explicitly, the writing of the narratives becomes a hermeneutical endeavor. Fowler (2006), once again, provides eloquent specifics:

> I pay new hermeneutic attention to questions of diction, style, tone, colour, specificity of nouns and verbs, of adjectives and adverbs to align them with what seems to lie beneath the text...What are the truths revealed through hermeneutic work with the text? What other interpretations might be constructed, offered, reconstituted? (p. 139)

One of the central challenges in writing the narrative chapters that follow has been how to work within the complexity and multiplicity of meanings. It should not be surprising that both discussions with participants and writing the narratives have been replete with multiple meanings, word play, irony, and especially ambiguity and contradiction. And if the writing of narratives is itself 'in quest' of meaning, there are also additional meanings that emerge only after writing, belatedly as it were. Ricoeur's notion of "reconfiguration" explores this element of meaning-making, whereby the reader of the text is, in some way, changed in the interaction with the text. While he is referring to the reader who is distinct from the writer of a narrative, the passage of time between writing and reading means that the reader—who is also a writer—is not the same person as s/he who did the writing in the first place.

My other—and perhaps greatest—challenge, as I mentioned above, is to write about what matters. There are stories from my conversations, and stories from my life,

about violence and non-violence, that seemed relevant, illustrative, illuminating, clever and/or elegantly written that, at the end, beg the question, "So what?" The stories that seemed most obvious to me at the outset, in terms of their relationship to non/violence and/or Mennonite pacifism, proved to be much less so as I kept writing/searching. I knew that juxtaposition was key to my narrative writing, but which narratives should I juxtapose, and in what order? I wrote, and then I revised, and then I discarded. Rinse. Repeat. It was frustrating at times.

The following chapter is an addendum of sorts to this methodology chapter, exploring some of my "failed" narratives and other issues in pursuing the question of what matters most in working with narratives about violence. This is ultimately a hermeneutical question, one that—as Strong-Wilson (2015) points out, is at the heart of both curriculum and life. I do not arrive at the stories that matter—a lived, hermeneutic process—without tending to, and working with, the unwanted, the disappointing. In narrating a complex and painful memory from childhood, Chambers (1998) writes, "As I revised 'Hunting' over and over, events and details and images were grafted together, breeding a tale I believed worth telling." She describes this process as "befriending" her weed patch, "…not simply pulling things up, ripping them out to die in the raging prairie sun, but carefully picking up the torn roots and hairs, crushed petals and shredded leaves…and tending to them in a way which would create something new and bearable…" (p. 20). Rather than discarding these weeds, I choose to treat them with curiosity and tenderness in the following chapter, open to the difficulty, of writing and of making meaning. Strong-Wilson (2015) invokes an "ethics of story-telling" in approaching what is difficult:

> An ethics of storytelling, which Fowler (2002) links to 'a curriculum of difficulty' would involve identifying that 'wherever difficulty exists, there is a story behind it' (p. 9). She associates the difficulty—and its narration—with *temenos*, the Greek word for crucible, 'which holds dangerous, hot, or unstable substances' (p. 6). (p. 627)

This is the story that, Strong-Wilson suggests, we have a responsibility to narrate—carefully, truthfully.

And it is this story—this difficult story—that is the story that matters.

Chapter 3: Tending my Weed Patch

I. Introduction

Since moving back home to my parents' house, I muck about in the gardens during my spare time. I study seed catalogues. I germinate annuals and perennials indoors in the early spring, and then step them up into cells, and then out into the beds.

But I don't enjoy weeding. When I was a child in Saskatchewan, my parents had a market garden business, and it would have been very helpful to them if I had been willing to help out with weeding. But I wasn't. I was not ashamed to be sent from the patch for whining, crying, or doing a careless job.

Indeed, that was usually my goal.

Yet now, as I develop and tend to my own beds, I do find myself weeding, and aspire to do even more. I get myself worked up into a little berserker frenzy. I hate the weeds. I am able to endure weeding because I take pleasure in destroying the weeds and "freeing" the chosen plants.

I was surprised to find out that my parents don't feel the same way. They don't hate the weeds (with the possible exception of Bindweed, a deceptively beautiful but utterly devastating morning-glory look-alike). What is weeded out is done in the name of tending, of stewarding the whole garden, not of annihilation.

But the weeds are not wanted, I say.

But that doesn't make them bad.

Really? Isn't rejection equivalent to worthlessness, error, sin? Isn't it better to have never been born than to be rejected? To never have been written than to be cast aside as pointless garbage?

Chambers (1998) writes about digging one's dandelions up tenderly, paying attention to the filaments of roots rather than tearing them up in a rage. She suggests a radically different response to working with what is painful, or dealing with what is unwanted, in life-narrative (and in pedagogy). How could exploring/writing about violence in and out of the classroom be otherwise?

Yet I did not start out from this position. Rather, I started out believing that I could take the ground, its microbes and earthworms, its dust and spores and roses and dandelions and construct a discrete grid, and analyse each quadrant. It would be meaningful—in an academy still gripped by positivist infatuations—for its objectivity, its symmetry. One woman's stories about violence might therefore be taken seriously.

In this chapter I take up what has been discarded, what was disappointing, what were (necessary) dead ends, and work at treating these narratives tenderly, but still critically.

I begin (as I began) with the problem of coherence.

II. The Problem of Coherence

A. Introduction

The problem of coherence, of bringing narratives together in a meaningful way, occupied me long before I formally took up the task of writing. How would I take all of these bits of narrative, about myself and others, and 'stick' them together in some semblance of unity? I also knew that I would be holding in my writer's fingers the narratives—generously given—of friends and loved ones, of forbears who only live through the stories I have heard from others, and of my teaching life which—when first I approached the question of coherence/concordance—seemed distant, as it was. How

could I be both respectful and creative? There is a further nuance with regard to coherence. As previously discussed , Ricoeur (1974) tackles the Gordian knot of defining violence by positioning language as its opposite, but notes that language itself, in the form of fraud, hypocrisy, and, one might conclude, verbal/emotional abuse in all its myriad manifestations, can be violent. "[C]oherent discourse," Ricoeur notes, is owned by no one. "If someone attempted to possess it, it would again be the violent person who, under the cover of fraudulently coherent speech, was attempting to make his philosophical particularity prevail" (p. 90). The problem of coherence, then, takes on overtones of fraud.

B. Four Thematic Orientations

My initial vision for narrative coherence was to write four unified narrative chapters, unified in the sense that each individual narrative was part of a larger, thematically-unified narrative: not snapshots, but a movie reel, a Ken Burns type documentary with wise voice-overs as the camera retreats from the photograph. Or better yet, it would be the plan for a magnificent structure that might approach in grandeur, the massiveness, of my topic: violence.

This structure emerged from my reflection on a bit of word play in the conversation I had with the Bible Study group in November of 2015. One of the participants commented on the prevalence of violence in entertainment, in American (and, I would add, Western) culture by quipping that we "Hate the sinner, love the sin. Oops!!" And everyone laughed (Focus Group Conversation, Nov. 2015). But his quip drew attention to the way that we might (and do) separate action(s) from actor(s) in our interpretations of violence, especially in relationship to ourselves as readers, as viewers,

as subjects; what we find to be tolerable or entertaining in both person and action differs depending on the context.

The Bible Study member had reversed the order of the bit of Christian pabulum, "Love the sinner and hate the sin." This reversal of the established order startled me and it made me wonder what might happen if the switching of terms continued. What emerges from the idea of hating the sinner, and hating the sin, as well as loving the sinner and loving the sin? I was quite taken with this symmetrical structure. Indeed, I was so certain that these would be the themes of my narrative chapters that I shared them with David, my teacher-participant, and excitedly yammered about it for a few minutes, explaining my vision in detail.

Perhaps he saw the flaws; perhaps he doubted my pretensions to a bird's eye view at this early juncture. In fact, he didn't have much to say (Teacher Participant Conversation 3).

Here is a more detailed explanation of the themes in an early draft of my methodology chapter, written before I started *really* writing, that is, writing narratives:

> It might seem—from the point of view of a pacifist—that the simplest approach to narratives of violence might be to reject both the sinner and the sin. And this is a theme present in many narratives that deal with violence. Take, for example, Golding's omnipresent *Lord of the Flies.* The boys who commit violence are evil; and the violence itself serves no 'higher' purpose. The other boys, the 'heroes,' reject violence and one of them is saved.
>
> On the other had, as a North American at the beginning of the 21st century, it might seems easiest to just throw up one's hands and discard such antediluvian prudery, and embrace the nihilist, Darwinian nature of the technological world, and love the sin, in all its entertaining excess, and love the sinner too. The hockey player who throws the high, late hit, concussing his opponent? It's just part of the game. The soldier who lobs the grenade? He's protecting "us" and we should all be very grateful. Consider, too, the heroics that violence makes possible. Where would *Beowulf* be without ripping Grendel's arm from his monstrous body?
>
> If such embrace seems to augur dystopian anarchy, one might, instead, take a more realpolitik approach: hate the sinner (the violent actor), but appreciate the

> benefits of the sin. The end of *To Kill A Mockingbird*, where vigilante justice is meted out by a half-wit who does not demand love, seems an apt example.
>
> Finally, what about loving the sinner and hating the sin? Alas, this one is actually rather difficult if one truly engages with it as an interpretation and/or response to violence. There is a curious silence here, in literature, in life. It might be repeated often by outreach committees of churches who envision the faceless but sinful masses awaiting salvation, but in our daily walk, our daily text, our closely held people and narratives? There is a rather startling lacuna where this theme is concerned, for although it is often repeated as a saying, it is not often narrated as a story. This is especially true in the language arts classroom, where neither David nor I could come up with a single story that represented this disposition towards violence and violent actors. (Discarded Draft, March 2017)

It was this last realization, that we, as language arts teachers, seem largely content with texts that narrate or evoke violence, but rarely imagine or envision what restitution, restoration, or reconciliation might look like, that seemed like such a brilliant observation. If I could structure my narratives so that they led to this apex, all the while being beautifully and insightfully written, then verily, this tower of words might almost reach God—or at least scholarly distinction.

The problem of coherence is fundamental to narrative. We might recall that Ricoeur argues that narrative brings into concordance or coherence what is fundamentally discordant or incoherent (Ricoeur 1984, 1988). From this emerges the sense that we live our lives "in quest of narrative" (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 20), where what is otherwise experienced as a shambles is given form and meaning in time. My "four thematic orientations" are illustrative of the dangers of imagining the narrative already written, and the quest as merely one of filling in the blanks, rather than the "in process" sense of an actual quest that faces detours, dead ends, and the vicissitudes of falling off of a roof.[10]

[10] I fell off of the roof of our porch—I was doing some repairs—in May of 2017. I broke my right tibia, and required surgery. This, and resuming teaching in the fall of 2017, delayed and irrevocably changed (for the better) this dissertation. Such are the contingencies of life and narrative(s)!

Nevertheless, while I would suggest that the writing that I did around my "four orientations" lacked a certain emotional honesty in exploring the intersection of narratives of/about violence, it nevertheless provided fertile ground for reflection and analysis.

As mentioned above, my writing on these four thematic orientations comprised many pages of writing. As it is neither feasible, nor desirable, to present all of my writing around these themes, I have chosen several excerpts and am including them as "first drafts." In a chapter entitled "Memory and Imagination," Hampl (1999) writes about first drafts in the context of memoir/autobiographical writing, in particular the inaccuracies that emerged upon her reflection about a piece of writing that she had done. How was she to reckon with these lapses? Rather than treat them as antithetical to the work of autobiography, she conceives of them as a kind of symbol that invites investigation and puzzlement. In another analogy, she posits first drafts as a kind of first encounter with a future beloved, which "is often reviewed for signals, meanings, omens and indications" (p. 31). Her conceptualization of these faulty first drafts is evocative of Chambers' suggestion that one deal gently with one's weeds. It is in this spirit that I include these "first drafts," although, to be honest, some of the writing represents a second or third draft. "First draft" must be understood in the context of this inquiry as a whole.

Excerpt 1: From "Hating the sinner, but loving the sin"

"I have said for years, and this is a good time to reflect on whether I still believe it, but I used to say that I subscribe to the "Sex, violence and rock n roll school of teaching," because you need to hook them."

David and I sit on a terrasse in late June, four days before I leave Montreal. My voice recorder is recording. It's a beautiful day, and while he's agreed to participate in my study on language arts, narratives and violence, I still feel anxious. What if he decides he doesn't want to after all? It's taken us a long enough time—through countless email exchanges—to actually meet. And if he quits or pulls out later, what will I do? Even though it wasn't in my original research design, conversation with a fellow teacher has become an important avenue for reflection, for consideration. I'm hungry for the chance to talk with someone else who knows.

Plus, he's so perfect: articulate, thoughtful, experienced.

"David, that is too funny!!" I exclaim, surprised, delighted with the resonance between us. "I also used to say 'My classroom is the sex and violence classroom' because…"

"Yeah. And then at least they sit up, right? I don't typically have a problem…but this is going to make me reflect on it. Like teaching *Lord of the Flies*…"

I had raised *Lord of the Flies* as an example of one of those books that is replete with violence and also firmly entrenched in the canon, where violence is the book's *raison d'etre.* When we use it, we English teachers teach—through commission or omission—about the ethics or necessity of violence.

"What do you think he wants us to close the book and [believe]… I'm curious," I ask.

"I think he abhors violence. Right? Like he even said that. He said, 'The theme of the book is,' right? Kids can google the theme of the book now. It is that humans are drawn to violence like bees are drawn to honey and he was writing coming out of World

War II, so he wanted to teach us that we have this propensity: if we don't control ourselves we'll kill ourselves. I think he reveals it really well, having these boys… throwing the rock down on Piggy or at the end, when they go through the forest and burn down the forest so they could beat up Ralph. It's… frightening. It's frightening. I think he wanted to frighten everybody."

High School Language Arts has a peculiar justification problem, quite possibly of its own disciplinary making, in that such stories as *Lord of the Flies* are seemingly prescribed (by the canon) but also used arbitrarily (the text is available in the bookroom the month that I need a novel). Whereas social studies and science teachers and math teachers and health teachers might meet the curious or absent stares of their students by pointing to the 'truth' and 'usefulness' of their content, Language Arts has no such crutch to fall back on. The construction and sharing of meaning, and its situational and unstable existence, are hard to explain let alone justify as 'truth.' So we find ourselves appealing to 'interest' or 'relevance' in bringing stories into the classroom. And don't forget: keeping kids' noses in books and out of trouble is vitally important, so bring on the sex and gore, and bring peace to my classroom kingdom so I can teach.

***

When I first started teaching, a veteran teacher handed me a file folder filled with study questions and an anticipation activity for Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. I had never read the book. I also didn't really like study questions, for I had memories of my own of blatantly copying from my friends. And it was all about boys—utterly a male world—except for the pig that Jack skewers through her hindquarters in a disgusting and utterly weird allusion to rape.

The file also included an anticipatory activity called something like "Desert Island." The premise was as follows: A plane with the students in the classroom crashes in the ocean near an uninhabited tropical island. The students are able to make it on shore but bring NOTHING with them from the plane. Their teacher is dead. There are no adults. How will they survive? In a class period, they are to organize themselves to address what they need to be able to survive and write it down.

So I begin.

"Alright folks, we're getting ready to start *Lord of the Flies*."

"Do we have to?"

"My friend said it was boring… he was really disappointed because he thought it was going to be good."

But still, there is some hope that this book, unlike most of the other books, will be truly interesting. As their teacher I can only imagine that by "interesting" they mean something like a movie, a Disney movie or an action movie. I think those are the likely hopes.

"I think you might like it. It's kind of like *Survivor*…or that stupid Tom Hanks movie, *Castaway.*"

"Miss, why don't you like Tom Hanks?"

"I just don't. How many of you have seen that movie?"

A few hands are raised. But they know the general idea.

"OK. So, today we're going to do a little simulation, to get us thinking about the idea behind the book, that some kids get stranded on an island. They're younger than you, so you're no doubt going to do a better job."

Silence. They're interested.

"Take one and pass it on." I pass out the yellow worksheets. On the top is a description of the scenario. The class is …

"Cool!" some say.

"When you say you're not going to get involved, what if I take Billy and try to roast him over a fire?" one of my more strategic students asks.

"No. Obviously, this is pretend, and if I sense that somebody might get hurt…or even might be getting pretty uncomfortable, I'm going to stop the game." I neglect to mention that the person most likely to get uncomfortable is me.

Excerpt 2: From "Loving the Sinner and Loving the Sin"

Once upon a time there was a wistful little girl who played with goats and not with people. That was because, frankly, the people who she might have played with at the elementary school she attended in the small town of Duck Lake, Saskatchewan were all very unpleasant—at least to her. And she was an only child, at least for her first 10 years.

It didn't help that she was also a humourless know-it-all, and wore weird clothes that her mother sewed for her—or, when given the choice, long prairie girl dresses, like her heroines in *The Little House* books, that were hand-me-downs or purchased at the Clothes Basket Thrift shop in Rosthern. These dresses were her favorites. It also didn't help that she wasn't related to anyone in Duck Lake or in Tiefengrund. She did have one best friend, Rebecca, who lived an hour north, beyond Prince Albert. Rebecca also hated her elementary school classmates. They were mean and narrow. But Rebecca had deep

roots in the Teifengrund through her father, whose family owned land, farmed, sang, and went to church. Those roots didn't *really* make it any easier for her, though.

Rebecca and Amarou got to see one another infrequently, because an hour's drive in the middle of winter at 40 below with a windchill is not undertaken lightly. But when they did, they whirled and twirled in their imaginations, playing *Star Wars* or perhaps *Oregon Trail* on nascent 486 computers. Rebecca was Princess Leia. Rebecca's brother was Luke, Han Solo, or Darth Vader as required. Amarou was that red-headed lady at the command center in *Return of the Jedi* who has a very minor part, but is at least a recognizable woman and not hideous. Rebecca got to be Leia because her hair was dark. The light sabres everyone used were from a plastic easel…long yellow tubes with green rubber "handles"—really non-slip "feet."

When playing Oregon Trail, Amarou and Rebecca loaded up the wagon with their least favourite classmates and then promptly made many contrary decisions so that it would flash on the screen "So and so is very ill" and then, "So and so has died." A sort of damning in effigy.

Giggles.

In the absence of proper playmates, there were the goats, of course, and the parents who obligingly read aloud or stalked badgers, but there were also private worlds, stories…and at the age of 10 or so, a television and the VCR. The VCR was brought up from Oregon by Amarou's Grampa Ron, along with tapes. Many of the tapes were filled with the lectures of Joseph Campbell's *The Power of Myth*. But there was one tape in particular that contained the complete miniseries of Peter the Great. This was a grand story, punctuated with mass beheadings and battlefields, set against the equally mythic

Russian landscape, a landscape not dissimilar from the central Saskatchewan prairies where Amarou lived… furious in both summer and winter.

Yet within the world of Peter the Great it was not the hero, Peter Alekseyevich, who most captured Amarou's imagination. Rather, it was his nemesis, the King of Sweden, who, in a scene still vivid, surprises his fencing partner with a flick of his wrist and a sliced cheek. The camera focuses on the King's face. He is pure malice. He's also rather attractive. Amarou spins a storyline…she is not the beloved of Peter but his faithful and unrecognized ally; her job is to thwart the King, but in so doing, both fall in love, and the result, after much harrowing drama, is peace between Russia and Sweden.

And then, of course, like any grocery-store romance novel, or indeed, Jane Austen masterpiece, the story ends, because peace is desirable and boring…an unchanging, static paradise, sort of like heaven. A similar storyline was woven along contours suggested by *The Highwayman.* Enmity and violence. Love. Personal and civil Redemption. Finis.

These tales, transformed by her imagination into living colour, were 'acted' with soundtracks from Prokoviev and Sibelius. *The Swan of Tuonela.* A tone poem about a journey into the underworld, the death of a hero for the haunting parts; *Romeo and Juliet: The Montagues and the Capulets* for the scenes of conflict. The final act from *Aleksandr Nevsky: Alexander's Entry into Pskov* for the joyful and triumphant finales.

So even more than the goats, more than with Rebecca, Amarou played in her imagination…played in these turgid and conventional tales of violence and redemption. It was endlessly entertaining.

Excerpt 3: From "Hating the Sinner and Hating the Sin":

On Martyrs

For many years my father was a minister, an exegete and educator, a trafficker in interpretations. Some of these interpretations were bundled up and offered as his Sunday sermons. Others were the subjects of his private meditations on the meanings of the diverse texts anthologized in the Bible, and wrestled with by scores of commentators over the last two millenia. He continues to dabble in the latter; the former public offerings were ultimately rejected by his parishioners, and along with them, his pastorship. He resigned some years ago, and it was largely because he didn't tell the right stories, with the right spin, using the right commentators.

I have often mused on the sympathy between being a language arts teacher and the pastor of a church, of working with (the) Word(s) as a way of life. Indeed, the past four generations on both sides of my family are a layer cake of ministers, teachers, and nurses, in humble service where such service involves telling tales about what's good and bad, and where telling the wrong tale can be a firing offense.

On a November morning, a Friday if I recall, my brother Sam and I sat down for our recorded conversation about violence and narratives. The sunlight was thin, but there was some. It was less than a month since our mother's surgery for the removal of the tumor, before the radiation, before I decided to move home, before I decided to stay home.

From the transcript:

A: When you…and there's two things here, and this is just in general, but when you think about violence and nonviolence, what sort of stories come to mind? And I start first with, if there's any Biblical stories that, like, stick out, where you're like, man this is …and if there's none of those, that's fine, um, but then, community or family.

S: Yeah. Um. Well. I have to mention it, even though it's kind of…I'm so bored with hearing about it now, but that god damn dude falling through the ice.

A: Dirk! Dirk!

S: I first heard that story when I was doing preschool over at the Miller's house. It was me and Sarah, and I remember Greg had the picture and …it was showing…oh, he came back and he pulled this person out, but I mean I also think about, in terms of the Bible, um… I'm trying to remember the context of this story…you know, I think about the whole crucifixion and isn't there a part of that story where when they're coming to get him that one of this followers strikes down…

A: Peter. Peter kind of loses his shit… and cuts off the ear…

S: Yeah, then Jesus picks it up…

A: And heals it…sticks it back on again…. (laughing)

Why was I laughing? These are some very serious stories about Dirk Willems, the 16th century Dutch Anabaptist martyr. The "ear episode" was the last miracle of Jesus before the crucifixion (Luke 22:49-51). My brother and I were being very irreverent, perhaps even blasphemous.

I was laughing from delighted—and yes, rather transgressive—surprise. Sam and I are 14 years apart, and Sam truly grew up as a "pastor's kid" with all the attendant institutional inculcation, the endless Bible studies and Sunday Schools, sermons and hymns. My upbringing was less orthodox, limited to Junior Choir performances once or twice a month, and we usually left before the sermon. My father shakes his head now at what he calls his arrogance, but Tiefengrund Mennonite Church was gracious and

graceful, a small white church in the Saskatchewan prairie, frequented by farmers and their wives, not the young professionals and established entrepreneurs of Pacific Covenant Mennonite Church, where Dad was minister for ten years. Tiefengrund was happy that they had a choir director, because no one else was willing to do it, and so censure was withheld.

But still, I knew about Dirk. I had previously mused about him in a journal for one of my graduate classes. I speculated that if my father had spent more time talking about Dirk, he'd not have been forced out of the pastorship of our church for not being "sufficiently" Mennonite. Yet here was Sam, talking about how tired he was of hearing the story about "that god damn dude." Apparently, Sam had heard quite enough about Dirk at church.

What had Dirk done to merit such scorn? Only die a heretic-martyr's fiery death.

It was during a 16th century winter. I do know something of winter. I grew up in Saskatchewan. Hostility is writ large in the hibernal landscape. Even taking a breath, when it's especially cold and dry, is painful. Dirk was living in the Netherlands during the explosive start of the Reformation, and near the end of a long freeze called The Little Ice Age. It was cold enough to freeze lakes—small ones—in an otherwise temperate climate.

Dirk had been arrested on charges of heresy, tortured and scheduled for execution. His heresy included his commitment to non-violence, after the teachings of Jesus. Somehow he escapes and heads across a frozen lake. He is pursued by an agent of the law. His antagonist encounters a thin patch of ice and falls into the frigid water. Were he any less committed a pacifist, Dirk would have taken this as a sign from God that his

escape was divinely blessed, and continue on his merry way, at least until he collapsed from starvation. Dirk, however, refuses to be complicit in the death of anyone. He goes to the man thrashing about in the water, sure to die, and pulls him out in what was no doubt a difficult rescue. His pursuer (somehow shaking off the effects of hypothermia, as well as the layers of wet wool fabric that would have hobbled both men) promptly returns the favour by arresting him. Dirk is returned to prison, and subsequently burned at the stake, a human torch to light and warm the spectators who turned out for such things.

Dirk's story is anthologized in *The Martyr's Mirror*, a pedagogical text, a text of Anabaptist propaganda. Historian of religion David Weaver-Zercher (2016) devotes an entire chapter to Dirk in his analysis of *The Martyr's Mirror*, entitled "The Most Usable Martyr: Putting Dirk Willems to Work." I feel snarky pleasure at this title: Of yes, if Dad had put Dirk to Work more often, he might still have Work (even though, of course, I'm quite happy that Dad isn't a minister any more; I would much rather that he grow vegetables and sell them, not least because that's what I remember him doing from my childhood.) But still, as Weaver asserts, Dirk is useful. "Little known in 1938, Dirk had become by 1950 the Mennonite Church's paradigmatic martyr, the one who stood in for the more than 4,011 people burned at the stake" (p. 273). During World War I, Mennonites faced emotional and physical abuse/injury for their refusal to bear arms; there were no provisions in place to deal with conscientious objectors except for internment. By World War II, as Weaver Zercher notes, provisions were in place; no longer would Mennonites and other pacifists be able to make grand comparisons between conscientious objectors and the martyrs of the *Martyr's Mirror* who died their horrible deaths. This is where Dirk's "usefulness" comes into play. In his story the emphasis is

not on his *death* but upon his *actions* that saved another life. His example, as Weaver-Zercher asserts, became a useful shorthand for how Mennonite (men, especially) might explain their refusal to enter WWII, and Vietnam: Dirk served; the ending is often left out, despite the danger. "Like the more venerable martyr motif, this service motif had a sharp edge, for service a la Dirk required both courage and conviction. More than martyrdom, however, service reflected an activist approach that midcentury Mennonites were increasingly wont to take" (Weaver-Zercher 2016, p. 276).

My father has convincingly argued that instead of an example of hating the sinner and hating the sin, that this narrative is rather about loving the sinner and hating the sin, and that Dirk illustrates such a position towards his captor. I have a hard time seeing it. That might indeed have been Dirk's position, but it doesn't make me like his captor, who is, by any measure, an ungrateful (or desperate) wretch. Our focus, my focus, is to point out that we—the reader, the listener—are not filled with love for the man or men who capture and kill Dirk. He is, they are, anonymous and shorn of any possibility for redemption. They are, furthermore, Catholic enemies, and the sense of anti-Catholicism was still present in our church, where certain parishioners would change the word "wine" to "grape juice" when singing a song in which communion was mentioned.

We are not Dirk. His example might be intended as pedagogical, but we do not love his enemy. His enemy is our enemy. And honestly, Dirk isn't much of a friend, especially when he's used as an ideological 11th commandment: *Thou must mention Dirk and Menno and Munster thrice per month, with genuflections*.

C. Reflection and Analysis:

1. Touchstones

In re-reading my writing it became abundantly clear that this autobiographical writing I had set out to write was of a particular type: instead of life stories (that is, what I had experienced in the course of living), I largely wrote about stories that were part of my formation—specifically my literary and aesthetic formation. In as much as I experienced, and was touched, intellectually and emotionally, by these stories, they are about me, but in terms of form, they are rather more like a catalogue: *Violent Stories I have Known and how I feel about them*. I focused on texts that treated or included violence as a theme and/or subject matter—and in particular, whichever thematic orientation I happened to be writing toward. In this sense, I started writing about "touchstones," without being conscious of it. Borrowing the term from Matthew Arnold, Strong-Wilson (2006) describes touchstones as those stories that teachers return to over and over again, that were important in their/our literary formations and represent situated and memorialized aesthetic experiences: "The tenacity of touchstones signifies the attachment to particular imaginative experiences" (p. 78). Even when a certain story (or type of story) is set aside, the reader—the teacher—finds another attachment.

Not all of the stories that I mention in these excerpts (or other parts of this writing) reveal positive attachments. Indeed, I heartily despise *Lord of the Flies* and the Dirk Willems martyr story, and my reaction invites reflection. However, in exploring the significance of these touchstones, I start with the stories from the second excerpt, ostensibly on the theme of 'Loving the sinner, and loving the sin.'

These stories from my childhood are pretty simple in terms of their use of or reference to violence. In the Oregon Trail game, Rebecca and I enacted a sort of delicious revenge story on our peers. In "playing" *Star Wars*, I bemoan that there wasn't a character who I could "be." This matter of "being" the story, that is, of "playing" the characters (whose stories become memories in the mind of the player (pretender)) reminds us that "aesthetic" experiences—to return to the Greek roots of the word: *aisthanesthai*, to perceive—are still perceptions, by means of which we come to know our world. Strong-Wilson (2006) writes, "Formative passages come to comprise literary memory, which also becomes cultural memory because certain stories are considered to be more significant (i.e. more formative) than others" (p. 71). She notes that for one of her teacher participants, Terry, he "enacted" (p. 78) the adventure stories that he loved as a child in his adult fondness for (stories of) travel. My point is that the types of stories we like can become the types of stories we like to imagine/tell. As I note in my writing, where violence was concerned, I enjoyed reading—and telling myself in my imagination—stories of redemption, especially where redemption occurred in the name of romantic love, especially of the kind narrated by the Brontë sisters. It is therefore rather unsurprising that I do not count among my favorite stories *Lord of the Flies* or the tale of Dirk Willems. In *Lord of the Flies,* the passel of feral boys is beyond redemption. Indeed, that's Golding's pessimistic point. There is no hope for humanity. Dirk Willems doesn't even seem to be human.

If I liked to read and create stories of redemption, did I also tell such stories through my curricula? Superficially, no, but I suspect that my treatment of texts dealing with violence were meted out to my students in the spirit of redemption, that in the

context of a violent school, and society enamored of violence, that these stories would "redeem." As I recall in my introduction, when I wrote about teaching the poems from Joan Baez' (1968) anthology called *Baptism*, I was certainly hoping that my students would 'see the light.' Despite my fundamental belief that teachers are not saviors, I enacted a sort of redemptive fantasy, not inconsistent with a Brontë novel: I am Jane Eyre, the teacher; my students are Rochester, with fractured pasts and grim futures, at least according to my view of them. At the very least, this reveals a certain troubling solipsism.

I would suggest that in my narrative formation (both read/viewed and imagined), and in my curricula, as well as the stories with which I began the narrative portion of this dissertation, I am returning to beloved aesthetic experiences. This is a fundamentally conservative, backward-focused impulse, but completely understandable within the context of human experience. Repetition reaffirms (the narratives of) who we believe we are. Revelling in what is familiar does not advance my thinking in the direction of change, of moving towards a more critical understanding how narrative(s) informs teaching and learning in secondary language arts. It does not move me in the direction of recognizing and narrating what matters most.

In "And Yet: Storying Complexity in Teacher Narratives," Strong-Wilson and I were concerned with destabilizing the narrative inevitability of teacher stories, which tend to be rather one dimensional: the good teacher; the bad teacher (Yoder & Strong-Wilson, 2016). The challenge that I face now is to not only narrate the complexity of the lived experiences (my own and others') shared with me during the course of this inquiry,

but to fundamentally call into question my own conservative concern with a stable past and present which found expression in the types of "stories" I was telling.

2. A return to first drafts: The problem of the narrator.

I proposed including these examples of first drafts not just for what they positively showed—revealed in my truthful attachment to touchstones, to formative narratives—but because they contained some significant element of falseness. That falseness lies in the narrator's relationship with her/my subject. She is arch, self-aware, and most of all, *distant from the subject.* Consider the following passage from "Loving the sinner and loving the sin":

> Once upon a time there was a wistful little girl who played with goats and not with people. That was because, frankly, the people who she might have played with at the elementary school she attended in the small town of Duck Lake, Saskatchewan were all very unpleasant—at least to her. (See above, p.)

In cadging the language of fairy tales, ("Once upon a time…"), and *Alice in Wonderland* ("the people…were all very unpleasant"), as well as *narrating* in the third person about myself in such a 'mythic' manner, I am opening up a chasm between the story that I am narrating and the fact that some aspect of my life is the subject. This demands scrutiny and reflection, for it is the heart of what is "false" in this writing. While such "falseness" is perhaps less obvious in the other two excerpts, it is still there. In the excerpt from "Hating the Sinner and Hating the Sin," the narrator (I) brings in scholarship, and offers analysis of Dirk Wilhelm's enduring popularity. While including scholarly or abstract material is not antithetical to narration (indeed, see Sebald (1998), *The Rings of Saturn,* for such an example,) I would suggest that my inclusion is more in line with analysis than story telling. It is, for instance, utterly unnecessary for the "plot"—because there is no

real "plot" in this excerpt. It is a musing, a meditation, not a narrative. Fundamentally, I suppose, the narrator (I) is not telling a story of a present life, but of a finished and distant past about which she is fashionably self-aware and towards which she is being fashionably ironic. Most importantly, she cannot bring herself to fully engage with the tension that the idea of "loving violence and loving the person who commits violence" evokes.

Before exploring this tension further, in the context of the concept of ambivalence, I want to spend some time with the question of the narrator, who narrates stories of/about violence. How *ought* one (I) narrate?

In my recent teaching of Wiesel's *Night* to ninth grade students, I wait until we are into the book a ways, and then I provide them with some excerpts from Primo Levi's (1988) *The Drowned and the Saved*, specifically from the chapter entitled "The Gray Zone." Levi suggests that survivors of the Holocaust were—to greater and far lesser degrees—collaborators, because the economy of the concentration and death camps involved transactions in potentially life-saving privileges, all of which required some degree of collaboration with the Nazis. In telling the life and death stories/histories of victims and survivors, Levi advocates the avoidance of what he calls the "Manichean tendency to shun nuance…and to reduce the river of human events to conflicts, and conflict to duels, us and them" (p. 2430)[11]. He uses the example of the *Sondercommandos* as the limit case for prisoners and victims of, as well as collaborators with, the Nazi genocide of Jewish people. About them and their life- and death-stories,

[11] From a three-volume set of his complete works; the pagination continues between volumes.

he writes, “I ask that the history of the ‘crematorium crows’ be pondered with compassion and rigor, but that any judgment be suspended” (p. 2449). In his invocation that we view the stories of the *Sondercommandos* with both rigour and compassion, but without judgment, he denies us the possibility of categorizing them as “victim” or “perpetrator” and dismissing them from the stage. They occupy a place between; this between-ness is unresolvable.

Levi’s appeal to complexity is made on behalf of those clearly and unequivocally victimized, even if their victimization is not the “whole story.” How then should the stories of those more closely aligned with the perpetrators (though not perpetrators themselves) be narrated? Remaining within the context of the Holocaust but from the perspective of a German, who came “after,” the narratives of W. G. Sebald might offer a way forward. Ward (2012) conceptualizes Sebald’s narrators as “empathic,” taking care to specify what he means:

> Often misunderstood, *empathy* is not identification or sympathy but “the ability to share and understand the feelings of another” (*OED*).[1] The key point is that it has a dual structure, a movement both towards and away, which forms a simultaneous gesture of proximity (identification, subjectivity) and distance (objectivity, critical understanding). This definition is based on the work of Dominick LaCapra, who has done more than anyone to clarify and revitalise the concept. In *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001), he describes empathy as “an affective relation, rapport, or bond with the other recognized and respected as other” (212–13) […]. (p. 3)

Ward arrives at this understanding of empathy via LaCapra (2001). Elsewhere, LaCapra (1999) discusses the role of empathy as a countermeasure to positivist claims of distance and objectivity, but also cautions that empathy does not entail the collapse of the self into the other: “Empathy that resists full identification with, and appropriation of, the

experience of the other would depend…on one's recognition that another's loss is not identical to one's own loss" (p. 723). Empathy, in this sense, is dual in its nature; it is oriented towards the other, while realizing the truth about itself: that the other is not the self, that there is a necessary distance between the two. Ward's (2012) description of the "dual structure" (p. 212) of Sebald's narrators is illuminating, in thinking about my "distance" problem, in positioning the narrator between identification/subjectivity and objectivity/critical understanding. To put an even finer point on the matter, I would argue that *understanding*, as is mentioned in the above definition for "empathy" from the OED (cited in Ward, 2012), is impossible, and furthermore, not desirable (See Chapter 4 for further elaboration of this idea). Levi (1988) also critiques the deployment of "understanding," writing that "…the verb 'to understand' coincides with the verb 'to simplify'" (p. 2431). Recognition, on the other hand, as specified by Lacapra's (1999) definition is, perhaps, a more compelling narrative aim, as writer, as reader (See next chapter).

Returning to the "dual structure" posited by Ward, working from the dual positions of both subjectivity (a narrator recounts a story) and objectivity (the narrator is a stranger to this story), Sebald's narrators negotiate the "perception of collective history through individual experience" (Hutchinson, 2006, pp. 171) in such a way that resists categorization, by being neither "history" nor "literature" nor "autobiography." In so doing, his narrators both are unsettled by, and in turn unsettle the reader with the implications, among other things, of being a (German) person in the wake of the Holocaust, connected to it, and on whom it places a responsibility or burden that is unspecified but real.

Strong-Wilson (2017) further notes that Sebald "writes at a slant," that is, indirectly about his subject(s), in such a way that the subject—the Holocaust—is "invisible." What remains is the sense of preoccupation that impels the narrator forward. Where a traditional narrative might closely follow a "plot"—a series of actions in time—Sebald's narrators digress, wandering literally—and figuratively—into terrain that, at first, seems "merely" coincidental, but where such coincidences (i.e., Sebald's careful juxtapositions of people, events, works of art, historical details) accrete an overwhelming significance, pointing to a preoccupation with a first-order subject (the Holocaust), without explicitly naming it. There is an ethical claim made upon the reader by this indirect approach, for it is the reader who is ultimately implicated in the project of 'making sense' of the subject, i.e., "reading" the allegory (Strong-Wilson, 2017).

My preoccupation as a language arts teacher, as a person, is with violence (Yoder & Strong-Wilson, 2016); however, I have been blessedly free from much first-hand experience with violence so far in my life. Still, I am acutely aware of its "phantom traces" (Strong-Wilson, 2015): without much effort, violence undergirds and interpolates my lived experience. Sebald's narrators provide a way into writing/reading about this preoccupation without laying claim to a single relationship with his subject, which would imply a certain mastery and familiarity. If you'll recall, I began this section noting what was "false" in the first drafts of my narratives. I noted the distance I created as narrator, and critiqued my claim to categorize the 'meaning' of violence into four distinct thematic orientations. It is, ultimately, this position of abstraction, of separation that flies in the face of my preoccupation, to wit, the imminence of violence. I have no unified position relative to this imminence—I remain unsettled. I cannot offer any "settled-ness" to my

readers, nor do I wish to. Resolving such ambivalence, between distance and intimacy, while pretending to understand and be understood, is not my goal. In refusing "either/or," the possibilities inherent in "neither/nor" become available, in all their disconcerting strangeness (Bauman, 1991). "Either/or" implies that there are only two possible orientations, and is fundamentally restrictive; "neither/nor" is expansive, but given our human impulse to categorize, can be frighteningly uncertain.

In engaging with Sebald's writing, I have long been troubled with his invocation of "objectivity," as seen in the following passage from *A Natural History of Destruction* (2003)*:*

> The ideal of truth inherent in its entirely unpretentious objectivity…proves itself the only legitimate reason for continuing to produce literature in the face of total destruction. Conversely, the construction of aesthetic or pseudo-aesthetic effects from the ruins of an annihilated world is a process depriving literature of its right to exist. (p. 53)

I wrestled with this passage already in my Preface (see pp. 5-6), wherein I focused on the word "unpretentious" as a way of making sense of his warning regarding the production of literature. It was in the course of exploring ambivalence that the implications of his demand for objectivity came into a sort of focus. Zygmunt Bauman (1991), himself a Holocaust survivor, theorizes ambivalence in *Modernity and Ambivalence*, locating the place of ambivalence in the figure of the stranger. Bauman was a Jewish-Polish sociologist and philosopher who spent much of his academic life teaching at the University of Leeds.

About the stranger, Bauman (1991) writes, "'Being outside' casts the stranger in the position of *objectivity*: his is an outsider, detached and autonomous vantage point" (p. 78, emphasis in original). This objectivity and detachment is not some positivist, scientific

"fact," but rather the result of alienation and homelessness. When I read this passage, I wrote "Sebald" next to the word "objectivity," for it occurred to me that *this* is perhaps what Sebald meant, that the only reason to produce literature in the wake of destruction is to invoke and evoke the stranger who regards the social landscape in which s/he finds her/himself foreign, and for whom nothing is "natural" (Bauman, p. 79). Bauman continues,

> Unlike an alien or a foreigner, the stranger is not simply a newcomer, a person temporarily out of place. He is an *eternal wanderer*, homeless always and everywhere, without hope of ever 'arriving'. The 'objectivity' (cosmopolitanism, anti-patriotism, non-commitment, 'turncoatism') of his view consists precisely in his inability to make a distinction between the stations of his unstoppable pilgrimage: as far as he is concerned, all of them are just sites, confined in space, bound to become the past in the future. (p. 79, emphasis in original)

Such objectivity, as Bauman renders it, overturns the comfort we find in conservative allegiances and identities, i.e., the allegiances and identities that seek to preserve and continue past social orders and understandings into the future. For white European-Americans and Canadians, the past social order is replete with trauma and genocide perpetuated on other people. Such conservative yearnings, as they might be present in literature, in history, in curricula, are unethical.

Bauman's conceptualization of ambivalence as a necessary alternative to the rational, normative discourse that populates so much contemporary thought/policy in education is elaborated on by Mansson and Langmann (2011). Ambivalence presents a threat to those arguing for the place of mutual understanding in teaching and learning about difference. The very state of ambivalence, as Bauman argues, is one which defies categorization, presenting a problem for meaning, for the *grasp* of understanding.

Mansson and Langmann (2011) write:

> There is a constant need to reinterpret the role of education in a world of difference. A consensus-ridden educational process… seems to obscure rather than illuminate the conditions for social togetherness. As suggested by Bauman (1993), living together includes not only living in a world of strangers, but also *sharing* the stranger's world. Sharing the world with the stranger is, following Levinas (1985) a relation of proximity rather than one of mutual understanding and rational consensus. (p. 24, emphasis in original).

Difference, in this case, is neither overcome, nor "tolerated," with the whiff of condescension that accompanies that word. What it means to live in a just society with others who are also strangers is therefore always in process. As I will discuss in the next chapter in the context of Ricoeur's conceptualization of mutual recognition, the surest indication of misrecognition is believing that one "knows" the other. Proximity is not the same as familiarity; indeed, too often we—as teachers, as humans—make this mistake, and we have a saying in English that speaks to this condition: "Familiarity breeds contempt." We can only be contemptuous of another if we are able to consign him or her to a category, under the aegis of *knowing* who or what she/he is. Proximity permits no similar claims, instead allowing only the knowledge that one is near another, sharing place or time or history.

Scholars within curriculum studies have turned towards ambivalence as a productive place. In her elegant and provocative exploration of war and the women's movement, Kelly (2013) critiques the elements within the women's movement for whom past identities and concerns are sacred, i.e., those who espouse a conservative attitude towards what the women's movement was and is. She makes the following remarks regarding the melancholia that emerges from a conservative approach: "In

[melancholia's] more complete—that is, less ambivalent—forms it stabilizes a field of study. In its less complete—that is, more ambivalent—forms, the potential for critique is heightened" (Kelly 2013, p. 80). While ambivalence is often cast as a sort of disease, something to be avoided, something which the human mind cannot endure, here Kelly represents it as generative and creative.

Britzman (2000) reflects on ambivalence in the context of idealization and the (reception of) *The Diary of Anne Frank*. In working with stories of profound loss/trauma such as *The Diary of Anne Frank*, teachers and students resolve the tensions that arise in its reading/teaching through idealization, focusing, for example, on Anne Frank as a paragon of courage. Such a move makes Frank's diary one-dimensional; indeed, it ceases to make her diary hers at all. This is problematic, for when we perform this meaning-making move, we are not so much teaching/learning as reifying what we already think we know or believe to be true. We are not so much reading another's story, as using or appropriating that story to confirm our own. In addressing the ethicality of teaching/learning from the trauma of others, Britzman (2000) writes,

> If the question of ethicality does not begin with what is successful, ideal or familiar about our actions and thoughts, but rather with what becomes inaugurated when we notice the breakdown of meaning and the illusiveness of signification, *then our pedagogical efforts must also begin with a study of the difficulty of making significance from the painful experiences of others*, the confrontation with the recursive structure of trauma, and the ambivalence toward the very question of loss. (p. 29, emphasis added)

The desire is strong—so strong—to resolve what is unresolvable where loss and trauma are concerned. I not only encounter this desire presently in teaching narratives that explore trauma, but I also encountered it most forcefully in writing about the trauma that my mother experienced (See Chapter 5). I cannot know or

comprehend her experience, yet it is proximate and I cannot deny its presence in my life. To ignore it is to lie about myself, about my mother; to resolve what is not mine is a kind of theft. I am left with ambivalence as the only ethical position.

Ricoeur (1988) describes narrative as a "provocation to be and act differently" (p. 249). At the close of this chapter, I would suggest that my way forward into writing narratives of/about/proximate to violence so as to live up to this description is to approach my subject(s)—as much as I can—as something of a stranger. This extends especially to the stories I consider most familiar, most constitutive, even, of who I think I am.

Chapter 4: Theorizing Violence, Recognizing Fragility

I. Introduction

On a recent drive home from a speech and debate tournament, my students were discussing the distribution requirements for different fields of study at our high school. For instance, four years of math are required. While all four of the kids are exemplary math students, they wondered whether this requirement was appropriate for all students. What was the purpose of learning math? If it was the problem-solving skills that made math a worthwhile subject of study, were the problem-solving skills involved in performing a calculus equation so much more enlightening than advanced algebra, or trigonometry?

"What about English?" I asked. If problem-solving skills are the skills that are learned in math, what purpose do they, as sixteen- and seventeen-year olds, see in the study of Language Arts?

With hardly a moment's thought, one student said "Morality," and another said "Empathy for others." The other two agreed. I was genuinely surprised.

In my introductory chapter, and at the beginning of my second chapter, I noted the resonance between teaching language arts and teaching ethics (where ethics is understood, per Ricoeur (1992), as the meaning of a good life, with and for others, in just institutions). That my debate kids (none of whom are my students at the moment) should also see such a resonance was illuminating, re-assuring even.

In her essay, "Teacher as Stranger," Greene (1973) directly addresses the ethical content in teaching English. Her prescience regarding the pedagogical dilemma many teachers—myself, included—face in today's American classroom is such that she might

be writing in 2020: “At a time of major tensions among groups and moral systems, no educator is in a position to impose designs for harmonizing clashing interests […]The educational task…is to find out how to enable individuals to choose intelligently and authentically for themselves” (p. 273). She then outlines the particular challenges of this task through a thought experiment: a teacher faces a choice about how to teach (or not) about a planned social action for peace during a time of war. Greene was writing, of course, during the war in Vietnam.

On the one hand, she posits a teacher who is invested in analytical (moral) philosophy. This teacher is galvanized to resist the manifold injustices in the world, and feels a responsibility, an obligation, to find expression of these beliefs in the classroom, in curricula and pedagogy. Yet such a pedagogical expression of personal convictions threatens the very freedom of conscience and choice that is at the heart of such convictions in the first place. This teacher faces a real problem, perhaps insurmountable. On the other hand, Greene explores the thinking of a teacher operating through an existential lens, where what matters are the states of being, where “anguish, boredom, guilt” (p. 279) are appropriate experiential responses to the absurdity of the world, where innocents suffer and the wicked prosper. This “anguish, boredom and guilt” are generative, and the existential teacher would “consciously stimulate the disquietude they entail; he would provoke to responsible action persons absolutely free to choose themselves” (p. 280). It is Greene’s evocation of “disquietude” that I connect to her titular metaphor: The teacher is obliged to be a stranger, where “the formerly unquestioned becomes questionable” (p. 268). But where she suggests that becoming a stranger is like returning home after a long trip, and looking at what is familiar with fresh

and critical eyes, I would argue that the "disquietude" emerges from the recognition that home is no longer home.

My parents tell me that they have not seen the country—the United States—so fractured since the era during which Greene was writing: the 1960's and early 70's, which included the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Women's movement. There is a certain urgency to my reflection on and analysis of Greene's two teachers, the analytical and the existential, for she is absolutely on the money. She evokes the spectre of the "Good German" (p. 280): the German citizen who disagreed with Nazi policies but did nothing active. The United States now has its own concentration camps (Pengelly, 2019), wherein undocumented workers and/or asylum seekers, especially from Central America and Mexico, are being detained or repatriated without due process. The occasion for widespread civil disobedience is also a part of my recent experience. Students have staged walkouts to protest the number of young people who are being murdered by white, gun-toting boys and men while at school. The choices of the teachers—of me—are fraught and subject to union guidance. But where Greene suggests that a teacher makes the familiar strange, and is thus disquieted, and disquiets others, I would take it one step further: the sort of teacher she would be—and I would be—is a wanderer who fundamentally resists familiarity. This teacher is not the heroic stranger who appears and saves the day, providing *deus ex machina* drops of wisdom that solve the community's disease. Rather, this is the teacher who is both master (of the classroom, of grades, of aspects of curricula) and subject/servant (of students, parents, districts and governments). In other words, at the core of being a teacher (of language arts, that is, of meaning-making from texts) is an ineluctable ambivalence as to who I am

in relationship to an/other(s). As I will argue in this chapter, drawing on the work of Dodd (2009), Ricoeur (1992, 2005), and others, this uncertainty and ambivalence about who I am in relationship to other(s) is not only unavoidable, but also absolutely necessary, in facing the problems of violence.

II. Violence: A Contested Concept

A. Violence as instrument

Violence is often conceptualized using instrumentalist terms (Dodd, 2009), where violence is "used" as a means to an end. One is reminded of Clausewitz' famous dictum, "War is the continuation of politics by other means," i.e., physical violence is a means in service of some (political) end. One is also reminded of corporal punishment as behaviour modification, and abusive language as a method of inciting fear. In our common lived experience, we usually view violence/threat of violence as a tool in the toolbox of control/coercion. Under this model, it can be evaluated in terms of its usefulness, or lack thereof, as any tool might be.

Consider Hannah Arendt's (1970) *On Violence*. While she argues for the essential self-defeat that the use of violence entails in politics/society, and challenges the notion of violence as an effective means to an end, she nevertheless frames it as a tool. A tool of the weakened, admittedly, but still a tool. Looking beyond the notion of a 'just war' in service of a somehow-better society, she focuses instead on violence as the means to the end of preserving or increasing power, "which is the essence of all government" (p. 51). Her argument rests on some core definitional distinctions between power, violence, strength, authority, and force, distinctions made in order to delegitimize violence. Power and violence, though often found together, are not, in fact, synonymous, she argues, but

rather marked by antinomy: "Power and violence are opposites; where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent" (p. 56). An individual's authority, magnified through strength, is nothing without his/her membership in a group that gives him/her power. Violence might magnify strength, but it does not make strength alone; it is, ultimately, "instrumental." Furthermore, violence is only used when those in power fear that they are losing power, which, in seizing the machinery of violence, they make manifest.

In *On Violence*, Arendt (1970) was responding, in part, to a conceptualization of violence put forth by Franz Fanon (pg. 14). For Fanon (2004), violence—in its conventional forms—is the righteous recourse, the life-giving tool of the oppressed. He suggests that when violence is done by people reclaiming their agency in the wake of colonial oppression, violence has an ameliorative nature: "On the individual level, violence is a cleansing force" (p. 5). Here is the justification: violence will recoup the self-esteem damaged during colonization, and rebuild identities of strength and self-determination. Yet despite Arendt's and Fanon's deep differences in orientation—tool of weak power, or agent of rebirth, the distinction between Arendt and Fanon is an evaluative (violence is useful; violence is not useful), rather than a fundamental difference. Violence remains somehow extrinsic, a means to an end of some description.

It is almost self-evident to think of violence in instrumentalist terms, as do Arendt and Fanon, and many of us do in our daily lives, where violence is used *in order to* overthrow corrupt governments or *in order to* defend one's property. However, as Hanssen (2000) observes, within the academy, this instrumental characterization of violence is complicated. There is hardly any disciplinary realm in which violence has not

been invoked to capture a sense of sustained injury or harm, not all of which entail violence as a means to an end:

> Stretched beyond its former clearly demarcated boundaries, meaning 'the use of physical force' (the characterization still to be found in standard dictionary definitions), violence now assumes such phenomenologically elusive categories as psychological, symbolic, structural, epistemic, hermeneutical, and aesthetic violence. (p. 8)

But does this 'phenomenological elusiveness' render it impossible to talk about? Of course not; these definitional challenges make such a discussion *more* difficult, but not impossible, and indeed, it is towards a phenomenological understanding of violence (courtesy of Dodd, 2009, 2013, 2017) that I will ultimately turn. In the end, the very difficulty of discussing the nature and scope of violence serves as a check on our desire to simplify and move on.

B. "An Essentially Contested Concept"

The heading of this section, "an essentially contested concept," comes from the work of de Haan (2008), who reviews the implications of the definitional debate around what constitutes violence. He is working within the discipline of criminology, but his analysis of the implications of inclusive vs. restrictive definitions of violence is apropos in discussing teaching/learning violence and/or non-violence because the demand to act ethically requires that we turn a critical eye to the intended and unintended suffering that our actions or inactions might entail. In arguing that the philosophical understandings of violence ought to remain contested, "to accept that, depending on the specific contexts of discovery and contexts of justification, valid arguments are feasible for either inclusive or restrictive definitions of violence" (p. 38), the construction of knowledge around violence is open to the widest possible range of inquiry, and I would add, critical reflection.

Furthermore, to illustrate his point, de Haan recounts two examples drawn from professional life and discourse. In the context of a nursing home, the hitting, kicking and pinching that the residents inflict upon their caretakers are never referred to as violence by the caretakers. However, in the line of police work, hitting, kicking, and pinching are categorized as violence. The circumstances and professional modes of understanding, rather than some independent assessment of instrumentality, construct the meaning(s) of action(s). And herein lies some piece of the fundamental ambivalence that, I would suggest, my participants and I experience in talking about violence: it is a word that is both appropriate and inappropriate, both desirable as a shorthand for the experience of pain, harm, etc., as well undesirable, in the context of professional or religious life. That it remains—and ought to remain—"essentially contested" (de Haan, 2008, p. 38) demands that we reckon with the ambivalence about how such notions constitute or constrain who we are. What violence means is inseparable from the contexts in which it is experienced and/or perceived.

Returning to the realm of education, Hakvoort (2010) notes that the intent to teach about non-violence ineluctably includes the concept(s) of violence. Todd (2009) gives this tension particularly eloquent meaning, arguing that "[i]t is not that violence acts as a condition for nonviolence, it is that the possibility for nonviolence appears in the space where violence is capable of being committed" (p. 17). Consideration of "where violence is capable of being committed" is a capacious proposition, as well as an invitation to define the concept. This is generative and open-ended, representing authentic inquiry. As de Haan (2008) suggests, "a proper definition of 'violence' should not a priori be seen as a starting point for empirical research but as a temporary outcome, which may or may

not prove to be useful in future research" (p. 38). The opportunity exists for inclusive and exclusive conceptualizations to provoke uncertainty and invite further inquiry/understanding, within and without the confines of this dissertation, and indeed, the language arts classroom.

III. A phenomenological approach to violence

A. Introduction.

If some *a priori* definition of violence is not required for meaningful inquiry, I am nevertheless faced with an obligation to state some sort of path forward into the subject as it relates to my inquiry. This path forward is not towards making violence "intelligible" (Dodd, 2013, p. 33) as a concept, but rather towards establishing it as a clear and compelling problem (Dodd, 2013; Ricoeur, 1974)—for human experience and meaning-making, for me as a person and teacher. In maintaining that concepts of violence *ought* to remain in tension with one another, Dodd (2013) argues for an "intellectual vigilance" where such vigilance is "with respect to the ethical consequences of discourse itself" (p. 52).

> Especially, one might say, a discourse about violence. Such vigilance flows from the recognition that the lived consequences of thought, of concepts, are not simple reflections of the logic of their coherence, or their rationality, but involve fundamental risks of violence that demand from us an assumption of responsibility for our concepts. (p. 52-53).

Dodd's assertion that discourse has "lived consequences" recalls the fundamental importance of subjectivity where violence is concerned, the importance of an individual who acts and suffers (Ricoeur, 2005), and draws meaning from lived experiences, meaning that may shift over time. I turn to a phenomenological approach to violence given phenomonology's concern with the meaning(s) of our experience(s) and

consciousness. Among such experiences is language, at which point I turn to Ricoeur's phenomenological hermeneutics in the discussion of violence and language. However, to begin, I discuss identity, the "who" that is the conscious individual who experiences a life, and makes meaning, or attempts to.

B. Identity, human fragility, and violence

That there is an intimate and—shall we say, symbiotic—relationship between violence and identity is almost self-explanatory: think of the various ways in contemporary Western (especially American) society which violent action can credit an individual with such epithets as "courageous" or "strong" (Dodd, 2009), perhaps becoming central to who s/he believes him/herself to be. However, in exploring the "problem" of violence and identity (language comes a little later in this discussion), some conceptualization of identity is necessary first, before discussing the "problem." In keeping with my methodological commitments to narrative, I rely on Ricoeur's (1988, 1992, 2005, and others) understanding of identity as constituted through narrative(s). Ricoeur (1988) writes,

> To answer the question "who?" as Hannah Arendt so forcefully put it, is to tell the story of a life. The story told tells about the action of the "who." And the identity of this "who" therefore itself must be a narrative identity. Without the recourse to narration, the problem of personal identity would in fact be condemned to an antimony with no solution. (Ricoeur, 1988, p. 246)

Ricoeur's understanding of narrative identity emerges from his careful examination of the aporias of time. We experience human time (Ricoeur, 1988, p. 180), which is reliant upon narrative for its constitution and understanding. This is the time of life and identity, through the narration of which we come to know ourselves and others, provisionally.

The “provisionally” is very important. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, in discussing autobiography as a methodology, Ricoeur (1988) argues that "the story of a life continues to be refigured by all the truthful or fictive stories a subject tells about himself or herself. This reconfiguration makes this life itself a cloth woven of stories told" (p. 246). This identity is "unstable" (p. 248) and vulnerable, as the subjective constructions of meaning from narratives invariably are; however, what endures is what Ricoeur terms "self-constancy," the self that promises, that can be counted on, that absorbs change and alteration, and which is in a dialectic with the ongoing revisioning of any person’s knowledge of him/herself. Ricoeur (1999b) summarizes his own conceptualizing of identity in an essay entitled, "Memory and Forgetting:"

> [I]n the course of personal life, I need a kind of flexibility, or a kind of dual identity, the model of which would be for me the promise, i.e., the capacity to keep one's own word. This is not the same as remaining inflexible or unchanged through time. On the contrary, it is a way of dealing with change, not denying it…The difficulty of being able to deal with changes through time is one reason why identity is so fragile. (p. 8)

Elsewhere, in elaborating on this vulnerability, Ricoeur (1992) says, simply, "For my part, I never forget to speak of humans as acting and suffering" (pp. 144-45). There is an "essential dissymmetry" (p. 145) of power "between one who acts and the one who undergoes" (p. 145).

The particular “charm” of violence, with regard to individual identity(s), is that it appears active, decisive. As mentioned above, we intuitively understand the effect that violence might have on identity: In a moment of classroom discipline, especially harsh discipline, a teacher might cease to see herself as weak and incomplete, and instead see herself more as the effective master of the room, the type of teacher that she thinks *she is*

expected to be. Her story might have powerfully changed in an instant, but how, and for how long and for whom? Dodd (2009) writes,

> The peculiar space of exception that violence carves out of the world intensifies the problem of who we are by testing us in a radical manner, and in this sense *promises to offer us a unique perspective on the essential outlines of who we are.* If we are drawn to violence, whether violent acts (challenging a sexual competitor to a duel) or situations (volunteering for a dangerous mission), it is because of such a promise; it is the promise that, in stepping beyond the confines of the "normal," we will discover, at the other end of what is allowed and acceptable, the truth of who we are (I am for sure "the one;" I am brave, honorable, engaged, etc.). (p. 138, emphasis added)

Dodd's reference to the "confines of the 'normal'" that violence seeks to "carve a space out of" deserves some thought. What is the "normal," but the everyday world where we, as humans, "act and suffer" (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 145)? We are vulnerable to the actions of one another, even as we are responsible for our actions and the effects of those actions on one another. Given that we can suffer so acutely, including at the hands of those we love most dearly, the "normal" is the site of contradiction and ambivalence. The charm of a "peculiar space" of clarity, about oneself, about one's world, is understandable.

Yet the promise of violent acts/situations, Dodd continues, is inherently unstable, protean, and illusory, and, in fact, not a promise at all. It is an attempt to foreclose and limit uncertainty and possibility, to force what is necessarily becoming—one's identity, one's knowledge of one's self and others—into something that is certain and finite. "[T]o be drawn to violence is … to begin giving up asking whether violence is at bottom just such an illusion; it is to begin to accept, without another word, the pretence that the fact of violence exculpates us from any need to expend more effort in deciding whether or not we are what we claim to be" (Dodd, 2009, p. 138). "Whether we are what we

claim to be" is the necessary uncertainty that accompanies being human in time, in the face of change. It is the uncertainty that accompanies the meaning(s) that we make from our experiences, meanings that emerge from the stories we tell about who we are and are not.

In the capability to act violently or embrace violence, a "distance" (Dodd, 2009, p. 139) is erected between one's identity(s) and the other possibilities/capabilities that might also be one's self. Furthermore, as proof, if you will, of the frailness of the promise of violence for identity, it should be recalled that the promise of violence requires regular reinforcement: if one is drawn, for instance, to violence in order to identify, and be identified, as brave, then one single instance of violent bravery is likely insufficient to claim such an identity through time. We, as narrators of ourselves and others, are aware that for the most part, a single story does not an enduring identity make. Thus, contrary to popular American culture, violence is a problem rather than a solution for the narratives by which we configure and re-configure our identity(s). Indeed, as Ricoeur (1999b) notes, violence presents a further "difficulty [in] preserving one's identity through time, and of preserving one's selfhood in the face of the other" (p. 8) because the legacies of experiences of violence persist into the present. These foundational experiences continue to shape and reshape our understandings of who we are beyond their event horizon.

C. Violence and Language

Ricoeur's narrative identity places language at the core of understanding who we, as human beings, are. It goes without saying that there are those who argue that our identities as experienced, especially as regards the problem of violence, are pre-linguistic (e.g., Staudigl, 2013). Identity might be considered another "fundamentally contested

concept" (de Haan, 2008, p. 38) and this would certainly be another avenue for inquiry. However, within the context of this inquiry and my commitment to exploring narrative(s) in teaching and learning about violence, in the context of secondary language arts, Ricoeur's linguistic turn opens up, rather than limits, for language itself can be an expression of violence.

If a life is "a cloth woven of stories told" (Ricoeur, 1988, p. 246) then the problem of violence and identity/self-knowledge also concerns the way(s) in which violence distorts and/or eliminates the possibility of other narratives about the self and others. This brings me to the second problem of violence in this chapter: the problem of violence and language. Ricoeur (1974) writes,

> [W]hat unifies the problem of violence is not the fact that its multiple expressions derive from one or another form that is held to be fundamental, but rather that it is language that is its opposite. It is for a being who speaks, who in speaking pursues meaning, who has already entered the discussion and who knows something about rationality that violence is or becomes a problem. Thus violence has its meaning in its other: language. And the same is true reciprocally. Speech, discussion and rationality also draw their unity of meaning from the fact that they are an attempt to reduce violence. (p. 89)

Ricoeur refuses to place anything, not even language, beyond the reach of violence, even admitting that his opposition of language and violence is problematic: "But as soon as this [opposition] has been said, one has the irresistible feeling that this formal opposition does not exhaust the problem, but rather only encircles it with a thick line surrounding emptiness" (p. 90) The inside of the 'black circle' is empty because language is not so much a "thing" as it is a dynamic interaction between two or more people. Let's unpack this a bit. As human beings, our use of language distinguishes us as a species, in the sense that when we enter a conversation, even a heated disagreement, we rely—provided we

are using language in good faith—on our words, rather than violence, to resolve the issue. However, 'the issue' is ongoing, dynamic, and shared among people. Yes, language—rationality—meaning are the opposites of violence, but language cannot be separated from violence cleanly, for the violent person may use language, and language can also constitute violence, i.e., verbal abuse or unjust legislation. Indeed, should a person use language to lie, such a lie diminishes the opposition between language and violence. "[C]oherent discourse," Ricoeur (1974) notes, is owned by no one. "If someone attempted to possess it, it would again be the violent person…under the cover of fraudulently coherent speech" (p. 90). Elsewhere, Ricoeur (1988) explicitly connects the lie and violence. We are to understand that it is not language in and of itself, but the perversion of language—where meaning is intended to fail—that marks the initiation of violence. "Attempt[ing] to possess" (Ricoeur, 1974, p. 90) language and meaning echoes Dodd's (2009) observation that violence serves to limit, to foreclose, possibility (p. 138).

D. John Howard Yoder:

If any of my readers are Mennonite, or are acquainted with 20th century scholarship on pacifism/non-violence, they might surely be wondering about the absence of John Howard Yoder's work in this discussion. Yoder (no relation), labeled by *The New York Times* as "America's most influential pacifist theologian" (Oppenheimer, 2013), was a prominent Mennonite theologian who taught at the University of Notre Dame and published widely on Christian ethics and non-violence. Yoder inspired my father and many others during the Vietnam-era resistance movements. In his most prominent work, *The Politics of Jesus* (1994), Howard Yoder argues for the ethico-

political relevance of the gospel, the stories of Jesus' life: "[Jesus'] deeds show a coherent, conscious social-political character and direction, and that his words are inseparable therefrom" (p. 115). His attention to the overtly political stands in direct contrast with much previous Mennonite dogma, which argued for a quietist, withdrawn attitude towards the world, though the raising of this question, that is, of traditionalist (quietist, inward-oriented) versus communalist (outward-oriented, engaged with the World) orientation, was not unheard of in Mennonite communities (Kniss, 1996, 1997) prior to Howard Yoder's work. Howard Yoder firmly held that it was not enough, in the face of human misery and injustice, for Mennonites or anyone else to merely bow their heads and fold their hands.

Howard Yoder spoke to and about the violence of war, of political action, of violence as a means to an end, of the violence done by people towards other people. His work was intended as an answer to those who argue for a 'just war,' or justified civil violence whereby violence is used and defended as an unpleasant and unfortunate instrument in the service of realising a somehow-better society.

> Each [Ghandi and Martin Luther King, whose ideas and success Howard Yoder uses as warrant] said in different ways that the means and the end cannot be separated. The means is the end in the process of becoming. When, in the service of even the most valuable cause, one chooses to resort to violence, that disregard for the dignity of the neighbour and that disrespect for the social fabric plant the seeds for the failure of one's own enterprise. Only fidelity to love as means can be an instrument for love as ends. (Yoder, 2010, p. 46)

His reference to "process of becoming" would seem to align favourably with my invocation of possibility and multiplicity. Indeed, I would really like to be able to use his work but I can't, for the simple reason that he is not who he claims to be in his life and work. Rather than practising non-violence as a discipline, he was, in fact a serial sexual

abuser, especially of his students. The Mennonite church, on two occasions, deflected, dissembled and otherwise gave him institutional shelter by 'hushing things up.' Yoder never repented nor made a full confession. They, quite literally, heard the claims of Yoder's victims, and set them aside. It is a shameful chapter in the history of the Mennonite church as an institution.

Even more, Yoder used the production of knowledge—scholarly enterprise—as the cover for his abuse. "He solicited help from female students and others, describing his entreaties as part of an 'experiment' in sexual ethics in which he and a circle of 'sisters' tested ideas about sexual intimacy outside marriage" (Waltner-Goossen, 2016, p. 49). When confronted, he claimed superior knowledge of the Bible as his justification. And it worked for many years. In attempting to control not only the meaning of experiences—his own and others'—but the meaning of a text as well, Howard Yoder exemplifies the problems of violence I have discussed in this chapter. He sought to carve a "peculiar space" (Dodd, 2009, p. 138) for himself, outside the "normal," wherein he used language and meaning deceptively. Lest he seem so ridiculous and extreme as to have no bearing on the conversation moving forward, as a language arts teacher and as a scholar, meaning-making is my trade. Can I be certain about whether or not I am foisting a narrative on those around me, attempting to control discourse so that I might feel less vulnerable, and less fragile in answering the question "Who am I"?

IV. Legacies of violence

The stories—truthful and fictive—that we tell about ourselves are not limited to some timeless present, of course. The narrative fabric of our lives includes histories and the memories of others. The legacies of violence—both as violence is perpetrated on an

individual, as well as when it is perpetrated collectively on a people—endure. The cost of violence, of human suffering, distorts and limits the lives of its victims and survivors, and continues to distort and limit the generations that follow, becoming intergenerational in its reach. Undergirding my long-standing interest in violence and narrative is the story I carry, that I cannot resolve, that my beloved grandfather abused my even more beloved mother when she was a child, and that in his old age she cared for him, cooked him weekly meals and stayed with him as he lay dying. I cannot pretend that *both* the abuse and the care didn't happen. That would be to reject some significant part of my mother's life story, of who she is. Neither can I say that I hate(d) him, because I didn't, and because she didn't, but every time she mentions him or he comes up in a conversation, I feel a certain dissonance. Switching registers from the personal (my mother and grandfather) to the historical, it is our (my white, settler) indebtedness to the violence of previous generations, and comfort with enjoying its fruits in our own lives, that creates the most inscrutable problem of violence, for it has implications for identity, truthfulness, justice and self-determination.

Ricoeur (1988) discusses the potential of narrative(s) to refigure, to change one's sense of self and one's history. One aspect of this work of narrative is in the obligations that narratives can place on us. Consider, for instance, that in the case of criminal activity, if one is told/witnesses (something/some narrative) that is material to finding out the truth of the matter, one can be charged with obstruction of justice for not coming forward. But what about ignoring or "forgetting" narratives of trauma and suffering? Is that not a way around the 'claim' such a narrative might exert? In "On the Natural History of Destruction," Sebald (2004) explores the striking lacuna in German literature

and letters regarding the carpet and fire-bombing of civilian centers that was employed by the Allies, starting in 1942 and continuing through the end of the World War II. Why such silence, in the face of universal suffering, about a program that contravened the conventions of war and made the likes of Winston Churchill a bit queasy? Sebald's answer is complex, but at its core is a desire on the part of Germany to ignore the past, to orient only towards the future:

> From the outset, the now legendary and in some respects genuinely admirable reconstruction of the country after the devastation wrought by Germany's wartime enemies, a reconstruction tantamount to a second liquidation in successive phases of the nation's own past history, prohibited any look backward. It did so through the sheer amount of labor required and the creation of a new, faceless reality, pointing the population exclusively towards the future and enjoining on it silence about the past. (Sebald, 2004, p. 7)

Sebald's striking reference to "a second liquidation," evokes the "liquidation" of the Jews, i.e., an attempt at total destruction of a group of people. Such language casts the future-orientation of post-war Germany with something akin to sinister intent, with obstructing, at very least, historical and societal truth about perhaps most importantly, the Holocaust, but also the incredible amount of suffering endured by German civilians—suffering, the loss of loved ones, the loss of any material comfort—at the hands of the Allies. The effects of these experiences lingered on the lives of those who endured them, or who, like Sebald, were "merely" alive, German and in Germany at the time. Indeed, Sebald suggests that one prominent interpretation of the bombings was that this was punishment, and that as a people, the Germans had best take their lumps and move on, and such an interpretation provides easy cover for ignoring the claims of collective (and, I would suggest, personal) histories and memories.

Collective memory, Rothberg (2009) suggests, is "the relationship…groups establish between their past and present circumstances" (p. 2). That is, the narratives of one's people, of one's forebears, become ineluctably intertwined with one's own narratives, and are recalled and invoked in the present. In lieu of the competitive dynamics that form between collective memories/histories vying for attention and recognition, in the sense of occupying space in public consciousness especially where trauma and tragedy are involved, Rothberg (2009) offers the concept of multidirectional memory: "The model of multidirectional memory posits collective memory as partially disengaged from exclusive versions of cultural identity and acknowledges how remembrance both cuts across and binds together diverse spatial, temporal, and cultural sites" (p. 11). Collective memory, in this case, is therefore not some monolith or collective of monoliths jousting with one another for attention, and towards which individuals have unique membership or lack thereof; rather it encompasses the "common" and/or "shared" (p. 15) memories where the memories that are represented transcend and exceed the individual who is doing the remembering, even as such memories are threaded through such an individual, who in turn has access, especially in today's media-rich environment, to more than one stream of collective memories. In "cut[ting] across and bind[ing] together diverse spatial, temporal, and cultural sites" (Rothberg, 2009, p. 11), multidirectional memory work permits the juxtaposition of memories (Strong-Wilson, 2017) and thus "…highlights the inevitable displacements and contingencies that mark all remembrance" (Rothberg, 2009, p. 16). This is not to say, however, that juxtaposed memories are all relative on the stage of history: "While a given memory rarely functions in a single way or means only one thing, all articulations of

memory are not equal; powerful social, political, and psychic forces articulate themselves in every act of remembrance" (Rothberg, 2009, p. 16). In the case of the Allies' bombing of civilian centers during World War II, Sebald might be understood to be pointing out the utter lack of multi-directionality: to remember the death, trauma and destruction sustained during the bombings inexorably recalled the systematic murder of Jewish people by Germans. Rather than attempt to work with such complexity, German culture and society chose to ignore both, as much as possible, in the name of a history-less future. Rothberg (2009) posits that multidirectional memory provides

> …A framework that draws attention to the inevitable dialogical exchange between memory traditions and keeps open the possibility of a more just future of memory. I identify the misrecognition of collective memory as a zero-sum game—instead of an open-ended field of articulation and struggle—as one of the stumbling blocks for a more inclusive renarration of the history of memory and a harnessing of the legacies of violence in the interest of a more egalitarian future. (p. 21)

Sebald, who was born and lived in Germany, but was too young to have "first hand" experience, writes "To this day, when I see photographs or documentary films dating from the war I feel as if I were its child, so to speak, as if those horrors I did not experience cast a shadow over me" (p. 71). We might understand him to be engaging with historical memory in a manner akin to Simon's (2000) articulation of the concept: '[Historical memory is] a decidedly socially inflected repetition, or better, a rearticulation of past events through which I incur a responsibility in which I am 'thrown back toward what has never been my thought or deed' (Levinas)" (pp. 9-10). In its generative turn (i.e., a "rearticulation" which implies talking/writing/thinking about a subject differently than previous articulations; contrasted with "repetition"), historical memory can impute a sense of responsibility, reminiscent of Sebald's "shadow." This possible turn brings to

mind the question: What are the origins of such responsibility(s)? Ricoeur's exploration of the intimate relationship(s) between recognizing the self and recognizing the other might offer some way forward, for it is the self who feels responsible for something/someone other than the self.

V. Recognition vs. understanding

Recognition is frequently mentioned in relation to learning about violence and trauma (e.g. Hilberg, 1996; Taylor & Gutmann, 1994; Todd, 2009) but most often without dwelling on what recognition means, as a concept. Strong-Wilson and I have made some small contributions to exploring the concept of recognition, especially as distinguished from the concept of "understanding," in a chapter (Yoder & Strong Wilson, 2017) on using residential school stories in the language arts classroom. In the following I will further develop this distinction, because recognition represents an important alternative mode of knowing to that of understanding—which, as I will argue, is impossible where the violence experienced by one other than the self is concerned.

There are many occasions where "understanding" is appropriate as a mode of knowledge; it is perhaps most appropriate when thinking about constructing meaning out of a text or discourse (Ricoeur, 1981b). We English teachers are particularly beholden to this mode of knowing, given that it is synonymous with "comprehension," the etymology of which is from the latin *comprehendere*, to grasp, to sieze (OED). To say that you understand someone or a text is to "grasp" the meaning of what that person is saying.

Yet one would never say that one *understood* another person in the sense of knowing their experiences, of knowing what it was like to be them, to inhabit the same body. That would be insupportably presumptuous (although that does not stop folks from

using this formulation, usually in a condescending manner). It is even rather lacking in self-awareness to talk about "understanding oneself" as a sort of final position. Why is there this dissonance with "understanding" oneself or another? It is perhaps revealed in the word "grasp"—or, where reading/interpreting a text is involved—appropriation, a word used by Ricoeur (1988) to describe the process of making meaning out of a text. But where a text, or words once spoken, or even human action once committed, offer a "limited field of possible constructions" (Ricoeur, 1981b, p. 175), a human being, while alive, is perpetually in a process of becoming. "Who" a person is, is subject to change, even as there is the being who can promise, who endures over time.

Recognition, however, is not limited to what is already finished. With regard to mutual recognition—the recognition between individuals, or peoples—Ricoeur uses the model of the gift, where the giving of a gift to another invites reciprocity, which is a starkly different mode of "seeing" another. On an intuitive level, giving a gift—that is truly a gift, something that the receiver would cherish, knowing that s/he has been thought of carefully and lovingly—involves, on the part of the giver, an investment of time and energy in thinking of another, who is not the self. On the part of the receiver, the flush of gratitude that accompanies a thoughtful gift turns one's thoughts towards the giver, towards what an expression of gratefulness might look like, that the receiver might give to the giver. Gift giving, however, never seeks to erase the fundamental differences, the asymmetry, between the giver and the receiver. The giver cannot "know" the receiver in any final or definitive sense; that assumption, Ricoeur (2005) suggests, is the ultimate "misrecognition" (p. 260). Thus there remains a respectful uncertainty about an other.

Our recognition of ourselves is founded on our capacities—to narrate, to remember, to promise, to "author my own acts" (Ricoeur, 1996, p. 17). Yet here again, there is uncertainty. Such capacities are inherently fragile: The actions of another(s) "help and hind[er] in the exercise of one's own capacities" (Ricoeur, 2005, p. 151). Elsewhere, he suggests that "a capability must be awakened in order to become real or actual" (Ricoeur, 1996, p. 17), and that "being recognized, should it occur, would be for everyone be to receive the full assurance of his or her identity, thanks to the recognition by others of each person's range of capacities" (Ricoeur, 2005, p. 250). Thus, recognition—of ourselves, of others—is reliant on others, and theirs are reliant on us. We are responsible for recognizing each other's capacities. Indeed, it is a worthwhile thought experiment to ask ourselves what limit we would think it reasonable for another to place on what he/she might recognize in us? I suspect that most of us would wish that there were no limits, that our capacities and the "full assurance" of our identities might not be so constrained.[12]

Herein lies, perhaps, the power of gift-giving as a model for mutual recognition—and its myriad challenges. It is not the fact of the gift itself, so much as the "being seen for who one truly is" that inspires gratitude. "Who one truly is" includes what one is capable of, and capable of becoming.

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[12] The reality is that constraints do exist, that in practice there are limits to responsibility, for as Ricoeur (2005) notes, "an unlimited responsibility would amount to indifference, by overthrowing the "mineness" of my action" (p. 105). Nevertheless, the call of what is fragile and has been placed in our care cannot be merely shrugged off. Ricoeur (2005) continues, "Between flight from responsibility and its consequences and the inflation into infinite responsibility, we must find a just measure" (p. 105). Once again, we are refused any sort of absolute clarity; this is work that requires reflection and discernment, work that is ongoing for who knows, in advance, the limits of the effects of his/her actions?

It is worthwhile recalling that, according to Dodd (2009), violence seeks to carve out a "peculiar space" (p. 138) that is separate from the normal world where our recognition of ourselves is still subject to the actions of others. The individual who is drawn to violence, in deed and in language, seeks to foreclose the possibilities and attendant frailty inherent in being human, in being subject to others. Thus violence requires a refusal to recognize an/the other as a capable human being of value and promise, endowed with equivalent capacities to the self. This is, perhaps, the source of the potency with which "recognition" is invoked in political matters and education, such as Taylor and Gutman (2004), or in talking about legacies of violence, as does Hilberg (1996), when Hilberg agrees[13] that with regard to the study of the Holocaust, in the end there can be no understanding, only recognition. The victims and survivors of past and present violence remind us that the capabilities that we, as capable humans, are called to recognize include those that are difficult and that implicate us: expressions of grief and anger, demands/actions for justice and compensation and self-determination.

The matter of recognition and capacities is acutely relevant to the classroom, the implicit goal of which is to *nurture* capacities: to read, to interpret, to narrate, to connect with others, etc. And yet, Ricoeur's analysis of recognition demands that we see the classroom as a place wherein *both* students and teacher(s) are struggling for recognition in the face of fragility and uncertainty. I see myself as a teacher, effective or ineffective, reflected back to me by my students. Certainly that reflection is mediated by my

[13] Hilberg's agreement here is with the assessment of his work by Holocaust survivor and scholar, H. G. Adler. He is quoting Adler, who says about Hilberg's work that "for Hilberg there is only recognition, perhaps also a grasp, but certainly no understanding" (Hilberg, 1996, p. 203).

perceptions and interpretations of my students' actions and intentions, but some essential part of me as a veteran—but still learning—teacher is only available to me through them. I also seek to be recognized. It is here, then, that I ask: what do I hope will be recognized in me when I bring violence explicitly into the classroom, in the form of a text or narrative? Am I carving out an exceptional space, where I am seemingly impervious to the actions of others? Am I using the stories of others' suffering to accomplish this?

Alternatively, when I teach a text, and it becomes (or doesn't) part of the narrative formation of my students, is it towards their capabilities that I am oriented? Perhaps superficially. As Noddings (1998) notes, it matters to teachers what students *do* with the texts we teach, and doing speaks to capability. But am I actually "recognizing" their capacities, or am I mostly implying that they are, in some way, deficient? In other words, is my curriculum and pedagogy oriented towards what my students are "missing," or does it begin with what my students already know and are able to do? It is all too common, and I am guilty of this myself, to see learning as filling in what is missing or mistaken in a student.

In an earlier version of this chapter I included analysis of the focus group discussion I held with Bible study members. I made the argument that one of the members was trying to control the discourse—this in a conversation about violence—and was thus coming uncomfortably close to being violent themselves. I thought it was a pretty clever piece of analysis, and it took up quite a few pages. However, as I set about revising this chapter, that section seemed increasingly a sort of wilful misrecognition. I had been welcomed, but I was still a stranger; the point of the discussion was to have a discussion among all of us. To produce the kind of knowledge that my analysis claimed

to be producing required the reduction of my fellow discussants to mere subjects who meant precisely what they said in the moment, *un*ambiguously. To recall language from my previous chapter, I had to simplify the conversation, to distill it to these few instances, and be confident that I, an interloper, clearly understood the verbal, social and historical dynamics at play.

That would certainly be a simpler picture of the world of my research, were I to ascribe to myself those godly attributes of unambiguous perception, where my voice is the one that matters most. That would indeed be a most peculiar space! And yet, it would be a lie about myself, about others, and a profound misrecognition.

VI. Conclusion

Ricoeur's analysis of recognition concludes with a moving testament from Montaigne regarding the essential difference of another, even one deeply loved: "If you press me to tell why I loved him, I feel that it cannot be expressed, except by answering: Because it was he, because it was I" (p. 263). In some essential way, the other remains a stranger. In some equally essential way, given that our recognition of ourselves is predicated on the actions of others, we do not know who we are already, or who we will become. Given these realities, Bauman's (1991) invocation of ambivalence, located in the figure of the stranger, seems an important ethical turn. As I mentioned in chapter 3, Bauman aligns the stranger with "cosmopolitanism, anti-patriotism, non-commitment[14],

[14] I wish to take a moment with "non-commitment," as it, perhaps, the most unsettling and counter-intuitive in Bauman's list. We conventionally think of commitments as being noble, something akin to Ricoeur's (2005) promise—that regardless of how we might change, we will honor commitments and remain committed. Nevertheless, it is instructive to think about how something so seemingly noble—such as pacifism or the commitment to non-violence—can become a tool of exclusion, social control and pain,

'turncoatism'" (p. 79). These positions, or ways of looking at the world, do not permit the easy categorization of the other, and resist easy categorization themselves. Given the limits of what we can know, about ourselves, about others, these positions seem not only ethical, but prudent.

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such as I have witnessed in Mennonite circles. It is not, of course, always so; only that when committed to uncritically, without reflection, it can become so.

Chapter 5: Landing, or 25 Threads

I. Introduction

This chapter is comprised of the narrative writing that forms the core of this dissertation. However, first I wish to reprise a question that I raised in Chapter 3, regarding how I *ought* to narrate, a question that necessarily takes up the figure of the narrator in my writing, for it is by means of this narrator that you, my reader, encounter these stories. I will also address the organization of these narratives as juxtaposed "threads," as well as comment on the title, "Landing."

A. On the narrator

Stories are told by a narrator, who is distinct from the author. Even if the narrator seems to be co-existent with the writer herself, as is the case in the narrative writing that follows in this chapter, they are still not one and the same. The writer—who is me—is a human being, still in the process of becoming; the narrator is a representation and is confined to the writing, the text. However, it is *through* the narrator that the reader comes to know the story, and so inevitably we might ask questions about her character or *ethos*. How does a narrator demonstrate that she ought to be trusted, or at least listened to, especially where such vulnerable subjects such as those involving violence are concerned? "How ought I to narrate" also involves the question, "Who ought my narrator be?"

Earlier in this dissertation (see Chapter 3), I drew on discarded narratives to show the kind of narrator that didn't fit the bill: a narrator who was distant from her subjects, and arch rather than emotionally-invested. One of those discarded narratives even included a 3rd person omniscient narrator, narrating, fairy-tale style, a childhood recollection. This

kind of narrator is inappropriate for the very reason that, in occupying a position of distance relative to her subject, she reveals a certain inflexibility, an unwillingness to be vulnerable. She was not, in a sense, *part of the story;* the story did not continue to affect her. I am reminded of Dodd's (2009) suggestion that the capability to act violently or embrace violence begins with a "distance" (p. 139) between oneself and others, between oneself and who one might become.

An alternative narrative position, one elucidated by Strong-Wilson (in press) in her analysis of the narrators in the works of W. G. Sebald, is that of the "concerned subject" (p. 181) in which the "the narrator is involved in the story, in being emotionally and intellectually affected, but also implicated because 'entrusted' with narration" (p. 182). This emotional availability on the part of the narrator might find expression in a variety of responses; my own narrator expresses a range of emotions and thoughts *in response* to the stories that she tells, including outrage, as well as embarrassment and contrition. Above all, she is the unifying thread that brings disparate stories into relationship with one another. In doing so, she reveals that she is listening (Strong-Wilson, in press, p. 181) for resonances, for echoes, for unscripted and disconcerting realizations—disconcerting for the narrator herself and the writer, as well as the reader.

Furthermore, she is concerned with accurately representing her co-narrators, the people whose words populate her stories. Because much of the dialogue in these narratives comes from actual, recorded conversations, I have distinguished typographically between what is recorded speech and what is imagined speech (that is, words that I have imagined the people about whom I write to have said): Any dialogue that I have imagined is in *italics*; any dialogue that comes from recorded conversations is

noted using conventional quotation marks and regular font. This is done differently in the two teacher stories, which are clearly marked as "teacher stories," because those stories do not recount precise conversation or even recognizable students. These two teacher stories are based on experiences of mine as a teacher in an urban secondary school. However, in order to obscure the identities of the students about whom I write, I have substantially changed details of character and plot. What remains are my feelings, and a loose representation of what happened.

In this last paragraph I have switched from using "the narrator" to using "I"—as in, "I the writer." Thinking about the narrator as separate from myself, the writer, creates a space in which the meanings of these narratives might emerge in concert with word choice, metaphor, and ambiguities. I aspire—in the world in which I am the writer and a person still becoming—to be like the narrator, who is necessarily ambivalent (in Bauman's (1991) sense of the word) towards her proximity to violence and narratives of violence.

B. "Threads"

I refer to the 25 narrative vignettes that comprise the following narratives as "threads." This requires some explanation. In writing about violence, I am trying to avoid any sort of causal, linear narrative that claims to *explain* my relationship with the subject of violence. This is because *explaining* is oriented towards *understanding*, which, as I have argued earlier in this dissertation (see Chapter 3), is impossible and presumptuous where violence or trauma is concerned. In order to emphasis contingency and proximity among narratives that might otherwise seem wholly discrete and disconnected, I juxtapose narrative vignettes. Strong-Wilson (2017) discusses

juxtaposition within the writing of Sebald, where seemingly disparate events, ideas and people are "connected by a narrator who goes to a certain place, or encounters a certain person, or comes across a reference of some kind" (p.163). The narrator's juxtaposition of discrete events, people, and ideas creates the occasion for connections to be made among them, but it is the reader who also bears a certain responsibility to be vigilant. Where Sebald makes juxtapositions through the experience of the narrator travelling and making encounters along the way (e.g., *The Rings of Saturn (*1998); *Austerlitz* (2001)), I have chosen to juxtapose these vignettes using the metaphor of "threads."

The idea of these juxtaposed stories as "threads" emerges from another metaphor: Ricoeur's (1988) for our lives as "a cloth woven of stories told" (p. 246). Being an avid seamstress, it is no stretch to appreciate how individual threads of varied colours and weights produce cloths of myriad textures and forms.

I have divided the narratives into six parts. There are four autobiographical sections in which I primarily take up family narratives, and two teacher stories in which I take up violence in the classroom, or, if not violence, "acting and suffering" (Ricoeur, 1992) in my role as a teacher in response to the actions of students, which was no doubt experienced by them as being subject to me. Because this is a dissertation, and not a literary endeavor, I pause between each part and comment on the narratives that I selected, and the manner in which these narratives, as written, take up the subject of violence and narratives of/about violence.

C. "Landing": noun, verb, adjective in transition

Titles are always difficult. In the end, I chose a single word, "Landing," as the primary title for my narratives because the word's multiplicity—in meaning, as a part of speech—reflects several of the layers I see at work in the narratives themselves.

First, there is the play on "land" as in the land that one lives on, such as the land in Saskatchewan and the land in Oregon that form some significant component of my narratives. However, "landing," rather than "land," points to the temporary nature of our "ownership" or occupation. If for no other reason than our own necessary mortality, we are always in transition: landing speaks to that transition. Like a bird perched on a branch, we have landed only for a short time. Although flying is quite the opposite of landing, I am reminded of Bede's famous parable regarding the soul, that while we are on earth we are akin to the sparrow who flies into an Anglo-Saxon mead hall, and is momentarily sheltered from the storms, only to quickly pass out the other end and disappear.

Landing also recalls arrival and in many ways, the narratives in the foregoing chapter comprise just that. If Chapter 3, my weed patch, described my anxious searching for a way to take up, to narrate, violence/about violence, the foregoing chapter represents an arrival at a kind of narrative place, even if provisional. My narratives also recount various journeys: my uncles', my parents', and my own.

Finally, though, "landing" is a place in between. When I climb the stairs in our house to the second floor, I arrive on the landing, in front of a window facing west. Three doors open out onto the landing. The landing is common and must be crossed in order to enter each of these distinct spaces. Drawn from various people, places, and stories, the narratives in this chapter represent an intersection. Like any intersection, a

measure of contingency underpins who and what are gathered at any particular time; such contingency, however, does not alter the fact that such a gathering—as in the gathering of the following narratives—might enjoin reflection and change.

Speaking of violence, Dodd (2009) suggests, "[T]o be drawn to violence is … to begin to accept, without another word, the pretence that the fact of violence exculpates us from any need to expend more effort in deciding whether or not we are what we claim to be" (p. 138). His formulation would seem to suggest that to do what is *not violent* is to *continue to make the effort* to "decid[e] whether or not we are what we claim to be" (p. 138). I read the verb "decide" in this context as a kind of hermeneutic effort, an ongoing question of interpretation, where one's narratives and actions might be subject to revised interpretations in the fullness of time, in the continuance of effort. Strong-Wilson (2015) writes, "A hermeneutical approach to autobiography in education…means that understanding becomes embedded as an aspect of the writing of the narrative rather than following on its composition" (p. 26). The following narratives, then, should be understood as evidence of—as well as provocation to continue—questioning whether I am who I claim to be, with regard to violence. I cling to this uncertainty as a kind of bitter taste, one that reminds me of the imminence of violence when it would be easy to forget and lapse into the ordinariness of daily living.

Part I

1.

In the fall, 20 miles west of Duck Lake, Saskatchewan, summer departs suddenly. There is no ambiguous mixing of hot days, chill nights, growing leaves, and brown ones. Quite the contrary. One morning my father walks into the kitchen and announces that we've had our first hard frost, a killing frost. As I wait in our driveway for the school bus, I take in the overnight miracle: the poplar trees, yesterday a tired olive, are this morning a golden yellow, glowing in the rising sun.

Lothlorien, we called it, after Tolkien's elven kingdom. Tolkien could not have known Saskatchewan poplar stands; his woods were the oak forests of Gloucestershire, a most solid Anglo-Saxon *treow,* but I've never seen an oak turn anything but brown and drop its leaves in a most desultory fashion.

On their slim and silver trunks, the golden canopy floats above me in the afternoon, when I get home from school and take to the woods. I collect the small branches that have dropped during summer storms. I use baling twine to attach a long, relatively straight branch between two poplar trunks, almost as high as I can reach. Then I lean other branches up against it and weave between them handfuls of wild oats and other snippets of baling twine and burlap. Because the trunks are so smooth, so devoid of knotholes, the horizontal branch slips a little, and soon my lean-to is pretty ramshackle. It is hardly the secret and weather-proof hideaway I had imagined, a hideaway like the badger holes out back, where I know the badgers live through the winter and sometimes emerge—to haunt the playtime of young girls.

Still, it has space for one. I lie on my belly in the deepest part of my lean-to. The leaf litter smells tannic. Through the open end I can see our house between the silver trunks, the civilized antithesis of my lean-to, though, given my parents' penchant for remodelling—and not quite finishing the remodelling—I'm pretty sure that to eyes more removed than mine there might appear some similarities between my junior survivalist concoction and their 'little house on the prairie.'

There are no larger branches with which to reinforce my lean-to because my father carefully manages his woods and the other woods around our acreage. We burn wood in the winter to keep warm, and this is Saskatchewan, so wood must be gathered well in advance and in quantity to cure.

After the leaves drop and the ground freezes, my father takes his little John Deere tractor and trailer out into the poplar stands to gather wood, scavenging from fallen or damaged trees and thinning out living trees. Sometimes I go with him. My job is to carry the logs after he's bucked them up.

Bucked. As I write the word I doubt its propriety. It comes from a vocabulary I have not used in 30 years. I can think of many meanings for the word, buck, and none have anything to do with trees. Horses buck, throwing their riders to the ground. Male deer are called bucks.

From the Oxford English Dictionary: "1953 *Brit. Commonw. Forest Terminol.*, *To buck*, to cut felled trees into any required lengths (Canada)."

Yes, my job is to carry the logs after he bucks them up.

Where does he learn about bucking up logs, in Canadian forest terminology?

His father, Sandy, was an Oregon schoolteacher and died when my dad was 17. And Sandy wore suits, not coveralls, and made every reasonable effort to escape his agrarian roots in the land. Dad married my mother when he was 21, and at 22 he left the United States for Peers, Alberta.

Is it there, in Alberta, a barely-bearded hippy, is it there where he learns? Does one of the local denizens, taking pity on his naiveté, show him brusquely one morning how to wield a chainsaw and what words to use while doing so? And then how to sharpen the chain with a file, how to grease whatever needs greasing, how to fall a tree so you don't injure yourself, and how to guard against kickback from the machine when you hit a knothole?

How do I know what these words mean, 35 years and thousands of miles removed from that childhood in the woods and on the plains?

Stand back, Dad shouts. My younger self stops, and looks up. He's cut notches out of either side of the trunk, and now the tree falls under the weight of his hand, hitching momentarily in the twigs of neighbours before splattering to the ground. I still hesitate, knowing, watching him as, with one foot on the trunk, he bucks up the log into lengths that will fit into our woodstove. Only after he's left with the chainsaw do I shuffle over, too hot in my snowsuit, and lug the logs back to the trailer. Even in the odor-muffling winter, I smell sawdust and grease and tannin.

2.

No matter the direction you drive in Oregon, stylized, brown-on-white silhouettes of Captain Meriwether Lewis and Second Lieutenant William Clark point the way. They

stand astride with index finger outstretched on highway signs across the state, because between 1804 and 1806 they (Lewis and Clark) were, apparently, everywhere.

There are other reminders.

Lewis and Clark 'open up the West,' and for their trouble, universities are named in their memory, and counties, too. Settlers, hungry for land, follow in their footsteps, presaging the asphalt and concrete with oxen and axes, and the Oregon Trail is born.

Settlers on both sides of my family are among the first to make this arduous journey. Their reward? The gleaming emerald that is the Willamette Valley: loam and clay, a temperate, Mediterranean climate with mild, wet winters and warm, dry summers.

I now live on land that is part of my great, great grandfather Peter Troyer's original farm.

These settlers, my people, find this beautiful land confoundingly empty of other inhabitants, and choose to believe that this strange emptiness confirms their place in God's plan. *Hallelujah.* But there might be another story.

In *Too Small a Place: The Removal of the Willamette Valley Indians, 1850-1856,* Spores (1993) writes:

> Even before the arrival of the Lewis and Clark expedition in 1803, trade goods and diseases brought by white men had begun to alter Native life in the Willamette Valley. Although whites were trickling into the valley during the 1830s, it was not until the 1840s, that farmers, traders, and missionaries settled the area in appreciable numbers, and by this time the Native population had already been drastically reduced…By the mid-1840s there were far more whites than Natives in the valley, and the latter were too few in number and politically too fragmented to constitute a significant impediment to white settlement. (p. 172)

The names of these fragmented and scattered tribes—the Clackamas, the Molalla, the Callapooya—are, like Lewis and Clark, enshrined in place names, especially the

newly-built conference rooms at universities like Western Oregon University, and government buildings. However, unlike Lewis and Clark (even now, look at how often, I repeat their hallowed names), the people represented by those names are invisible. I, for one, had no idea that Molalla, that pit, that hardscrabble town that has to pass an ordinance to make the inhabitants mow their lawns and trim back their blackberry vines, bore any connection to the original peoples of this place.

3.

Colton, Oregon is nestled in the foothills of the Cascades, on the route from Hubbard to Mt. Hood, by way of Molalla, Estacada and Sandy. These are mean towns, perched at the juncture between the wild mountains and the docile Willamette valley.

Colton is where the local draft board meets in the late 60's and early 70s. The members of the board examine and render verdicts on the consciences of young men, where Yes means voluntary service in the United States, and No means the hellscape, the jungle-death, of Vietnam.

How far is Colton, Oregon from Vietnam? Or rather, given that my father appeared before the board in 1970, how far is Colton, Oregon from the eastern border of Cambodia? That's where many U.S. troops were fighting.

Google maps won't tell me, but if I want to pay a lot of money, I could fly there, and it would take 21 hours.

Jon Yoder, at 17, seven years before he becomes my father, is prepared for his meeting with the board. His two older brothers have already met with the equivalent boards in Indiana, when they were going to college. In addition to their experience, Jon

has his Mennonite words and traditions all ready for grilling, but it turns out that what matters most to these men is his father's father.

You any relation to Edward Z. Yoder?

He was my grandfather.

Perhaps they give him a hard stare or a rude snicker, but there can be no doubt about their response.

They tell him he's a Yes. Yes, he will not go to Vietnam. Yes, he has passed the test. Yes, they don't want to deal with another Pharisee.

As he leaves there is another Yoder headed before the board, a young man who shares a last name but nothing else, and certainly not the magic lineage. This Yoder ends up in the jungle, maybe on the eastern border of Cambodia, packing a gun and other accoutrements of killing. Maybe he kills another. Maybe he's killed.

Look, I don't want to dispute that Dad learned more about what one ought to say—and, of course, believe—about being a pacifist, that he was taught about being a Mennonite and what that means. I'm just saying that in the final analysis of that day, before the draft board in Colton, Oregon, what matters the most is lineage, the same as if he were a petty prince, the same as if he were a merchant's heir.

My distant cousin, Joanne Wolfe (2018), has published a sort of biography of this grandfather (my great grandfather), the renowned pastor, at least in our family, and minister to conscientious objectors interned during World War I. Joanne Wolfe changed her name. It used to be Wolfer. The Wolfers weren't exactly model Mennonites. The biography is called *In the Hollow of God's Hand* and it's about saints—as if Ed and Alice

were St. Cuthbert and St. Hild, only married and fecund. Here's the blurb from a recent book-signing.

> A dramatic panorama of life in a nearly forgotten time. Born into an Amish-Mennonite family in West Liberty, Ohio, in 1881, Edward Z. Yoder survived countless pioneering challenges as he pushed westward across North America at the turn of the 20th century -- from sod busting and coal mining on the North Dakota prairies, to lumbering in Minnesota's rough logging camps, to subsistence farming in Oregon's verdant Willamette Valley. After rejecting his Amish-Mennonite roots, Ed finds himself being chosen by lot to be a Mennonite minister: an unpaid, lifelong position. *In the Hollow of God's Hand* is the true story of one man's faithfulness through unbelievable hardship, and his personal and spiritual triumph over nearly insurmountable adversity. (Fauquier Times, 2018)

Someone lends Dad a copy and he leaves it around for a while. I pick it up, to browse. Edward is handsome, Alice is beautiful, God pays close attention to one little family (which is nice of Him), and the photos Wolfe supplies bear little resemblance to the pictures I've seen in family albums. Maybe I've just been looking at the wrong pictures, rather like my ancestors, who showed up and took land and felt good about it, because they were listening to the wrong story.

When folks get curious about my life in both Canada and the United States, or when I'm trying to be sophisticated and worldly, I tell such curious folks that my family arrived in Canada during the unpleasantries in Vietnam—wry smile on account of the euphemism—because we were conscientious objectors.

That's a type of story, and it's broadly true, but broadly speaking sweeps past the particularities of a life lived, as a monarch sweeps by her subjects, as the settlers sweep into the empty Valley. It sweeps past my dad getting a high lottery number, for one. It

also sweeps past my uncles' legal and illegal emigration to Canada. It sweeps past my uncle Chris's search for land to call his own, and my uncle Eric's summertime restlessness. It sweeps past the desire to leave and start over, elsewhere, and how good that sounds, how liberating.

4.

In the 1980's, during my childhood, unrelenting drought makes the golden forests of fall more intense, more brilliant.

Saskatchewan—or at least, that part of Saskatchewan between the North and South Saskatchewan rivers—is crippled. There isn't enough rain for the wheat, the canola, the barley, or the vegetables that my parents grow and sell at the Farmer's Market in Saskatoon.

Land is so undesirable in the 1980's that just before we move to Oregon in June of 1990, shortly after my 14th birthday, my parents sell their 10 acres for $19,000 CAD, the same price for which they purchased it in 1979.

Sometime in the mid 80's, on one of his trips to Saskatchewan in his laden truck, Grampa Ron—my mother's father—brings a dining table and four chairs. The table is white melamine, with chrome legs. The chairs are blue vinyl with chrome, and very modern. I don't especially like it, but I am relieved that at least it matches. I feel the same way when we finally purchase a complete set of dinnerware. To match is to arrive.

But when we leave Saskatchewan in 1990, so that my parents might return to Oregon, there's no room in the U-Haul trailer or in the back of Dad's truck, so the table—along with many other things: chairs, books, a dog—is given away. Uncle Eric and Aunt Joan take our dining room table.

My parents never return, have never returned to Saskatchewan, in almost 30 years. There are many reasons: young children, jobs, a garden, etc. I return, though. Gran drives to Saskatchewan on her own from Oregon, and the first year or two after our move she takes me with her and I split my time between Uncle Eric's and Rebecca's. Later I fly up fairly regularly.

It irks me that my parents don't return. Years later, when I have a glass of wine too many at dinner, I become distraught about it. I weep for the loss of my childhood home. I tell my parents that I feel like the product of exile, that what I love so much and what is so important to me was their banishment, that I yearn for Saskatchewan; they are just happy that Saskatchewan is done.

5.

Alice Troyer, grand-daughter of Peter Troyer—the man who buys a farm in the almost-empty Willamette Valley—and sainted wife of Edward Z. Yoder, my father's sainted grandfather, is a big woman—not fat, but sturdy. She looks over at her grandchildren, Jon and Lois, playing with marbles and odds and ends. Jon is the apple of her eye and Lois is the sour quince.

Lois starts to build a fence, but she's doing it all wrong, so Alice, as substantial in presence as she is in form, leans over and grabs the oddments.

This is how you build a fence, she grunts. She is not offering to play with them; rather, she is affirming orthodoxy. There are fences outside to keep in livestock, to mark boundaries.

She's issuing a commandment.

Jon looks up, briefly, but then slips back into his imaginary world. Lois is left torn. She's seen her brother build a fence, and she's just changed it a little. She has made it better, stronger or more picturesque. *No,* This *is how you build a fence,* she thinks.

When Alice dies, shortly thereafter, a gust of wildness blows through the old house. A little cousin comes careening down the stairs, wearing Alice's glasses.

6.

There are local enmities.

The town of Canby, Oregon doesn't much like the town of Mollala. There's a rivalry that goes back decades, mostly played out in high school sports and regular trash talking. My family is not exempt.

In the mornings these days[15], before I go to work, my dad reads the local headlines to me, and (anecdotally) the difference between the two towns is reflected in their preferred crimes: Canby favours fraud-related crimes, while Mollala's crimes tend to be more colourful, more violent. There is a sort of historical symmetry for this petty dislike in their nomenclature: If Mollala is named for a people who were decimated by settler diseases, Canby is named for the only United States general killed in the Indian Wars.

I am a third-generation graduate of Canby High School. Both my parents graduated from CHS, and three out of four of my grandparents did as well.

Lois, my father's sister, and Zoe, my mother, meet their freshman year at Canby High School. They are both a little wild, or maybe unconventional is a better word. The

[15] As of February, 2019

Senior boys leave their books around in the hallway, which is against the rules, so one day Lois and Mother take it upon themselves to be law enforcement. They take all the boys' books and spread them out, so when the period is over and the boys come to get their books, nobody knows which book is whose, and they have to race around, bending over and opening up each book to find their own—and the passing period isn't very long. Lois and Mother think this is pretty funny, and it *is* pretty funny, but it's also pretty bold.

The fall of Lois' sophomore year, Zoe comes over to Lois and Jon's house on Whiskey Hill Road for Lois's birthday—October 8. Sandy Yoder, Lois and Jon's dad, is there, pale. My mother catches a glimpse of her future father in law, although she doesn't know it. Sandy dies before they meet again.

For a Christmas party her senior year, Lois has her mom, Martha, sew panties as party tokens for all her guests. It makes Gran a little uncomfortable, but Gran doesn't think too much about it. She makes the panties, just as she went to work and kept her family both before and after the death of her husband.

A Mennonite single mom. Gran, no doubt, could have married again, but she chooses not to. Instead she travels, first to visit her sons and their families in Canada, and then to India, Africa, South America, and a couple of times to Europe, all on Mennonite tours.

7.

When we leave Saskatchewan for Oregon, everything that we don't leave behind is loaded into an old grey Ford truck, and a U-Haul trailer.

One of the pieces of furniture that makes the cut is a small oak dresser that Grampa Ron brought up to Saskatchewan in his little yellow truck. He re-finishes it and

stains it. It's beautiful, very simple in line. It's for me, something that my Granma Nancy spotted, and that Grampa knew he could restore. It has seen a lot of this continent, really, for having made that initial cut, it has been with me ever since, along with a black lacquer jewellery box from Aunt Lois and several small tea cups—also from Grandma Nancy.

When we finally arrive in Oregon we move in with Gran, my dad's mom, into her house on Apperson Street, in Oregon City, the first capitol of Oregon Territory. A few months later, my parents buy the house right next door. There's a problem, though. It only has two bedrooms. If I slept in the same house as my family, I'd have to share a room with my siblings who are both much younger than me. That is intolerable, so I have a room at Gran's.

Gran generously offers to let me completely redecorate the room and make it thoroughly my own.

She sews a drape out of some sari fabric that she brought back from India: white gauze, embellished with sprays of shiny, pink embroidered flowers. I choose a garish pink paint, and an even more garish embossed blue wallpaper with pink roses. It is, as one of my high school friends puts it dryly, a girl's room.

My bedroom window is but 20 feet from my parents' bedroom window, but I still feel an intensified exile: first from Saskatchewan, then from my parents' immediate house.

It is the best solution, of course, and three years later they move to a large house in the country, with bedrooms a-plenty, on the land that was Peter Troyer's, in a house built for Alice Troyer Yoder's sister. Gran has her own room, too, for she lives with us,

just as Alice lived with Lois and Jon on land that I can see today from my bedroom window. My father has moved home, literally, and when he becomes pastor of a Mennonite church in Canby, many of his parishioners are folks he grew up with, relatives even.

Commentary on Part I

Bernasconi (2013) writes, "We find ourselves immersed in violence long before we recognize it as such, if we do at all" (p. 83). Violence and its reverberations are not immediately apparent in part I; there is no physical altercation or profound witness to suffering. Some violence is referred to (Vietnam, the destruction of Indigenous peoples by settler diseases), but it is of the historical kind. In introducing the places and people who figure prominently in the remainder of these narratives, I write about origins: my own, my parents,' the names and histories of places and towns. Violence, as *content*, is not foregrounded. As will become apparent in later threads, these same origins *are* marked by experiences of violence, the legacies of which continue to shape the present. However, my journey to such knowledge was anything but linear, and it is by no means finished. To craft a linear narrative would deny this detour-laden (Grumet, 2006b) experience of writing, as well as distract from the "ordinary" nature of the violence that marks these people and places..

Explicit, unavoidable violence as content tends to effortlessly arrest the attention of the reader, of the writer, rendering us speechless or given to meaningless platitudes, and creating a vacuous distance between oneself and such obvious violence. This is the violence with which we are largely familiar, and in time, we are able to dismiss it and return to "normal" life, as though "normal" life is utterly distinct from violence. I have written these first threads as a deliberate counter to this kind of writing about violence; the violence is there, but not immediately apparent, requiring some vigilance on the part of the reader.

This is true even of that which makes the most obvious claims to being utterly distinct from violence, that is, my father's family's Mennonite pacifism (Thread 3). Pacifists, or those who claim to espouse it, are commonly gifted with non-violent inclinations that extend far beyond one's narrow refusal to believe that war is justified under any circumstances. There is no evidence, for instance, that Mennonites are less likely to be involved in criminal activities. I am reminded, as always, that John Howard Yoder's eminent pacifism (see Chapter 4) blinded many in the Mennonite church to his very real acts of sexual violence towards women.

Part II

8.

While the second Gulf War is tearing up the lives of men, women and children, mostly in Iraq, but also in the United States, I live in Seattle, teach secondary Language Arts, and go to therapy.

I spend nearly six years in weekly therapy during my late 20's and early 30's. The culmination of this therapy is my decision to quit teaching and move back to Montreal to go to graduate school for a "proper" master's degree.

Over the hours and hours of conversation, my therapist and I notice that when we approach something significant, I start to cry without warning. Not every session produces weeping, and sometimes I wonder whether or not she decides how far she's going to push me by how long it's been since I've shed tears.

I imagine her notes: *A has not cried in three sessions. She is deflecting, skirting. There is a hardness right now.*

But one day, surely, she is pleased, if she judges her effectiveness by the frequency of my weeping.

On that day she muses that while we haven't uncovered any traumatic event in the telling of my life, my patterns of interactions suggest to her that I have attachment issues. Did I—was I separated from my parents, or someone else when I was very young, a young baby?

I imagine her notes: *A talked about her infancy today. She was extremely underweight for a full-term baby, only 4 pounds 13 oz. She can't say why. At birth she was placed in an incubator for 8 days, with diurnal visits from her parents. She was*

sickly. She and her parents lived with her father's brother, Chris, and Chris's daughter, Tess, who was essentially A's big sister. A and C were very close, and she used to eat her dinner perched on C's lap. When she was a year and a half old, C and T left, suddenly.

A sobbed and sobbed about this

9.

Oregon is famed for its wet winters, but during 2018, not so much. It's November and the daytime highs climb above 60 degrees, in full sun. A black-eyed susan, confused, sends forth a single bloom. Is this year abridged, with winter edited out?

After the first hard frosts, Dad starts clearing the gardens. He pulls up the dead plants, tills what's left, and burns the refuse that isn't piled on the Carbon Reefs. Carbon Reefs are Uncle Eric's idea, a sort of fanciful—and yet not—approach to dealing with what's dead. Don't burn it, releasing carbon into the atmosphere. Mound it and let it decay naturally. Some carbon reefs are nicer than others. The ones on which the brassica family is piled—the cabbages, broccoli, cauliflower—smell awful.

Some of Uncle Eric's carbon reefs have faces with wide eyes and pronounced noses. The faces remind me of the Roman *genius loci*, and animate his garden with a kind of other-worldly presence. My father refrains from such imaginative forays; his piles are just piles.

As Dad pulls the pepper plants, he gleans a basketful of red jalapenos, bell peppers, and Mad Hatters, named for the *Alice in Wonderland* character. They sit on the porch for a week, for 10 days.

"*What are you going to do with those peppers?"* I ask him.

"Throw them out when they get rotten."

"Then why did you pick them?"

"Because they were too beautiful not to."

That is, indeed, one of the challenges of living among gardens. Produce must be culled. Only, these peppers glow a deepest crimson and they are so abundant.

After a particularly difficult week, during which all the fall's harpies come to scream at me, I make hot sauce.

I fire up the grill and roast the jalapenos and bell peppers. I chop up the thin-skinned mad hatters, along with garlic. I add vinegar, salt, and sugar, and simmer it for 30 minutes. I puree the results into a scarlet sauce, which I pour into pint jars.

I scald the lids and tighten the rings just so. I place each jar on the wire rack inside the canner and bring it to a rolling boil. When the processing time is finished, I lift the rack out of the boiling water and carefully place it—do not jostle it too much, everything is hot and sharp!—on the same green towel that we've used for my entire living memory, Saskatchewan and Oregon, so that the jars might cool away from any draught.

All the jars seal with a satisfying pop.

I'm very proud of my canning skills. I'm further proud of the fact that my canning skills are the result of a mother passing her skills to her daughter, which she, in turn learned from her mother, Nancy. And Nancy learned them from her mother, Leona, and so it continues, mother to daughter, like mitochondrial DNA, like beads on a wire, slipping back through mothers and daughters all the way to Mary Wise. She was Scottish, and arrived in the United States—by way of Ireland—in the 18th century.

There's this man I'm in love with, at one point in my life. He does all sorts of dangerous things: he climbs rocks; he rides motorcycles; he's enamoured of earth-moving equipment. Because I'm in love, I want to impress him with the dangerous things that I do, so I suggest that we can tomatoes together.

We start by scalding the tomatoes to peel them more easily.

He manages one jar, and then finds it all too tedious. I finish the job while he sits at my laptop and reads to me from an article he wrote on labour unions in the Pacific Northwest.

At one point he looks at me, bemused.

"You know," he says. *"Canning isn't dangerous at all."*

I have nothing but boiling water, exploding jars and botulism as warrant for my claim. But I don't advance such a claim, because canning itself isn't the point, of course. I tell him that his writing is really amazing, and he's impressed.

I worry that he's going to leave me, and he does.

10.

I was born in Edmonton, Alberta.

I should be a fan of the Edmonton Oilers hockey team, given my personal connection to the city, as well as the notoriety of the Edmonton Oilers during the 1980's. Saskatchewan doesn't have an NHL team, and during my impressionable childhood, Wayne Gretzky is carving a name for himself on and off the ice. Nevertheless, I am not, nor ever have been, an Oilers fan. Rather, I am a Montreal Canadiens fan.

I first intentionally follow hockey when we move down from Saskatchewan, when I am 14.

I remember the famed Sports Illustrated (both the cover and the content) from the spring of 1993, after the Canadiens' impractical, miraculous Stanley Cup win. I savour, for years to come, wily Jacques Demers' call to measure the curvature of Marty McSorley's stick. (NB: McSorley had been an Oiler. He was Gretzky's protector. I knew him from the Saskatchewan years.) 1993 is also my first full year of high school in the United States. It's possible that my hockey-love emerges from my need to identify with something so very *Canadian*, to distinguish myself even more from being an *American*, like my peers.

Seventeen years later, in 2010, from my home in Seattle I find myself following yet another improbable Habs playoff run. Over the summer, the playoff hero Yaroslav Halak is traded. Carey Price is kept. I discover Hockey Inside Out, a now-defunct online community. I don't participate. I just lurk.

By November, when I learn that I've passed my National Boards[16] with flying colours, I've decided to leave Seattle and return to Montreal, to grad school, to hockey's high altar. When I tell my therapist, with whom I've been working, weekly, for five years, she's not impressed. She's trying to get me married, or at least in a committed relationship where I can work on my deeply rooted discomfort with conflict.

Hockey feels like a drug, the adrenalin-fueled narratives of winning and losing, of slick passes and big hits, of timely or miraculous or lucky saves. I love the narratives. A little battle between good and evil is played out each night on the ice and it's so damn simple.

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[16] National Board Certification is an advanced certification that teachers might pursue, involving both a portfolio as well as a battery of standardized tests. In many states in the United States it confers additional salary.

11.

In September 2016, in Saskatchewan, I sit with Uncle Eric around our former dining room table, the table that my Grampa Ron brought up from Oregon in a little yellow truck, that wouldn't fit into the U-Haul. It's now Eric and Joan's table, and has been for the past 25 years or more. Eric or Joan has found a picture of my Dad and Eric in their twenties, selling vegetables at the Farmer's Market in Saskatoon. Both Dad and Eric are gardeners and have earned a living as gardeners—although Dad has done other things besides: brick mason, pastor of a Mennonite church.

So has Eric. In the long Saskatchewan winters, Eric works with wood and clay.

His forms are wildly imaginative, but always organic, as though they had grown up from deep soil and drooped casually, feeling gravity. They are of the earth, and to the earth they respond. There is a touch of Hieronymus Bosch in his creations, but only Bosch's wild imagination; Bosch's rigid, damned, stick-people do not feel gravity, nor do they belong to this Middle Earth.

We're talking about being Mennonite, and Mennonite beliefs.

"The last time I was with Dad, we got pretty heated, or I did, on the subject of Hell and stuff. I couldn't cough that back," he says.

My dad studied Eric, the way younger brothers do, trying out vicariously—I imagine—the ideas, the postures, the turns of phrase and of collars. My dad remembers Eric and his dad arguing passionately, before the end, before Sandy's early death. I ask Eric about those arguments.

"I think I could have worked it out with him over time," he says. I believe him, after hearing a story about Sandy from my Uncle Chris, about Sandy's softening just prior to his untimely death.

Eric continues, shifting from recollecting the battle about Hell to recollecting the battle about evolution.

"To hell with cramming it into six days, with some authoritarian at the helm!" he says, emphatically. "It's a whole different paradigm, and I rejoice in the first critter."

His shelves of worked wood and clay testify to his enthusiasm for this first critter, and its power and glory, the boundless creativity of creation.

12.

My own adolescent arguments with my father were tame affairs, by comparison. We would start at a distance, and then reduce that distance until we had—through some dialogue—arrived at a place of compromise.

Arguments with my mother were and are entirely different. We do it rarely, but my own passion is met with equal or greater passion, and our love, our deep affection—more than one psychologist has suggested "enmeshment"—contorts itself, demanding reconciliation while also demanding submission, so that to remain in different places is intolerable. So the argument can engulf the household, as various others try to intervene. I always end up sobbing, devastated.

I fear this anger. I fear my desire to hurt, even if it is transitory.

Some time after making the hot sauce out of the leftover Mad Hatter peppers, my parents leave for a short vacation.

Bonkie, a small black and white house cat who regularly joins us at—on—the dinner table, is ill.

In the past six days, I have been to the vet four times. She is suffering.

I message my mother, asking that she come home with Dad, when he returns the next day, so that she can take over and make the decisions, for euthanasia seems increasingly necessary. After all, Bonkie is her cat.

She doesn't get the message, and instead calls me. She's wine-tasting and jolly.

I am insulted and enraged at her good humour. I take it personally, and when she says that she wants Bonkie put down, she makes it clear that she's not returning from vacation early. It is up to me and my brother to take Bonkie in, although she phrases it as having trust in me and Sam to make the best decision for Bonkie.

I hang up on her.

She calls back.

I refuse to talk to her.

All the way to the emergency vet, I plan my rebuke…or rather, my excoriation, something akin to shaming. This fierce desire is nothing less than the desire to hurt, with words.

But Oh! I can hear some prominent pacifist say. But Oh! You are confusing the petty, venal sins of everyday life for that much greater sin that is the organized, state-sanctioned deployment of humans and machines with the purpose of killing other humans. Your myopia renders you irrelevant to any larger discussion, my dear. Have

you learned nothing? Go read some John Paul Lederach[17]. He's a profound teacher, a great scholar.

13.

Ed and Alice (Troyer) Yoder have eight kids who grow to adulthood. Like the children of preachers the world over, the kids inevitably find themselves involved in the church in some capacity. For instance, I taught Sunday School for a brief period of time, although it raised some eyebrows in my father's church because I was not baptised, and I was of an age when I should have been. I'm sure some of Dad's congregants wondered: *Why doesn't he compel her*?

Ed and Alice's eldest son, Paul, takes part in the herding of folks towards this very ceremony, the public commitment of baptism that is so central to Mennonite identity: Ana-(again, from the Greek) Baptist: re-baptizers. After all, it was the meaningfulness of this ceremony (or the lack thereof, in both Protestant and Catholic infant baptism) for which our Mennonite ancestors were willing to be martyred, that baptism should not occur when one is an incapable baby, but when one is a capable (young) adult, who might attest to his or her faith and commitment in full possession of the faculties of reason and reflection.

Edward Z. Yoder, the patriarch, was himself baptised at age 28.

Inevitably, what is free and meaningful becomes less so in the hands of an institution and its keepers. The aforementioned Paul, being himself properly baptised, is given the responsibility to "encourage" the youngsters to the alter, to the river, to the font,

[17] John Paul Lederach is a noted Mennonite peace scholar, now professor Emeritus at Notre Dame University.

or to wherever there is a minister with a cup of water and the authority to bestow a new life in Christ. There are even tent meetings for this sort of thing, and at one of them my uncle Eric tied his shoelaces together, and has to hop out of his pew, when Sandy, his father, gets up and leaves.

Eric, Paul's nephew, is at the church camp where Paul is working.

One night at the camp, Paul gathers Eric and the other boys around the campfire to tell horror stories of the unbaptized, the folks who weren't ready when the death came. Paul tells them, around the inconstant flames, in the deep darkness, that he'd thought about catching a snake and dangling it over the fire to illustrate the torments.

And Eric is thus terrorized to the altar and the minister and the cup of water or the sprinkling or the river.

This is a far cry from reverence for the first critter and wonder at the magnificent world of life and growth and imagination. This is the marshalling of man-made fear to coerce young people. It turns the baptism ceremony itself into a lie.

"It's a terrorist attitude," says Eric, 60 years later. "I curse that typical theological image. I curse it to the depths of what cursing can do. Because it's a misconception of things."

He tells me this story with a certain relish.

"Good. I can go on the record," he says. "I would take back my baptism. It was secured through fear."

14.

Eric leaves for Canada first, going AWOL from the Army base near Denver where he was serving his voluntary service, but his younger brother Chris is not far

behind. Chris, too, drops out of Goshen, and marries, and does his voluntary service by working in a mental institution in California. Unlike Eric, however, he completes it, and emigrates to Canada legally. He does not need asylum. He also doesn't need a lot of Mennonite clap-trap about pacifism.

Chris's views of the war in Vietnam are shaped by the two senators from Oregon, Hatfield and Morse, who are on the vanguard of advocating for the end of the war for political reasons. They publish documents. Chris reads them, this before the internet made such reading accessible.

"My view on Vietnam had nothing to do with Mennonites and not wanting war. I said this is politically wrong, and so I was on the side that was against the war."

This is a little startling to me, to hear this scion of pacifism saying that pacifism is not the motivation for his being against the war. But Chris's world is the world of *realpolitik*. Of Judges and Senators and Presidents and the application of power.

During the summers when he's home from college, he works at a steel fabricating shop a half mile or so from where his parents live.

"I would work the night shift sandblasting steel and I worked with a guy, Robert. I can't remember his last name but he was from our community. He had been over in Vietnam in the war and he looked like he had gone through something," Chris says.

They talk about the war, in between the howl and wail of machinery. One day, around the time that Nixon and his minions are on TV telling the nation how the United States is not bombing Cambodia despite its being a haven for the Viet Cong, Robert loses it. He tells Chris that he flew so many missions over Cambodia, dropping bombs, that he can't even count them.

"And so I realized then that our president was standing up in public and just bald-faced lying to the American people, and I was shocked by that," Chris continues. " I was an Eisenhower patriot. I sang the Marine hymn in first grade and I used to cry when they sang those patriotic songs. When I realized that the president of the United States was lying …some patriotic thing went out of me. I said, 'What a…This isn't America.' It didn't have anything to do about Mennonites and killing or anything. It was just, that was a bad war."

There is a certain clarity here, one that resonates 50 years later.

15.

Beads of light.

The summer of 1991 sees tanks roll in Moscow, and Boris Yeltsin climbs aboard one for the world to see and somehow doesn't end up dead.

Like the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the fall of the Soviet Union further lifts the shadow of nuclear annihilation that has haunted me since my first awareness of its potential. Only, it happens concurrently with the US entering Iraq, its first "hot war" since Vietnam, and so mutes some of the "broad, sunlit uplands" of the moment.

The first Gulf War is broadcast on television, where beads of light and bright pixels from tracers illustrate for the millions of distant viewers the business of missiles and anti-aircraft guns. Dan Rather and Peter Jennings intone on the evening news from some desert—or desert set. General Schwartzkopf uses a pointer when he holds a press conference. I want to be extraordinarily aware of each moment, like the bright beads that stream from anti-missile defense systems, so that I, too, might someday recall the particulars. The energy of this war recalls the fictional BBC production, *Piece of Cake,*

about the Battle of Britain that is broadcast on Masterpiece Theatre at around the same time.

My father returns far too late from a fishing trip and my mother and I are waiting for him. I'm in an anxious frenzy: the fatal beads of light in Iraq, and the handsome fighter pilots in Hornet Squadron during the Battle of Britain, and the worry that my father has died on some river meld into the same nightmare. I recollect—though I am not at all certain that it is true—that when Dad finally arrives he has stuffed the fish that he'd caught—wrapped in ferns—into the pockets of his plaid shirt. They are small fish, a little pointless even.

No one in my immediate family has been to war, not even on my mother's side. While not a Mennonite, my Grampa Ron received a farm deferment during World War II, in order to help his adoptive parents. Farm deferments were given to young men in order to make sure that farms stayed productive, an essential component of the war effort. Grampa Ron is ashamed of this, later.

Even more than the pacifism of my forebears, this utter lack of any sort of empirical knowledge in matters of warfare is rather embarrassing for me, contributing, perhaps, to a certain romantic rendering of war, of righteous violence and what it must feel like to be a part of something so sublime. I develop an early and still extant fascination with World War II, ergo my obsession with *Piece of Cake* and William Shirer's *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, which I read over and over until the covers fell off.

Yet if I am envious, I also sit in judgment.

Several years ago, near the very beginning of my doctoral studies, I have an email exchange with my dad about his commitment to non-violence that has lingered with me persistently during the succeeding years. He tells me a story from his childhood, a story that slips back to a time before his birth. Boone Hostetler, from my dad's home congregation of Zion Mennonite Church, defied Mennonite doctrine and custom and joined the air force during World War II. When he returned, he was ostracized, as is rather customary of Mennonite and Amish communities when a member has broken established rules. Nevertheless—and almost incomprehensibly—Boone continued to come to church each Sunday, and sat in the back pew, though no one would talk with him. My father remembers him as a great, powerful man, hunched over, relegated. Where once he was vibrant—a young man of great promise and aptitude, celebrated for his sporting prowess—he became a pariah. Yet he never stopped coming to church. Though I never met him, I am moved by the ambiguity, the transgressiveness of his presence, and the ambivalence (my father's, mine) contained in invoking his memory. I fancy Boone as ruined by his wartime experience, although that says much more about me than him, given that I am the one construing that he felt remorse for having gone to war.

The second Gulf War is also broadcast live, but national interest is fickle. I follow the news, but I no longer quiver at the history being made. I'm too busy just trying to survive my first year of teaching. I remember the students from that year with particular vividness. I was alert, extraordinarily aware of each moment.

Some years later, one of these students from that first year, so etched in my memory, appears in the doorway to my classroom during 6th period. He is dishevelled.

His eyes are strange, and when I ask him where he's been, he tells me that he's been in Iraq. When I inquire further he gives me the name of some city in Iraq that I recognize, due to its notoriety, as an enclave of death and destruction.

Here is my empirical knowledge of war and violence. He stands before me with hairy eyeballs and a yearning for something that led him to my door at a most inappropriate time. I want him to leave. I want to call security.

Commentary on Part II

Unlike Part I, the threads in Part II generally exist in the recent-past. This is not a child's hazy recollections or the ancestral yarns of parents and grandparents; these are the recollections that lead to now, to this dissertation. The little girl who felt exiled from her Saskatchewan home grew up and became a teacher and a graduate student.

Violence as a subject—but not yet, perhaps, an experience—is more immediate. Recalling the language I used in discussing part I, violence is not just referenced as historical detail and texture, but is enjoyed (hockey), believed in (religion) and imagined (in my fight with my mother). Its effects are witnessed (my student returning from the war in Iraq), from which I write that I turned away. There is an amplification of the "nearness" of violence, where in Part I it was largely historical in scope, not personal.

Still, the implications of these instances of violence might easily be shrugged off as utterly mundane, so common as to be unworthy of narrative attention. Of course, that is my point. In writing the intersection between narratives of violence in my personal and teaching life, I uncover the contradictions in my understandings of what is tolerable and intolerable: the violence in Christianity is intolerable; the violence in entertainment is just fine.

In Thread 12, I write that in my experiences of fury that I have wanted to hurt someone I love (my mother). To admit this is both painful and necessary; in so doing I reject some part of the false narrative that I am somehow separate from the entanglements of violence. From such a realization of entanglement emerges questions regarding responsibility. That, of course, leads to my final thread, about my love of violence as entertainment, as pageantry, and my utter failure to respond to the effects that violence in

war had wrought on a real person, my former student, who came to my door seeking something. I can hear the (very correct) chorus of voices of other teachers and concerned folks pointing out that I had a classroom fully of students, that a strange man appearing on the threshold *ought* to be treated with fear and suspicion. This is all true. But I consider my response to him a failure (which I attempted to convey through the juxtaposition of my glorified notion of violence vs. my reaction to his actual presence) of imagination and compassion, as it has its origin in my romantic notion of soldiering, a notion which he so clearly affronted with the truth of experience.

Part III

16. Teacher Story - Melissa

"Ninth grade was my hustling year," Melissa writes at the beginning of 10th grade, as if decades, not months, have elapsed since then. It's the first major writing assignment of the year, a riff on Sherman Alexie's (1993) short story, "Indian Education." After some pre-writing I have them choose five vignettes from their school life which, at this point, comprises some 10 years, and then narrate them, modelled on Alexie's intense, punchy prose and litanies of education-induced misery.

"Ninth grade was my hustling year." I still remember the pleasure I get from reading this line, followed by her abbreviated, arch description that she was hustling Ramen noodles, keeping a stash in her locker. Making her deals during morning break. I teach at an urban high school and lots of deals happen during morning break.

"Are you serious?" I ask her, naïve and a little bewildered. I even wonder if she is using code, if "ramen noodles" aren't really ramen noodles. By the end of the year I've learned better than to ask her a straight question like that.

"Yeah," she says, blasé with a touch of insolence and a wicked, knowing leer at Andrew, who ducks and turns away to hide his laughter.

Melissa twists and turns, slips from any grasp, laughing backward.

"Don't worry," she tells me. "I'll get it done." She waves me off like a weary mother worn out by a colicky child.

"Melissa, I've given you three days of time in the computer lab to work on this essay. It's now the third day. You've done nothing. Almost all of your classmates are finished."

She lifts her head off her arm and makes a show of looking soberly at all her classmates, now finished with their essay and happily trying to circumvent the school's internet filter so they can get on Facebook. Her eyes rest briefly, narrowly, on the one kid who's still working. Then she looks at me, and lets her body drop, suddenly boneless, back onto the table. This time she hides her face in the crook of her arm.

"What?" I say. "I can't hear you when you're talking to the floor."

She peeks at me, one eye only.

"You know I'll get it done." There's that same exasperated weariness.

"Mel, that's not the point. You've misused this time, and it's really difficult for me to go around telling other students that they have to stay on task when you're over here doing absolutely nothing…"

"It's OK, Yoder. They know me."

She straddles the worlds of school work and school life with stubborn ease, refusing to give quarter: she is both brilliant and a rebel, but without the tedious angst of so many other adolescent rebels. She wears Converse sneakers and a windbreaker. She talks to everyone. Everyone knows she's smart. It's no big deal.

I leave her to her sleeping or day-dreaming or whatever she's doing in the corner, where I've put her so she doesn't actively distract her less-gifted classmates. She likes to tell them, with glorious irony, that they need to get to work just before I'm about to do so.

I've learned with Melissa. I put her in a corner, which she doesn't seem to mind. And she'll turn in a lovely essay, on the due date and not a minute before.

Melissa stipulates the use of her use of class time to a degree I don't allow in any other student. When I become frustrated over the seeming unfairness of Mel doing her thing (which is whatever she wants) in a corner, while I demand that all the other students toe the line, her response is always the same: Yoder, they know me. I'll get it done. And it will be good.

And she always does. And it always is, except for one time when it wasn't and with righteous satisfaction, I tell her that if she'd used her class time wisely her paper would have been much better. She flushes, and snatches the paper from my hand and is absolutely unresponsive for the remainder of class. No one can make her laugh. The next day is a revised essay.

And I accept it.

Cambodia is so far away. A friend of mine returns from a vacation to Southeast Asia—Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam—with tales of the plane ride, and pictures of Angkor Wat, which is impressive enough, but so very *jungle.* He says it's unbelievably humid. I wrinkle my nose, and slurp my Korean noodles. We have something of a tradition: he travels to far flung places, and when he returns from his travels we meet at a Korean restaurant in North Seattle, and he regales me with his tales, and I eat Japchae and drink barley tea.

"And the Khmer Rouge? Did your guides talk about that?" I ask.

"Of course not!" he says. We laugh a little. I didn't expect that they would have. The execution of hundreds of thousands of people does not make appetizing tourist fare.

In order to guess at where Mel comes from, I must resort to my limited knowledge and imagination to travel outside the awesome stone edifices of Angkor Wat, the archaeology, the remnants of myriad homes, each with their own bathing pool to which the medieval Cambodian family retired in the afternoon, when the heat was oppressive, in the shadows of the greatest religious edifice in the world.

I do not understand the complexities of the chaos of Cambodia and its peoples during and after the Vietnam war. The destabilizing forces at work in the region, and the U.S. bombing on its Eastern borders, displaced millions. Perhaps the other Yoder, the one who was sent to Vietnam (when my father wasn't), destroyed some homes. Surely my uncle Chris's co-worker, Robert, at the steel fabricating shop, the one who flew the bombing missions, did.

And so Cambodian refugees poured out, carrying with them scant belongings and profound pain and uncertainty. They persisted, unto Thailand, unto the United States. Eventually the child of one of them is my student, and this young person charms me with her writing, her stubbornness, and the way she flouts the rules.

Commentary on Part III

While in this narrative I explicitly take up teaching, the same question might be posed as I posed for Part I: If this is about violence, where is it? Is it limited to the "distant" violence of Cambodia?

Like my beloved Saskatchewan, it was with great pleasure that I wrote this teacher story. I adored this student (even as I have significantly changed the details of our time together to obscure her actual identity). Indeed, I liked her so much that I relaxed my own classroom policies to accommodate, to nurture her beguiling wilfulness and talent. I am a human being; there are some of my students with whom I have greater rapport than others. This rapport inevitably finds some expression in the classroom. The question for me, and for this story, is whether that is an appropriate use of my power as a teacher.

The opposite of rapport is animosity, and in Part V, I explore a very different relationship with a student, one that raises questions for me regarding my use of power, and the nearness of such use to violence. Thus, this teacher story serves as a kind of foil, even as it points to the very excesses, if you will, that raise ethical questions for me in thinking about the intersections between teaching (language arts) and violence.

In addition, Mel's connection with Cambodia lent itself to this collection of threads. Again, in my writing I am exploring the sense of contiguity (Strong-Wilson, 2015), where Cambodia is where my Uncle Chris's friend was bombing, and where my father likely would have gone had he not received his conscientious objector status.

Had he been drafted, my dad might have died there; other people's fathers and sons did. The most capricious of circumstances saved him: his parentage and a high draft

lottery number. Mel's family might have died while fleeing Cambodia; many did. As the daughter of refugees, Mel will not be permitted to forget the coincidences that made her life possible, and I think most would gravely shake their heads in agreement. Why is it acceptable for me to forget the coincidences, where matters of life, death, and human suffering are concerned, that have made my life possible?

Part IV

17.

During the course of my research I meet with David, my teacher-participant. He knows me slightly outside of the context of this research. He knows a little about my Mennonite background. He's also a pacifist, like me. Hockey, it turns out, is our mutual dirty secret.

"What happens when there's a fight? I feel so conflicted about it!" he asks.

I tell him about the time I went to an Everett Silvertips game with a couple of friends of mine. I'm into the game. A fight breaks out. I leap to my feet, along with the other 1500 or so spectators, gawking, chortling, salivating. Only as I'm on my feet do I remember that these kids in the WHL are young. Some of them are the same age as the kids I teach. I spend my days fearing verbal and physical fights at school, using a sort of psychological missile defense system to protect myself and others, and here I am, *cheering* what in my halls would cause an adrenalin spike, and hours of anger and feeling shaken afterwards.

"I feel so conflicted about it," David says. "I remember going to NHL games with my dad and there would be a fight and my dad would hiss. My dad was super-pacifist and not really into sports, so he'd be going "Boooo" or "SSSSSS." Everyone around us was like, "Yeahhhhh! Get him!" I would just sit there. I knew that Dad's was the CORRECT response, right, but I was super competitive."

He pauses.

"I will go to hockeyfights.com to watch the fights! And I feel…like it's this guilty pleasure, whatever it is. Like I don't really want people to know about it. Like

when you type "H" in my google search bar, hockeyfights.com comes up first. I wish it would be something else, right?"

"Oh, I know, I know," I say, fervently. I do, too.

In March, 2010—March 8, to be precise; I don't even have to look it up—the Boston Bruins' lumbering giant of a defenseman, Zdeno Chara, drives the head and neck of young, brilliant Max Pacioretty of my beloved Habs into a stanchion and cracks his neck. Pacioretty drops to the ice. A wild furore ensues, engulfing the hockey world, including me and David on opposite sides of the continent.

"You know what I did?" he says, amazed at his own passion. "I actually wrote a journalist from Toronto. There was all this commentary, and there was a guy from Toronto, in the *Globe and Mail* or whatever. I wrote him a long response, because he wrote something that I thought was good. I talked about, you know, old men sending young men off to World War I. I was really pissed off at [Don] Cherry. I think the journalist was shocked. He wrote back thanking me for my response, that he normally didn't get well-thought out and well-put comments, that people usually just got mad."

I have to admit that I don't put my anger to such articulate ends. As I tell David, on the day of the fateful game, I decide to take the following day off. That means I can watch the game—which is a much-anticipated continuance of the blood feud between Boston and Montreal—and then get caught up on my grading. Only it doesn't happen that way. Chara hits Pacioretty, and I lose my mind. I wake up way too early the next morning, feeling just desolate, like a loved one has passed, like a dream has died, and then remember that Montreal is three hours ahead of Seattle, and there's probably some

news. There is, and I watch Twitter for the next eight hours before finally propelling myself out the door for a walk.

It's a rare sunny spring day. The daphne is starting to spread out its scented fingers, a sensual delight I usually pause before in sheer wonder. Not today. A hockey player on my favourite team, across the continent, in another country (where, admittedly, I plan to move) has been injured. Torrents of rain and rotting foliage would better suit my mood.

When I get back from my walk, I learn that the Montreal Canadiens have opened up a portal through which messages can be sent to Pacioretty. I want to send him a message. I know it's silly. I'm ashamed. But I send it anyways.

The next day, when I return to the classroom, my neighbour and a Detroit Red Wings fan, says hi. I blurt out my tragedy. He laughs at me, and says, *You didn't send him a message, did you?*

I'm a blusher. I blush. *Of course not!* He knows though. He's my good friend, and he looks out for me, but he still gives me shit about writing to Max Pacioretty.

I am, however, not the first person in my family to do something dumb where hockey is concerned. My great grandmother, Leona, was a hockey fan, and Grampa Ron takes her to a Portland Winterhawks game one time. She gets so worked up—this proper school teacher—that she slams her purse down onto the head of the spectator in front of her, only to be horrified at her own behaviour. Grampa thinks it's funny but also pretty intense.

Grampa Ron is another hockey fan, although it's mostly because sports are his thing. He prefers football and baseball, but when he comes and visits us in Saskatchewan

in the spring, it's Stanley Cup time, and he sits in front of our tiny black and white TV (how could you see the puck??) and smokes and swears at the players and refs. Frankly, it's kind of fun.

Grampa is jolly. He comes with his truck laden, with canned fruit, and toys. One time he brings with him a beautiful oak dresser for me, which he refinishes in the garage. He brings me my first (and only) Barbie doll.

Oh, ZoeAnn, he says, when my mother protests.

I look forward to his visits.

18.

Nancy Palmer, my mother's mother, sits at the dinner table upstairs, cigarette poised, a small, dark woman rooted deeply in her kingdom, an acreage on the outskirts of Canby, Oregon[18]. Through the picture window she can survey the farm that she and Ronald have worked so hard to make thrive. This window—and the house it's part of—is new, only a couple of years old. It's modern. It has five bedrooms, enough for each of the kids to have one. The youngest two boys shared a room for a bit, but her eldest two children are recently married and have moved out, so that's not a problem anymore.

Gone is the old farmhouse with the dining room painted like a scene from the Oregon coast, all greys and browns, made more gray and brown by the dust, and sometimes, dirt. Her eldest child, Zoe, senses that Nancy's not a fan of spending time grubbing out dirty corners. So her eldest, wanting to help her mother, develops an early anathema to things that are not clean.

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[18] Sometime during 1974.

Gone is the crowded summer heat, when the kids would drag mattresses out under the old black walnut tree in order to escape the heat.

It's glorious under that noble tree, in the cool night with bright stars.

It's been a busy few years for Nancy. There's the new house, for sure. But she goes to Portland State University and receives her teaching certificate in Secondary Geography. Her eldest, bright and in high school, helps her with her studies, and it's nice to have a daughter so accomplished (although she mustn't know, lest it go to her head so Nancy reminds her regularly to hide her brains because boys won't like it.) Nancy endures her student teaching. She likes high school kids, and she likes people, but she isn't very good with classroom management. She manages her own five children with threats: *If you don't stop it right now, your father will deal with you when he gets home from work*. Ronald does, with options ranging from yelling to spanking. But you can't always be calling the principal every time some kids get rambunctious.

She tries to get a job at Canby High School, where her children go, where she and Ronald went, but they won't hire her for Geography because she doesn't coach a sport (although Ronald, a star athlete in high school, does a lot of coaching in the community, but he doesn't count). In the grand scheme of things, geography is a man's discipline. So they hire her as a Study Hall teacher instead, but that goes over like a lead balloon. It's Nancy's nightmare, and justifiably so. She has no content to teach; her sole job is to ride herd on a bunch of teenagers who view Study Hall as a free period. It's thankless, and she decides not to return. She gets a job at the Post Office instead.

Nancy is the only one in her family to follow in her mother's footsteps, or almost. Leona Parmenter rode a horse to and from teacher's college in the early 1920's, and

received her certification, and thereafter a job in a small hamlet south of Portland. There are pauses in her teaching at regular junctures for the laying in and births of her 7 children, but when her husband dies in a logging accident (while her youngest is still just a tiny baby), she is the sole breadwinner, and her in-laws don't help.

Nancy's father dies on her birthday. December 6. She's the middle child, younger than her sisters, older than her brothers.

Her mother is descended from puritans and the hard-bitten Scots-Irish who arrive in the new world ready to harry the Indians from pillar to post, from coast to coast (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014). Leona's family does the killing and pillaging all the way across the country, starting in South Carolina and moving west, up the Oregon Trail. She does the paperwork and is admitted to the exclusive Daughters of the American Revolution.

When her husband dies she teaches and holds her family together as best as she can. Her eldest daughter becomes an attorney. Her second eldest a book-keeper. The next daughter is a housewife. And Nancy becomes a teacher, until she isn't one anymore.

Leona has a hard life, and she isn't particularly warm, so maybe it doesn't really occur to Nancy to be particularly warm to her own children. But Leona does enjoy Nancy's eldest daughter quite a bit, and is excited when Zoeann joins the speech and debate team at Canby high.

Oh, Zoeann. She had such promise. It's a good thing Leona isn't alive to see her now.

Sitting now at the dining room table in her new house, Nancy takes a drag on her cigarette and stubs it out. Before her on the table is a new photo album, and some photos

from the weddings of her two eldest children, especially of her eldest. She's putting the album together for Zoeann, who recently emigrated to Canada with her new husband.

He's not the husband Nancy had in mind for her daughter. He dropped out of Harvard, has long hair and a beard, and together they want to live off the land, so Zoeann drops out of Oregon Health Sciences University and they leave the country.

Nancy can't understand it. Here's her daughter, so talented, so smart, who feels so free in the world that she can just drop out of school and leave her family who've worked so hard so that she can have a wild life!

Nancy leafs through the pictures. She did the wedding. Her daughter wasn't interested, not even in the dress. She's already living with Jon, after all. Having a bigger wedding is what Nancy wants. She wants a celebration, for the people in her community, the people among whom Zoe grew up, the people that she's leaving.

It's a nice wedding. Nancy works hard. She is a fine and talented seamstress and sews a beautiful dress for her daughter out of pebbly crepe, with puffed sleeves and a lace ruff. Zoeann looks lovely in it. For herself she sews a modern, dramatic gown. After all, she's only 42! She's not such an old woman.

But as she's putting the pictures together in the album, along with some pictures from her eldest son's wedding from a year later, she stumbles on a photograph of herself and Ronald.

It's shocking and kind of grim, but she doesn't throw it away. Instead, with a twist of the knife, she carefully centers it on a page all by itself, and gives it a caption, in blue, ballpoint pen.

"I didn't realize I was so ugly."

19.

"I didn't ever feel any warmth from her…any love. Any feeling that I was special. I never, ever felt that. And all I remember was when she died, how much it felt like… She'd been living with us and it was, like, her spirit had lifted and there was all this energy and some kid came down wearing her glasses. It was kind of funny. Like, finally it was free. We could wear grandma's glasses. This is fun. We could play with her glasses. I didn't have any remorse," Aunt Lois says. "I didn't really know her very much. That's about all I know." Brusquely, she finishes talking about her grandmother, Alice Troyer Yoder.

Later in our conversation, I ask her about violence, about what gets left out of conversations about violence and nonviolence. Her response remains thought-provoking, a sliver in my thumb, a pebble under my heel.

"The good part of violence [gets left out of conversations]," she says. "I think that we never talk about the important role of violence ….we need to be violent. Violence is very important and it's a bad word. And we need to use it…you have to couch it in a different word and then it's not as explicit, but…" She trails off for a minute.

"And this is kind of why I like religion in a way," she continues. "Sometimes God is a violent God. Sometimes we have to be violent with ourselves. Sometimes I have to say, violently to myself, 'Do it!!' And it's OK! There comes a time when I cannot be nice. I've just got to say, 'Do it!' And I'm being violent. And it's important. So I think, to me violence is like surgery. It's a cut. And sometimes we need to be cut.

Sometimes surgery purges us of nasty things, and I think violence can be very good that way.

I'm not sure that I follow, that I agree. But I do know what she means about just giving oneself a hard shake, of forcing oneself against every fibre of one's being to do what is the right thing to do, or to just finish something. It isn't nice; it isn't kind.

"So I don't think we talk about the positive aspects of violence at all, especially in the Mennonite community. Violence is just bad. We all pretend that we're not, and we shouldn't be. It needs to have a role in our lives and by exploring how we are violent and not saying that it's bad helps us to…. be more skillfully violent. You know, when you cut out a tumour you are being very violent. But sometimes it's really good to cut out a tumour. And be clean with it. We need to bless the procedure. This is what I think. To be skillful with our violence, to bless the cutting, to be skillful cutters."

Bless this cut.

She's not the only Mennonite woman with whom I speak during this project who references an aptitude for cutting. When I sit with the Bible Study Group, the (mostly) Mennonites who'd been meeting for 15 years to go through the Bible chapter by chapter, it is one of the women (who has deep roots in the Zion community) who speaks most clearly about a personal relationship to violence. Prior to her comment, much of the conversation, mostly among the men in the group, dwells largely on physical violence, in the abstract. Then Margaret interrupts.

"I also think that violence is not just what we do to someone…we can be very violent with words. Mennonites are ….we've got it down to an art, against one another."

"Really?!" one of the newer members asks, shocked.

Folks chuckle in wry agreement. They know, especially the ones who grew up in the community. They've experienced it over and over again. I've experienced it, especially in relation to my dad's pastorship.

"I would say that in my years of watching [physical] violence, it doesn't work," Margaret says. "Physical violence does not work. You know, whether it's the big wars or it's spanking your children as hard as you can. It doesn't work. So I can say that. But I could probably really do something, like cut loose on somebody with words. And it shows just an awful lot of violence in my heart."

Bless this cut.

20.

My teacher-participant, David, and I talk about stories we like to teach.

"I do one called 'Greasy Lake' by T.C Boyle," David says. We're on a terrasse, in the shade of trees. I am drinking coffee; there's a slight breeze.

"And in it, there's these two guys, they're 17. It's this time of year, the end of the school and they're just out having a good time and they go up to Greasy Lake because that's where people go to hang out. It's like what I did in [in the place where David grew up]. And they're a little bit high, a little bit drunk, and they see this guy who has this car and they think it's their friend and he's in there with a girl. They think, 'Ha ha…let's flash the lights and go pound on the car.' And then they realize that it's not their friend…. and a greasy looking character with engineering boots—that's how he's described—a greasy looking character with engineering boots gets out and beats them up, but then one of the guys hauls out a tire iron and conks the guy and kills him."

I'm a little shocked. Death by tire iron? That's pretty hard-core. Only, when I later read the story for myself, I discover that the guy is only knocked out, and everyone makes it out alive, if permanently altered. I say "if." Were the characters real life boys, like David and his buddies when they were young, such a story might also emerge as drunken bravado.

"And then the vixen gets out of the car," David continues. "And [the story] says, 'And maybe it was the painted toenails that set us off or maybe it was the …' But they try to rape her. But they don't succeed, because people drive in. Then it goes on. And it's a great story, too. Really good story. Again, I love the way he writes because he has…long sentences and short sentences…lots of similes. It's a real contrast with Carver."

David has been telling me about this Raymond Carver short story, "Popular Mechanic," about a domestic dispute in which a baby is inadvertently (but still gruesomely) killed by its parents who are fighting with one another—about who gets to keep the baby.

"This year we had…like, there's this attempted rape scene in it. Somebody said something and two of the girls got so upset about this scene and about how we were talking about this scene, like, so upset. It was the whole day that we…and we had to debrief the next day because it was…And I think they were right. I think they were right. Because I wasn't sensitive enough because the rape never actually happened, and it was like… it was almost like…that kind of thing happens. Nobody was condoning it. But nobody was…talking about how this almost happened and how awful that was. It was like, 'Well, it's one of the things that happens in the night and in the end the boys go

home and the cars are trashed.' So it really affected them. Really affected these girls…and therefore affected the guys…all of us. And we sort of sat up and went…we have to be more…well, whatever. From now on I'll be more aware of this. But there was an element… and I think it might even be…10 years ago if I taught this story it wouldn't have been, you know, you wouldn't have thought about it the same way. Right? I think it's good."

His last words are delivered with emphasis. He pauses for a bit.

"So, obviously I use a lot of violence, right?" he says. "But find literature that's good that doesn't have [violence in it]."

It's true. Lots of literature that we teach is filled with violence. But, um, not all literature involves the *depth* of violence that these stories do. I don't teach stories that involve ripping a baby apart or beating someone unconscious with a tire iron.

I keep coming back to this conversation. At first I think about it and feel pretty good that *I* didn't teach anything as violent as these stories. I even start to think that maybe my preoccupation with violence is maybe not that significant, certainly not as significant as I think. Maybe I'm respectable after all!

Righteousness, however, is not a good colour on me. During my most recent return to this conversation, I realize that the most startling thing that David is saying, that he's wrestling with, is that this story evokes nostalgia for his youth. Such nostalgia is not for attempted rape and tire-iron battery, but for what is on the periphery: summertime lakes, restless adolescent boys, a dash of electrifying danger. At the same time, the story brings distress to his students. He's realized it, and he's trying to figure out what to do.

21.

Sandy Yoder sits at the dinner table[19]. The house is quiet—the kids and Martha are gone. He has scissors in his hands, and a newspaper.

It was a really nice thing for someone to do. And Sandy is tickled. There, in the announcements section of the Canby Herald is the following:

> *Sanford K. Yoder will come back to Oregon to teach the sixth and seventh grades at Ninety-One [school] next year, after receiving his Bachelor of Science degree from Goshen College in Goshen, Ind., at June 3 commencement exercises. He was one of 188 graduates. A former farmer in the Ninety-One district, he is the son of the Edward Z. Yoders, now living in Millersburg, Ohio.*

It would have made his dad proud, but his dad passed a number of years ago. It's his mom that's in Millersburg. But mostly it's Sandy who basks in this particular, fantastic glory. Gone are the days of the tile factory. Gone are the years of working in—and then taking over—his father's berry patch. Gone are the years of his mom and dad in the shack, out back.

Sandy would wear a suit and tie. A sharp suit; a sharp tie. And there'd be some nice clothes for Martha, to complement his sharp suit and sharp tie. And some fine china, too—something from Meier and Frank in downtown Portland, nothing local. Lenox: cream with a dark pink rose in the center of each plate. They'd make a day of it. Leave the kids with the Gingerichs or the Kropfs. Maybe even dine out—at the best place.

Sandy just wasn't cut out for a manual labour kind of life. He'd watched his father serve—and slave for—the church, for decades, its 'minister for life'. For almost 50

[19] During the early 1960's.

years E.Z. had served without pay, working his small acreage, accepting the largesse of the congregation. A ham here; some fruit there.

Around the time that Sandy completes his teacher's training at Goshen, the home congregation, Zion, hires a new pastor from back east, and for once the church is actually paying. Sandy supports him, thinks he is just what the congregation needs, an educated man and his sophisticated wife.

But don't mistake him: Sandy is Mennonite through and through, the proper and proud scion of his father, who has a name (if no money) in the community, and who named Sandy after an eminent colleague in the struggle to help conscientious objectors in World War I. There is a sort of aristocratic yearning here: if the land, the wealth, the claim is not there, at least the title, the lineage, confers some significance.

After his dad dies, and his mother moves into a home, Sandy sells the family farm, picks up his family, and goes to Goshen.

He has a glorious time at school, glorious enough that it becomes his vision for his own children. Martha supports the family working as a nurse. They live in a little hot box of a trailer. But Sandy is chasing a dream. It is—oddly enough for this son of non-conformists—quite in keeping with the American Dream.

Sandy picks up a pair of scissors and cuts out the announcement. He puts it in a file of important things, a file that endures, and 45 years later I find it, and it makes me wonder about this man I never met.

Oregon has orchards and berry fields and nurseries a-plenty. There is—and has been, for many, many years—an abundance of opportunities for manual labor in the fields. In the 1950's and early 60's, when my parents were children, it was common for

families to hire themselves out to farm-owners as pickers. It was a way to supplement what was never enough, what was never comfortable. It was also a way to teach the virtues of discipline, and hard work, and the difference between a mushy strawberry that melts in your hands before it can be put into a crate (and thus wastes your labour, as you are paid by the pound) and a firm strawberry, one that will pass the row-boss's inspection.

Both my parents' families work in the fields in the summers.

One time Sandy and the kids are out picking strawberries. Sandy won't pick at any local fields near where they live. He goes to Silverton, or to St. Paul, not Canby. He claims to know where all the best fields are, the fields where you can go in and fill up your haleks quickly, and make some quick cash. This contrasts with another approach to picking in the fields, which is to build up a more stable relationship with the farm owners, one based on mutual dependence.

So, they're out in the field picking berries, and there are other families around picking berries, and all of a sudden Sandy starts talking about how they're going to drive up to Seattle to visit the Space Needle, and eat steak and salmon.

Only they aren't. Sandy's just talking big to impress the other pickers. His own children know that nothing of the sort is going to happen.

But another time, when the family is moving into a new house, he doesn't let his kids in on the joke. Sandy tells them that there's a swimming pool in the basement of this new house, and when the family first arrives, the first thing they do is race downstairs. Sandy thinks it's pretty funny, their disappointment. He enjoys the spectacle, the drama.

I carry my grandfather Sandy in me. I know he had a vivid and wild imagination, that students loved being in his class. I trust the appraisals of kids, a sort of nod to the old chestnut that only fools and children speak the truth. I'd like to think that my students feel somewhat the same about me, and I cherish their regard.

I know that my dad loved his father deeply, and lost him far too soon, and carries such loss, such grief with him.

Knowing this, it feels treacherous to say: I cannot understand the story of the swimming pool that wasn't, or the imaginary trip to Seattle, and his delight in the disappointment of others.

Commentary on Part IV

Each of the five threads in Part IV are longer; each is a kind of study in uncertainty, about how one *ought* to respond to violence, or how one admits one's own relationship to violence. Three (Threads 17, 19, and 20) are comprised of material from my research conversations about teaching or about being a Mennonite, that reveal complexity and contradiction where violence is concerned. I did not set out looking for a teacher participant who also identified as a pacifist; however, that David *did* identify as a pacifist made our conversations that much more galvanizing, because he also felt unsettled about using violent stories/stories about violence in the classroom.

The remaining two (threads 18 and 21) are, by contrast, two of the most "fanciful," in the sense that I have an actual artifact (the photo of my maternal grandparents; the announcement of my grandfather Sandy's graduation from the local paper) around which I have imagined some day in their lives. This imaginative exercise was, for both, my own way of exploring my response to two people I consider rather cruel—but who were also beloved by my own parents, and others. I started out writing about the both of them from a distance, the way that I wrote about the white settlement of the Willamette Valley in Thread 2, for instance. This was easiest, because I disapproved of them. It was too easy. By imagining myself in the room, indeed, in their heads, I was able to close some of the distance, to treat each more empathetically, to write towards greater complexity. I discuss the effect of this writing strategy more fully in Chapter 6, especially with regard to my Grandma Nancy.

Recall in Thread 12 that I talk about having felt the desire to hurt—with words. In Thread 19, Margaret, the Bible Study member, acknowledges that she could "cut loose on

somebody with words." In the next part, Part V, which is a teacher story, I narrate some part of this desire.

Finally, these threads (especially 18 and 21) also set out important narrative details to which I return in the final part, Part VI.

Part V

22. Teacher Story - Aaron

On the third day of my first year of teaching, Tim Little picks up his backpack and throws it at the clock in my room. I send him out onto the steps of the portable I'm occupying until my classroom is finished. The rest of my 5th period sophomore language arts class screams.

"He was just playing around!!!"

"Why are you being such a hard ass?"

"Look at Miss Yoder get mad!"

My other classes are going well, on this, the third day of the year. I have two other sophomore language arts classes in addition to this one, and both are into my very first unit, built around a Phillip K. Dick short story called "Human is…" It has a lovely, thought-provoking conclusion where an emotionally abused wife chooses to protect the body-snatching alien inhabiting her husband's body rather than get her 'real' husband back. It's really sweet, gentle. It ends with the wife and husband-alien walking off together, with her asking him what his name really is, and him politely telling her that it would be unpronounceable. Her husband's real personality—presumably his essence but maybe not his humanity—is locked away in a jug on some alien planet that's undergoing environmental catastrophe. I pair it with Ray Bradbury's "There Will Come Soft Rains", about the aftermath of a nuclear catastrophe.

Fifth period has no interest. They tell me it's boring when they bother to consider it at all. They let the photocopies of the story drift to the floor. They yell across the room at one another, asking for answers to the response questions, "Because it's too boring to

read." Then Tim Little throws his backpack at the clock so hard that he breaks it. I send him outside and yell at another student and this student—who is black—accuses me of being racist.

I am utterly skewered, like a fish on a harpoon.

Amidst the maelstrom I pull the student who accused me of racism aside, and assure him that if he really feels that I have acted in an inappropriate manner, I would be happy to talk with him. Because my teacher training—as well as my knowledge of myself and my world—tells me that I do have prejudices, and it horrifies me.

He snickers at me.

After school I tell my department chair, who tells another teacher, who tells the guidance counsellor (and seemingly the whole damn school), and the kid who called me racist is transferred out of my class, and Tim Little is suspended for a day or two. And my department chair, pursing her lips with disappointment, tells me that I just have to shrug when they call me racist. That it happens to all the teachers. That they are just trying to get my goat.

No matter what I do, no matter how original or exciting my curriculum, nor how abject my bribes, this class is hell. They are only interested in one another, in their mutual and pungent responses, feelings and opinions. They don't even hate me; in fact, they routinely compliment me, on my clothes, on how nice I am, on how I don't yell very much. I plead with them to be quiet; they see no need. I am merely an accessory, as vital as a classroom poster or garbage can in their pursuit of one another. The garbage can doesn't need quiet, so why should I?

My other classes aren't like them. My other classes are delightful, and I already feel like we're playing together with language and ideas, rather than *working*.

Vice principal Jill Austin[20] is amazing. She leaves our high school after one year because her gifts as an administrator are abundant and manifest, and she is given her own school.

She is both realistic and profoundly, deeply hopeful—although often very tired.[21]

During one of our first conversations about the challenges of my school, she calmly says that she could go to twelve different lockers and find knives.

So why didn't she?

I can't remember her response, but I'm sure it's pragmatic—or possibly exhausted. In her spare time, when she has energy, she re-upholsters vehicles, having found sewing garments and re-upholstering furniture rather boring. Auto upholstery is the real challenge. We bond over our love of Rowenta irons. When the occasion presents itself I drop by her office, just to chat. I want her to be my mentor.

At the first of the year, after winter break, those of us who are in portable buildings outside while our classrooms are remodelled are moved back into the building. I have a wonderful classroom—one of the largest rooms downstairs, with a window, no less (although near the back of the room). Windows are rather endangered, like the Spotted Owl. I put my desk next to it, so that I can stare out the window onto the soccer

[20] Pseudonym
[21] She passed away shortly after taking her new position.

field, and into the green woods where the kids smoke pot at lunchtime and show up to fifth period with bloodshot eyes, smelling like skunk. I come in one morning in April, on the day I'm supposed to be observed by my principal, and the window has been busted, my computer stolen.

"Miss, do you cry on the way home from teaching?" One of them asks me. There's no sneer; it's a genuine question.

"No. Should I?"

"No. But some teachers do. Some teachers cry in class."

"Well, I guess you all have something yet to accomplish with me, then."

I answer snarkily, but honestly. I don't cry on the way home from school because of 5th period or because of any other class or person. It's many years before I cry because of something that happens in class, and then only while teaching my first university course, because I see an old teaching predilection resurface, one I thought I'd exorcised, and because teaching is so bloody emotional.

My snark catches them a little off guard, and they don't understand what I mean, "still have something to accomplish." They congratulate one another on how frustrated I get when they won't be quiet, but they persist in thinking that I like them, because they like me. In fact, I don't like them. And this is why I don't cry.

Instead of crying, I endure, I avoid. I start making calculations. How much do I fight, and how might I avoid public entanglement with them? I had an excellent and strategic classroom management teacher during my certification who advised us to deal with management one on one with students, wherever possible; it is the rare student who rebels when there are no peers around to impress. So I cede the front of the classroom,

for the most part, biting my tongue, my lip, working one on one with students while chaos swarms around me.

There's a disruptive swarm of girls, about eight or ten. They are all in each other's business, and class time is the best time to discuss it. It doesn't matter if one or more are absent; they run solid interference on my teaching regardless. They complement me on my clothes, and ignore me or shout over me whenever I try to speak to the entire class, and are absolutely sweet one on one, quick to acknowledge that their behaviour is not appropriate, but give no indication that they are willing to alter it.

But Tim Miller. And Aaron Spindle. When they are absent, the classroom is better, noticeably so. Both inject a particular meanness, the sexualized sneer, the ugly taunt—things that I can't just pretend not to see, for fear that the classroom will become a (more) dangerous place. When Tim or Aaron do or say something obnoxious or cruel there is momentary silence, the silence that I myself can never achieve. I have to do something, and publicly.

I know what I would do now. I've done it. It's very effective. If a student forces me into a public confrontation of sorts I merely say, very quietly, "Why do you need so much attention right now, at this moment?" It gets to the heart of 99% of major class disruptions: a student, or several, either want attention focused on them because they are hungry for it, or want attention focused on them because they want to divert attention from something else (like being bad at language arts). When I shared this technique with a fellow teacher during the second year of my PhD Studies, she looked at me, shocked, yet titillated: "I could *never* say that at my school. *Not* that I haven't wanted to. But I would get fired," she simpered.

"I don't use it very often," I say, a little embarrassed at what I thought was such clever strategy. "But sometimes it's necessary, when a student has taken the class hostage." Consider the alternative. It is a necessary violence.

But I don't know how to shame students in their tracks while I'm teaching 5th period during my first year of teaching. I do know, however, that the classroom—and the learning—is much improved when Aaron and/or Tim aren't there, and I hatch a plan.

It is, in short, a plan to remove Aaron and Tim from my classroom for the remainder of the school year—it's late May. I make arrangements with the librarian that the two boys will go to the library and work on their work instead of coming to class. (From this vantage point, 15 years on, I can't remember how I got permission and/or cooperation from the librarian for this little exercise in exile, but I did.) And for about a week, Aaron and Rob are gone: It is heaven. I had been right…without the two of them, and with the shadow of exile hanging in the air, 5th period is more manageable.

Only Aaron wants to come back to class. He doesn't want to be in the library. It's boring.

I say no.

He shows up to the classroom anyway, refusing to leave, claiming that it is his classroom, too, and that he has a right to be there.

I call security and have him removed to the attendance office, and write a referral.

And then Jill Austin calls me down.

Jill is tired a lot of the time, and especially so on this afternoon in late May.

"I just talked with Aaron Spindle. He told me that he's not welcome in your classroom."

"Did he tell you why?" I'm defensive. I know I've taken extreme measures but I feel justified.

"He said that he doesn't do anything that's different from the rest of the class, like Jackie and Natalie."

"Jill, I've charted it. Yes, they are all horrible, but when Aaron and Rob are there, it is especially awful."

"Have you called home?"

"Of course! And I've talked with the counsellors, and countless times with the students. And Jill, nothing works! They are a horrible class. But less horrible when Aaron isn't there. I think it's totally bizarre that he wants to come back to class."

"He feels like something has really changed between you two, that you're targeting him."

"Well, I am targeting him. And Tim. I don't know what he means by 'Things have changed.' They were never good to begin with."

"He doesn't think so.

"Oh, Jill. Oh, god."

"I want you to talk with him. And you can't exclude those boys anymore. "

I leave her office feeling all sorts of frustration, of course. My plan, empirically based and working, has been rubbished by Jill, who I adore, but who I also would have

hoped would understand my rationale, that the few (who weren't learning anything anyway) might justifiably be diverted for the general good.

There is Aaron, sitting on a bench. I sit down next to him. It's after school; the building is largely empty.

"Well…?"

"It didn't used to be this way, Miss Yoder. We used to have fun together."

I churn in a sort of fury. I never had fun. No part of that constant chaos, danger, powerlessness was enjoyable. But Jill is my boss, and she's given me my marching order, so I do a little lying.

"Let's try it, Aaron. Let's try to have fun again. It would be really helpful if you'd stop talking when I ask you to."

"OK, Miss Yoder. I'll try."

The next class he walks in with his arms upraised, like those fake WWE wrestlers after a fake victory. Tim is right behind him, fake-bowing. The class cheers. Aaron looks at me and curls his lip.

"We're back," he sneers. And he means it.

Commentary on Part V

Not so long ago, corporal punishment policies permitted the infliction of physical pain on a student by a teacher—and not just by male teachers. In Charlotte Brontë's (1853/1986) novel, *Villette*, the narrator forces a noncompliant student into a book closet and locks the door. This instance of violence is transformative, even celebrated by the students, and her headmistress, the imperious Madame Beck. Lucy Snowe, the narrator, says, "From that day I ceased to be a nursery-governess, and became an English teacher" (p. 75). While locking a student in a cupboard would now be grounds for dismissal, the sentiment—that a teacher wins respect (and her teacher-hood) not through humanity and kindness, but through strength and cruelty—persists. Think of this oft-repeated nonsense: *Don't smile until November.*

Part V is an account of a time when I tried to lock students in a cupboard—or at least separate them from the rest of the class. I wanted to do it for the same reason as Lucy Snowe: that I might become a teacher, a teacher to whom students listen and pay the complement of being quiet and attentive. In chapter 4, I wrote about the importance of the recognition of others where our capacities are concerned. It is the recognition of others that confirms that we are teachers, for we are thus able to do what teachers are supposed to do. I am also reminded of Dodd's (2009) warning that "[T]o be drawn to violence is … to begin giving up asking whether violence is at bottom just such an illusion; it is to begin to accept, without another word, the pretence that the fact of violence exculpates us from any need to expend more effort in deciding whether or not we are what we claim to be" (p. 138). The times that I have used language harshly while

managing a class have certainly been occasions where I felt my identity as a *good teacher* threatened.

I remain *extremely* ambivalent about this story, in part because I am still—17 years later—angry about the experience. This ambivalence finds expression in the unresolved ending.

Part VI

23.

During October, 1968, Sandy Yoder hangs up the phone, and leans back in his chair. He doesn't feel particularly good. He hasn't for a while, although he would never admit it. He's tired all the time.

It's more than just the annual back-to-teaching exhaustion after a summer doing other things. It's more than these particular fourth-graders' excessive energy. He's made a name for himself as a highly imaginative, playful teacher. Kids want to be in his class. He just doesn't have it for this group. There's a war raging in Vietnam, and his two eldest sons are flung across the continent, and there's disappointment that he has to contend with.

He'd been on the phone with his second son, Chris, to wish him a happy birthday and find out how things were in California. Chris had dropped out of Goshen at the end of his third year, and was doing alternate service in California at a mental institution.

Chris sees Goshen as part of an oppressive, hypocritical system. Sandy sees Goshen as a privilege, a great privilege, one of his greatest accomplishments, something for which he literally sold the family farm. Now both his eldest sons have rejected it, dropping out, scorning it with the scorn they inherited from him.

Eric only had one semester to go, and through their heated arguments Sandy learns that Eric and Chris didn't go to Goshen and find the Great Minds. They went to Goshen and found little Mennonite men who cared mostly about being Mennonite, in saying who was on the inside and who was on the outside. Come to think about it, that's

what a lot of Mennonites do. It's even what his father, E.Z., did over military service, and Zion split in two because of it.

But Eric takes it one step further. He even rejects alternate service, the option for conscientious objectors that Sandy's father, E.Z., had risked life and limb for, and which Sandy himself would have proudly taken during World War II had he not already received a farm deferment. Eric sees Alternate Service as serving the military by another name, and he won't be complicit. His friend and Goshen classmate, Ray Funk, drives onto the army base where Eric is located, and they go for a drive…all the way to the Canadian border. It's summertime. It's a good time for a road trip. They spend a couple of weeks in Ontario trying to sell a Dodge Charger, and then Eric goes west to Saskatchewan, to work for Ray's dad because he can't come back to the United States.

Sandy and Martha get the phone call from the Army saying Eric has gone AWOL. There's an FBI warrant for his arrest. Martha is a worrier under the best of circumstances, but she soldiers on, going to work every day at the hospital. Sandy tries to keep it together, but the world keeps telling him that what he worked so hard for—his family, his suit, his church, his career—is not what he thinks it is, that it's tainted. No matter how hard he resists, not matter how vigorously he argues, doubt creeps in.

On the phone he jokes with Chris about coming down to California for a visit, and sitting cross-legged on the floor with Chris' hippy friends. They share a good, hearty laugh, but Sandy's a little bit serious, too. There's a shift, an opening: the past is stale.

Two days later Sandy suffers a massive heart attack while golfing with his brother. He dies. He leaves behind Martha, and his four children. The youngest two, Jon and Lois, are still in high school.

24.

In the summer of 1994, my mother tells her parents what happened

Nancy gets a letter from her eldest daughter. It's a letter in which her daughter confronts both her parents, but especially her father, about the sexual abuse she suffered as a child at his hands.

Furious, and hurt, Nancy says it's a lie. She calls a family meeting, and her children—now fully grown, with children of their own—show up. Except for Zoeann, of course.

Nancy flourishes the letter, a Virago, the biting North Wind. She reads it aloud, to make sure that everyone understands the particulars.

What do they say?

She's their mom. She's hurting. Some rally with her, brandishing pitchforks.

Some remember the way that Ronald 'dealt' with them, at her behest.

But Zoeann is also their sister. Ironically, if there's one thing that Nancy has impressed upon them all, it's that families help each other out. So a little while later, when it becomes clear that Nancy's colon cancer has metastasized to her liver, and she doesn't have long to live, one of the kids calls Zoeann, a nurse.

Zoeann cares for Nancy until Nancy dies.

There is no touching deathbed scene, no redemption.

But my mother is alive. She has been through fire.

25.

I don't remember exactly how I first stumble on Sherman Alexie's (1993) short story collection, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. It might be through my partnership with Seattle Arts and Lectures' Writers in the Schools program, through which a practising writer partners with a classroom teacher to co-teach craft lessons. I work with the program for two years. I attend their workshops. I think it's through one of those workshops that I encounter Alexie—his writings, not his person. He's a local writer, after all. At one point I even lobby SAL to invite him to speak at my high school. Kids like his work. I think he's bitter-funny, and fun to teach, and I think I'm using his work to teach about social justice. Only he declines to come visit. I'm a little hurt.

I develop a beginning of the year ritual around one of the stories from this collection. The story is called "Indian Education." It follows an Indigenous kid from Eastern Washington through elementary and high school, on and off the reservation. The schools change, but the experience of education is the same: education wounds, it cripples, it disappoints. The tone of the story is dark, cynical, poetic. It works well with kids, and when I ask them to write their own vignettes about their educational experiences, it's usually their best writing of the year.

What's odd, though, is that when I teach it to my kids I feel like I somehow know this story—not that I've experienced what he experiences, and I'm certainly not Indigenous—but it just feels close to home. I don't spend time reflecting on this. I just know that I like to teach it, that it works well with kids, that it makes me feel like I'm teaching social justice, whatever that means.

One of my recent students says that I have had the privilege of forgetting. That's about right. In amidst ritual re-visitations of exile from my childhood home, it never occurs to me to remember that there were other people, neighbours even, who were and are still in the Duck Lake community. And children, who are now adults. Children—Indigenous children, like Alexie's character—who went to school on and off the reserve, who were the majority of my classmates during elementary and middle school.

It should then be no surprise—given that I had forgotten their existence—that I forget their names. When I look at elementary school class pictures on a visit to Oregon while in graduate school, I can only recall the names of the six or so white kids in my class. It's not as if Stobart Elementary School in Duck Lake, Saskatchewan, was a big school.

One day an older couple came to our farm in Saskatchewan—this would have been in the early to mid 1980's. They explain to my dad that they want to look for a Manitoba maple tree on which they'd carved their initials when they were young and in love.

I learn, suddenly, that our farm has a history that predates our arrival. But how can it? It is *our* home, and with the narcissism of a child, I assumed that it has always been intended as such.

When my parents arrive in Saskatchewan in 1978, they are assisted—taken in, even—by the same Tiefengrund Mennonite community from which Ray Funk comes, and remember, Ray Funk is Eric's buddy, with whom Eric absconds to Canada. My parents buy the property from a member of the Tiefengrund Mennonite church. It's

beautiful land, 10 acres of both cleared and forested land, with a slough in the back. The house is set on a hill, and has granaries, outbuildings, and a barn where we raise goats.

It's about two miles north of the hamlet of Carlton. Carlton has a post office, so our address is Box 51, Carlton, SOK OWO, but it's a dying—some would say, already dead—town. It died when CN Rail stopped coming to collect grain.

Our farm, with its willows and poplars that are golden Lothlorien in the fall, is beautiful, but I have a long, long bus ride each morning and afternoon to the town of Duck Lake. Our home is just on the border between two school districts. Had I lived a mile to the south I'd have gone to Laird schools, with the other Mennonite children. But our house is on the other side of highway 212, and so I go to school with the Cree kids from the Beardy's-Okemasis reserve, and French kids.

School is hard for me. Or, more particularly, making friends at school is hard for me. I'm an awkward child, and everyone else is related to one another, it seems.

It is ever a relief to get on the bus at 3:30 and travel west. I am one of the last kids to get off the bus. At the turn-off onto the gravel road that passes by our house, I get up and go to the front of the bus, and watch the red-winged blackbirds.

Canadian soldiers, retreating to Fort Carlton from the Battle of Duck Lake during the 1885 Rebellion, possibly crossed over our (not-yet) driveway on their way, and retracing their steps every afternoon, I cannot wait to find such safety and comfort.

Other people came to our farm, too.

A few years ago I tell my dad what I've discovered about our farm: It was originally part of the reserve that belonged to the Stoney Knoll/Young Chippewayan Band, so designated by Treaty 6 in 1876. Unlike the Clackamas, the Mollala and the

Callapooya tribes in Oregon, there were sufficient Young Chippewayan survivors of settler diseases to be represented. Then there was famine, brought on by dwindling buffalo herds; then there was the 1885 Louis Riel Rebellion; then the government took the land back because they couldn't find the Young Chippewayans (and they probably didn't try too hard). Shortly thereafter the government gave it to Mennonites. With a sort of cruel irony, these lands set aside for Mennonites were also referred to as reserves, and Mennonites were adamant about patrolling their borders, using available legal methods to displace any interlopers (Ens, 1994).

One summer evening when I'm home from Montreal, and we're sitting on the deck with the remains of dinner, I ask my dad if he knew about any of this when we lived on our farm.

He pauses.

Well, there was a time when a carload of young Indian men came to the house. Zoe was at work in Rosthern at the Mennonite Nursing Home. Dad was home alone with me when this carload of young Indigenous men pulled in the driveway. When Dad came out to find out what was up, they told him that they'd come to take back their land.

There was visible tension between white and Indigenous folks in the 1970's.[22] Ours wasn't the only farm to which groups of Indigenous folks came, with the same message. There were more open conflicts, with abundant anger and fear.

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[22] For an account of the history as well as the work of restoration that is ongoing between the Mennonite and Lutheran communities (who received land that had been taken away from the Young Chippewayans), and surviving members of the Young Chippewayans, see the film, *Reserve 107* (Leitch, 2016).

At the time Dad quickly made the mental calculation that what was in the best interests of him and his daughter was to offer the men a beer, and take a walk around the place, and talk about plants.

So they did, and then the men left, and nobody came back.

There are times, still, when I start walking up the gravel road from the junction with highway 212, walking in my mind to calm my spirit—walking, always walking, home. I pass the sloughs and willows and red-winged blackbirds, the Regier granaries. I pass the ditch that filled with pasque flowers in the spring. Finally, I arrive at our turn, and I see the gardens that my parents wrought out of drought-ridden soil. Even now, as I write this 30 years later, the vision brings tears to my eyes.

Surely such grief accompanies those for whom the memories of this land, these sloughs and blackbirds and pasque flowers, run deeper, far deeper than the years of my childhood. Only I imagine that such grief is sharpened immeasurably by the memory that such loss is the result of lies and broken treaties.

Still, the red-winged blackbirds swoop and gambol, reveling in the clear blue sky.

Commentary on Part VI

On reading these narratives, one of my participants wrote that Thread 24, where I talk about my mother and grandfather, reveals the original instance of violence that underpins the other threads. It is true that Thread 24 contains the most obvious, the most proximate story of violence between two people connected with me. My maternal grandfather's betrayal of my mother's trust and body is profound, but even more profound is my mother's response, and the persistence of relationship between the two of them while he still lived. Nevertheless, I would disagree that Thread 24 is the most *important* instance of violence; indeed, I would take issue with the notion of "instance," for such language suggests that we are otherwise separate from violence. If there is one thing that I have sought to do in the preceding narratives, it is to problematize my distance from violence. There need not be an "original sin" that "poisons" my world and turns my gaze towards violence. Indeed, this mode of thinking suggests that wrestling with the implications of living in a world fraught with violence is pathological, arising from some injury. Instead, I embrace the words of Italo Calvino (1974), who writes, "The inferno of the living is not something that will be; if there is one, it is what is already here, the inferno where we live every day, that we form by being together" (p. 165).

I began these narratives in Saskatchewan (Part I, Thread 1), wondering how my father learned to cut down trees for firewood. I close these narratives with how I learned the history of violence attached to the land that we owned. Learning—education—does not proceed in a linear manner, but instead emerges in fits and starts, when one is open, when one is curious, when one encounters others. In the present day, in Oregon, I

continue to enjoy the fruits of white settler culture, and the ownership of land that was once the homelands of the Callapooya, the Clackamas, the Molalla. What responsibilities accompany this inheritance, an inheritance that is very much part of the inferno, given its origins in injustice, violence and suffering? It is an inheritance that I have accepted and from which I continue to profit.

There is no easy answer to this question. At very least I am responsible for remembering this part of my past, and I am responsible for remaining attentive to ways that I can support Indigenous people without making such actions about me, about assuaging *my* conscience. Still, that is not enough, and I remain unsettled, as I should. For too long I have been able to forget. As my student pointed out, I am not owed that privilege.

Chapter 6: What is Not Inferno

> The inferno of the living is not something that will be; if there is one, it is what is already here, the inferno where we live every day, that we form by being together. There are two ways to escape suffering it. The first is easy for many: accept the inferno and become such a part of it that you can no longer see it. The second is risky, and demands constant vigilance and apprehension: seek and learn to recognize who and what, in the midst of the inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space. (Calvino, 1974, p. 165)

I. Introduction

My purpose in the preceding chapter was not to produce great literature, but rather, to "see myself seeing" (Grumet, 2006b, p. 112). I engaged in writing, revising, and writing again in order to challenge the *meanings that I give* to my own stories, the stories that form part of my narrative identity (Ricoeur, 1988, 1992, 2005). Pinar (2011) writes, "Such understanding, achieved by working through history and lived experience, can help us reconstruct our own subjective and social lives" (p. 2). This "subjective and social reconstruction" (p. 2) is in service of a more just and intentional society, and seems very much in keeping with Calvino's (1974) injunction to "seek and learn to recognize who and what, in the midst of the inferno, are not inferno" (p. 165). Such work begins with one's own understandings of the world. What follows in this chapter are reflections on the connections and tensions that would otherwise have remained obscured, hidden from, or denied by from my consciousness in the humdrum of daily life. What emerges, I hope, is some understandings of what, moving forward, is *not inferno*.

A. Making the familiar strange: Complicating family stories of/about violence

At the beginning of this research project, I was aware of two "canonical" family narratives, one public and one private. The public story was about my father's family's

virtuous pacifism; the private story was my grandfather's abuse of my mother. Challenging my received understanding of these two narratives was essential, for in revising these narratives, my own understanding of who I was in relationship to violence was made less certain, and became oriented more towards compassion and multiplicity, rather than judgement and dogma.

Perhaps the best example of this type of "complication" is the story of why my uncle Eric chose to go AWOL from the army base, alluded to in Thread 3 and further narrated in Thread 23. I write:

> But Eric takes it one step further. He even rejects alternate service, the option for conscientious objectors that Sandy's father, E.Z., had risked life and limb for, and which Sandy himself would have proudly taken during World War II had he not already received a farm deferment. Eric sees Alternate Service as serving the military by another name, and he won't be complicit. His friend and Goshen classmate, Ray Funk, drives onto the army base where Eric is located, and they go for a drive…all the way to the Canadian border. It's summertime. It's a good time for a road trip. They spend a couple weeks in Ontario trying to sell a Dodge Charger, and then Eric goes west to Saskatchewan, to work for Ray's dad because he can't come back to the United States.

I've known a version of this story for as long as I can remember. Prior to my conversation with Eric, I assumed Eric's motivation for leaving the Army base, for going AWOL, as being this monolithic, ponderous decision, the product of Kafka-esque internal chaos, with late nights and sweaty brows, in response to the weight of past conscientious objectors' decisions. Certainly there was conflict, and certainly there was critical thinking about what it really meant to be a conscientious objector if one was still serving the military, if only as a kind of lab rat in a medical facility. But Uncle Eric also talked about his choice in terms of it being summertime, and Ray and his other buddies had graduated and were free, and Eric wasn't. He wanted to be somewhere else!

It is the capacity to act on multiple motivations that makes the action that is taken more poignant, by resisting a simple story, a simple judgement, about any given action, but especially where violence is concerned. To me, in the present, the causal story of Eric going AWOL because of a principled rejection of violence (which it certainly was!) that was passed down to him by his Mennonite forebears makes his decision seem inevitable, and short-changes the actual difficulty involved, the risks that were taken, and the consequences for him and his family.

In a similar vein, my Uncle Chris' account of why he left for Canada is challenging, in its flat-out rejection of the "pacifist Mennonite" narrative: He says, "My view on Vietnam had nothing to do with Mennonites and not wanting war. I said this is politically wrong, and so I was on the side that was against the war" (Thread 14). The choices that my uncles made, in response to the Vietnam war, whether born of summertime restlessness or political disdain, had a profound effect on the choices that my parents made, and subsequently on my life. Finding out that they made these choices for a variety of reasons, some contradictory, frees me from the explanation that I am who I am because of some Mennonite dogma, the controlling discourse of others.

My narratives are replete with conflict and/or uncertainty between (usually) parents and children: Eric and Chris and Sandy, their dad; Lois and her grandmother; my mother and I; and my grandmother and I. It is this last one that is the most complex, although Lois' comments about her grandmother (repeated twice) provide a parallel. Lois says, of her grandmother, Alice: "I didn't ever feel any warmth from her…any love. Any feeling that I was special. I never, ever felt that" (Thread 19). In writing about

Alice/Lois I am also evoking my relationship with my grandma Nancy, about whom I could say the same, that I never felt warmth from her.

In early renderings of Nancy's story—necessary background for understanding my mother's origins, and mine—I was quite bitter, quite cutting about her. Not only did I never feel any particular affection from her, but I carry a fair bit of anger towards her for the way in which she treated my mother after my mother confronted her parents about the abuse she experienced (see Thread 24), that even though my mother cared for Nancy in the days before her death, Nancy could not bring herself to reconcile with my mother. It was only after working with an artefact—the wedding album that she assembled for my parents, which included the note, hand-written, that she didn't realize she was so ugly—that I could begin to imagine her as a complicated person, rather than a villain (Thread 18). Indeed, she and I were/are united in loving my Grampa Ron. Writing this about my grandmother allowed me to recognize her as a fragile being, a being who on a given day felt such disgust towards herself that she memorialized it. Recognition is not the same as "understanding." I do desire to turn my grandmother into a saint or "reform" her memory; I only wish to make it more difficult to forget that she is part of who I am.

This dissertation has a life outside of scholarship; writing about my grandmother, and having my mother read what I had written, has freed me to be curious about Nancy. My mother does not speak about her with bitterness, and I find myself asking my mother, as I did today, about Nancy's preferences: Did she like grapefruit? I love grapefruit, but can't eat them because of the cholesterol medication that I take. Nancy loved grapefruit, and like me, she had high cholesterol.

In the introduction to chapter 5, I suggested that what is *not violent* is to *continue to make the effort* to "decid[e] whether or not we are what we claim to be" (Dodd, 2009, p. 138). This was a very real question with regard to writing about Grandma Nancy: Am I so sure of who am I that I can narratively condemn her? The question of "who" and its relationship with narrative invites a return to Ricoeur's (1992, 2005) formulation of a fragile-yet-persisting narrative identity. Does this understanding of identity admit such certainty?

No. So once more, I look upon what I thought I knew with less familiarity, with something of the "non-commitment" (Bauman, 1991, p. 79) of the stranger.

And what of my grandfather Ron, the one person in my narratives who commits violence, unequivocally? I did not have to write towards a place of ambivalence with him. The earnest fondness with which I write about him prior to Thread 24 is very real, as is the very real discomfort I continue to feel towards his memory. These are two conflicting narratives that cannot be reduced. In this regard, I have my mother to thank. Indeed, she provides my original inspiration for living with ambivalence. While she has never shied away from the abuse she suffered from him, she also does not shy away from talking about him in other ways: his warmth, his work ethic, his sense of humor and energy. She has made it impossible to tell only one story about him. In my writing—as in my life—he is neither a monster, nor innocent. There are, however, many (narrative) possibilities beyond just those two, that begin to approach who he was and what he did.

B. Complicating violence in classroom stories

In the introduction (Chapter One) to this dissertation, I wrote that I used to joke that my classroom (my former classroom, not my current classroom) was the "sex and

violence" classroom, in terms of my choice of texts. When I returned to the secondary language arts classroom in 2017, the first text that I selected to teach my grade 11's was Hersey's (1946) *Hiroshima,* which follows the lives of six witnesses to the atom bomb deployed by the United States. I had been out of the classroom for six years, and while I didn't really think that I had forgotten how to teach—or how to be a teacher—I wasn't completely sure. So I reached for what was familiar, what I knew in terms of *being* a teacher. While I hadn't yet written the narratives in the foregoing chapter, and my theoretical and methodological commitments were still a little uncertain, I nevertheless knew, even in the moment, that I was *returning* to what had once been: comfort in the 'shock and awe' of violence as a subject matter. I am reminded of the story of Hansel and Gretel and the shiny white pebbles: it might be dark, but so long as I could keep tracing the pebbles I could find my way "home." My thought was on the pebbles, on the day to day, on surviving as I found my way again.

The most intensive work of this dissertation has unfolded in unison with this becoming life in a language arts classroom. My writing and research have reverberated in and through my actions and choices as a teacher. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that my ideas have been *tested,* in as much as that word can mean taking abstractions for a ride in the practical realm of curriculum choices. I would not now teach *Hiroshima* the same way that I did in that fall of 2017. I look upon my desire to once again "teach about violence" to be a reflex—and not self-reflexive. Indeed, I have not chosen to teach this text in the succeeding two years, though I cannot—and should not—say that I will never teach it again. What lies in between the teacher I was three years ago, and the teacher I

am today is this scholarly effort spent wrestling with my relationship to stories of violence.

Working with violence as a subject permits the teacher to tell a fairly simple story wherein the teacher and students can be united in regarding what is "wrong" or "bad" as if it were a frog on the dissecting table of a biology classroom. That a teacher and students might see such violence in wildly different terms, as did David, my teacher-participant, and his students, in reading T.C. Boyle's "Greasy Lake" (in which there is an attempted rape; see Thread 20) rips apart this seeming simplicity, and lays bare the fundamental asymmetry between teacher and student, an asymmetry predicated on the difference between the teacher who (mostly) acts, and students who (mostly) undergo (Ricoeur, 2005). Our discipline (language arts) is further unique in that we traffic in stories in a way that no other discipline does so explicitly, although history—obviously—comes close. If teaching language arts is really teaching about ethics, as my debate students and my own intuition tells me is correct, then ethics is "in the air," so to speak, and the practices of the teacher relative to her students, and vice versa, become further heightened in their significance.

David responds to his students' protests about "Greasy Lake" with reflection, realizing that his love for the story is also about his own adolescence. This was, I think, a rather shocking reflection for him, because in our next conversation he expressed the desire to not teach stories that had violence in them but noted that it was difficult to find such texts, especially within the canon of high school English/Language Arts. In that same conversation, held before he returned to school in the fall, David was explicit about what our conversations about violence had made him think about in terms of curriculum

texts, but also the acting/undergoing element of the relationship between teachers and students:

> Probably what I will do this year with the AP [Advanced Placement/Grade 11] kids—that's where I do the short story about the baby being pulled apart—is I'm going to maybe be explicit with them at the beginning of the year about this. Like, "Let's look at this as we go through, because there is a lot of violence everywhere."[…]And that way they can gage their own reactions. It will be an exploration, so they're not just getting assaulted with stuff, because the teacher gives them stuff. (David, Conversation #2, August, 2016)

His use of the word "assaulted" is particularly noteworthy, evocative as it is of this asymmetry between teachers and students, and is reflective of his doubts about how he worked with (narratives of) violence in the past. His reframing of his curriculum as an "exploration" in which students can "gage their own reactions" points to a more complicated "quest of narrative," one that acknowledges that others (his students) might/will tell the story differently, as had begun to happen with "Greasy Lake." However, it is important to acknowledge that he didn't have anything "figured out." As of our last conversation, in January of 2017, he had not chosen to teach this story.

Indeed, when I write about David, I choose to write about uncertainty. He provides a necessary kind of ethos in my writing: Here is another teacher, an experienced teacher, who is likewise troubled, when he stops and thinks about it (in our conversations, in his teaching life). My concerns regarding the (perhaps violent) use of violent texts were/are shared by another.

If David—as narrated—provides a kind of ballast, a necessary second teacher voice amidst the Mennonites—then the choices I made in terms of narrating my own teaching life were made to rock the boat, to *provoke* uncertainty, in myself, in my readers.

My stories of Mel and Aaron are companion pieces, even as one is about a student I really liked a lot, and the other about one towards whom I have a kind of lingering enmity.

Mel's story first suggested itself to me because of the resonance or proximity to violence within other elements of my narratives, namely her being the child of refugees from Cambodia, who were made refugees as a direct result of American actions in Vietnam and Southeast Asia. My Uncle Chris recalls that his buddy at the steel factory made bombing runs over Cambodia (Thread 14). Yet the actual story that I tell about Mel and me is one in which I contravene my own classroom policies because Mel is charming and—most importantly—a beautiful writer. I have written elsewhere (Yoder & Strong-Wilson, 2016) about how aesthetic desire (my own, for beautiful student writing) can animate my teaching and personal investment in a student. Mel, however, is conscious of the influence she has:

> Melissa stipulates the use of her use of class time to a degree I don't allow in any other student. When I become frustrated over the seeming unfairness of Mel doing her thing (which is whatever she wants) in a corner, while I demand that all the other students toe the line, her response is always the same: Yoder, they know me. I'll get it done. And it will be good. (Thread 16)

Despite my frustrations, I never want to shame her. Quite the contrary. I took delight in her brashness. I took immense delight in writing about her, even as I changed elements in order to obscure identifying details.

Before discussing Aaron's story, I wish to make a detour through Thread 12 wherein I talk about my mother and euthanizing her cat. I write:

> All the way to the emergency vet, I plan my rebuke…or rather, my excoriation, something akin to shaming. This fierce desire is nothing less than the desire to hurt, with words.

It was difficult to write these words, to articulate what—after I'd calmed down—I categorically did not want, and yet what, in the moment, animated my every fiber. And yet to not write about this instance, or another like it, would have been to unconscionably avoid my capability to hurt others, indeed, to do violence to others, through my words and deeds. I'm reminded, as well, of Margaret, the Bible Study member who, amidst the various abstract discussions of violence and non-violence quietly admits that while she thinks that physical violence doesn't work, she "could probably really do something, like cut loose on somebody with words. And it shows just an awful lot of violence in my heart" (Thread 19).

In our relationships with others, it is impossible to avoid causing some pain and hurt feelings, especially in those we love, and enduring the same, for the simple reason that we experience conflicting feelings, perceptions and expectations. As Ricoeur (2005) notes, and as I have repeated throughout this chapter, we act and suffer. That said, the ethical problems created by our roles in these conflicts are amplified by various factors such as magnitude and privilege. When I was young, a friend of the family became highly proficient in martial arts, and yet, at the apex of training, began to experience devastating anxiety over the implications of being able to deliver serious bodily harm with the use of one's limbs. Realizing the capability was horrifying; equivalent, I imagine, to walking around with a loaded gun concealed in one's purse. The actions we take as teachers are amplified by the power that we wield.

Aaron's class was—and still is—the worst class that I have ever taught. I certainly had some difficult kids in other classes, but never again have I had a coalescence of kids who were so little interested in the teacher. And therein lies the rub. In my first year of teaching I was, first and foremost, struggling to be a teacher, to be *recognized* as a teacher, to see my "teacherness" reflected back in and through the words and actions of my students, for I was uncertain about it myself. Writing the story of Aaron gives me a container, like Fowler's (2002) *temenos*, for reflecting on such difficulties, for considering the past in the present, for while I am now much more skilled in managing unruly kids and am far more confident in my identity as a teacher, my fear of a classroom run by students (in spite of me as the teacher) is something close to existential. The story ends ambivalently, with the triumphant return of the boys, which was unbearable, but ultimately borne. Their triumph is not without a certain poetic justice. As Mel's story reveals, I am not always fair in the application of power and enforcement of rules, and that is worth remembering. Over and above anything else, these two narratives represent my continued efforts to determine, to decide whether I am the person I "claim to be" (Dodd, 2009), in relationship to violence. It is both unsettling and necessary to acknowledge that these efforts are ongoing.

C. The last thread that I wrote

In juxtaposing the narratives so as to invite connections and coincidences to emerge (Strong-Wilson, 2015), and in narrating ambivalence, I try to avoid the certainty of some dominant, over-arching narrative about violence, as the very quest for certainty can easily elide the essential fragility of being a human being. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, this inquiry has been, at its core, descriptive; the narratives of/about violence that I

carry, as part of my narrative identity, and that I encounter in my classroom, are contradictory and unsettling. This is best exemplified in Thread 15, which was the last thread that I wrote, even as it is not the last thread in the chapter. It follows a dream-like progression from the television representations of the First Gulf War, and the fictional account of World War II pilots, through the anxiety over my father's return, to what is, finally, clear (and frankly distressing): the appearance of my former student at my classroom door, inappropriate and vulnerable, to tell me that he'd been in Iraq. Here, at the threshold of my classroom door stood a witness; I turned away.

I was teaching.

The pace at which life unfolds in the classroom means that such an utterance—I was teaching—can become an excuse for inattentions, to the stories—our own and others—in which we are immured. Writing these narratives has provided an opportunity to recover the significance of such difficult moments.

D. What is not Inferno

While the image of the red-winged blackbirds, with which I end these 25 threads, preceded my discovery of Calvino's (1974) *The Invisible City* (by way of Bauman, 2005), it has since taken on significance as a starting point for "recogniz[ing] who and what, in the midst of the inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space" (p. 165). The legacies of violence persist; our connections to violence are intimate and often invisible. I am the daughter of settlers, and in as much as I remain tied to the land they claimed and/or bought, I am implicated in the violence that was done and continues to find expression in national and local responses, policies and attitudes towards the Indigenous peoples of North America. This is inferno, and I am a part of it.

The red-winged blackbirds are not. Beloved by peoples across the prairies (and beyond), they have become a sort of talisman for me, of the reality of what is not inferno, of the importance of attempting to do as Calvino suggests: give space.

Calvino's injunction is a fitting place with which to conclude this chapter, and indeed, this dissertation. Where, in this expression of my preoccupation with narratives of violence has the "not inferno" emerged?

In working with me, in so generously sharing their stories and reading/reviewing my writing, my family members have repeatedly given me a gift, akin to the gift with which Ricoeur (2005) illuminates the potential of mutual recognition. The most difficult part of this dissertation was writing the narratives, working, as I was, with the subject of violence and with the stories of living people, towards whom I was responsible and ethically-bound. I wrote with my family members in mind, and as such it was a different kind of narrative writing than I had previously done. I wished to represent them truthfully, to avoid misrecognition. Receiving their approbation for what I had written, at the beginning of December, 2019, created the conditions to finally bring this project to completion.

It was not merely the gift of their time and intellectual labour; it was, fundamentally, their recognition of my capacity to write, to write about them, to write about violence, that lingers with me. I am filled with gratitude.

The legacies of violence among which we live, and to which we are heir, find expression in narratives. We, as English teachers, bring them into our classrooms, weaving them into the stories of our curriculum. It is easy, given the pressures of daily classroom life, to forget that these are narratives that have been generously shared and

that they originate in real people. In the classroom the stories of others can become objects to use rather than something precious in one's care.

Indeed, how might I recognize—even from a distance—the people whose stories I teach, and the complex legacies of violence of which we are all a part? It occurs to me that one way forward—drawing inspiration from my own experience in writing this dissertation with others—involves recognizing and affirming the capacity to narrate. It is important to remember that the capacity to narrate is not simply to tell a story, but to tell a story multiple, even myriad ways, to revise, to contradict, to reject, to be ambivalent towards, to argue about. To make such an effort involves turning my thoughts towards others, and with a similar anxiety as I approached working with the stories of my own family members, and asking whether or not I am telling the story truthfully, or even whether the story I am telling is one that they—those with whose stories I am working, and their communities—would want shared. This involves far more than text selection. When working with communities that are not my own, especially where there are legacies of violence and injustice, I must search out the public discussions that folks from these communities are having about narrative and representation—and not just academic folks. These are available through forms of media that are being produced by community members for community members, like books, community newspapers and Twitter feeds. Where I have already engaged in this kind of learning, it seems that celebrations of strength and resilience are the necessary partners of narratives of suffering and injustice. This is the more complicated story—and a story that "teaching about violence" in mainstream public education almost always overlooks.

Chapter 7 - Conclusion

I. Introduction

At the end of this school year—late spring of 2020, the year of Coronavirus, of the killing of Floyd George by Minneapolis policemen that ignited demonstrations around the world—a student opted to substitute a writing prompt of their[23] own in place of the writing prompt that I had assigned as their final piece of "distance learning." I welcome this sort of initiative. This young person wrote about being torn between empathy for the people protesting police brutality, and loyalty and love for family who were involved in law enforcement. They had turned to online forums to try to talk about this internal conflict and had been met with excoriations for not being aware enough of the cruelty of law enforcement, that cops are, by definition, violent and oppressive. This person despaired of being able to be critical and clear-eyed and engage in conversations about justice, but still be able to love the important people in their life.

This person is 16 or 17; I am 44. Their writing lingers with me, because I share this conflict, because this conflict has—and continues to—illuminate the conditions of this dissertation, conditions that are ongoing. In my response to this student, I could offer nothing but the suggestion that feeling unsettled and torn was appropriate; that swaggering generalities and sweeping statements are the enemy of good communication; that it was vital to stay curious about themselves as a growing and changing individual, and about others, who are also growing and changing.

The ending of this dissertation features no triumphant waving of banners and thumping of chests. What I told my student is what I tell myself, after almost eight years

[23] I am using the third person plural in order to obscure the identity of this student. I have also chosen to write very vaguely about this person's connection with law enforcement.

of wrestling with these questions. Nevertheless, here at the close of this inquiry I have an opportunity to reflect on where I started—i.e., the questions that animated my research to begin with—and where I—or others—might continue scholarly inquiry in the future.

II. A return to my research questions

Question 1: How do narratives about violence inform curriculum in a secondary language arts classroom? By narratives is meant the curriculum texts as well as the stories originating with and brought by the teacher and students.

I have sought to describe the complexity of the way that narratives of violence inform curriculum in secondary language arts through exploring the constitutive narratives of my own "biographic situation" (Pinar, 2004, p. 36) that undergird the curricular choices that I make—both in terms of text, and more broadly, in terms of the story that I think I'm enacting when using those texts. The example of David, my teacher-participant, invokes the conflicts that can animate the relationships between teachers and students *because* of the texts, and because of the stories that students carry. The stories from my family, especially the story of my mother's relationship with her parents, illustrate the proximity of violence. The stories of my teaching life raise the very real spectre of a teacher misusing her power, especially when her she perceives her own identity to be in question.

This complexity suggests that a kind of cautious skepticism is necessary when entering what I have also called the "intersection of narratives" that is teaching secondary language arts. Because of the intimacy with which we live with violence and stories of violence, and because of the significance that such stories have for our identities, we cannot pretend that they do not exist, or leave them at the classroom door. However, our

allegiance to a particular text or interpretation, to what students are supposed to "get" from a singular reading of such texts, might be better approached with a certain ambivalence, of the kind Bauman (1991) locates in the figure of the stranger. His stranger occupies a stance of "non-commitment" and "anti-patriotism" (p. 79). Adopting this stance in relation to the language arts classroom might work productively to acknowledge the multiplicity not only present in the lived experiences in the classroom, but in the writing and reading of texts. A teacher's commitments, like her commitment to her identity as a pacifist or her love of certain texts, *ought* to be critically revisited. Patriotism—jingoistic pride in such arbitrary matters as where one was born—ought to have very little place (or no place) in today's diverse classrooms. Having problematized the very elements of our identities that make us—especially white settler teachers—feel comfortable and "at home," we might thus "illuminate the conditions for social togetherness" (Mansson and Langmann, 2011, p. 24).

Question 2: How might recognition, rather than understanding, help negotiate these intersections of narratives? What implications might recognition have for teaching and learning secondary English language arts?

This is really a question about how to work with the narratives of those who are other than the self—the teacher self. "Understanding," as I have discussed in chapters 3 and 4, is still oriented towards the self, towards what the self might grasp. Recognition, especially in its mutual iteration as articulated by Ricoeur (2005), orients itself towards the other, first through the analogy of giving a gift that that shows that one truly sees the other for who that person truly is, and second, through affirming the capabilities of another.

If I were to give a gift to my students, a gift so meaningful as to awaken a desire to reciprocate (as Ricoeur (2005) imagines this gift), what might that gift be? Surely it would differ, based on the individual. Thus, in order to give such a gift I would have to think of each individually, and ask myself, what matters most deeply to this person? I might have to get to know each student better. That said, while I cannot speak for all of my students, for the vast majority being affirmed as a worthwhile and gifted human being is high on the list of what matters.[24]

It is often the case that narratives of/about violence and trauma are used by language arts teachers as if disembodied from any living person. What implications might recognition have, when there is no person or student in front of me? Even from a distance, across space and time, I can recognize the capacity to narrate, which—as I have often suggested in this dissertation—includes the capacity to narrate otherwise. In my narratives I write about using Sherman Alexie's (1993) "Indian Education" in my previous teaching life. I continue to do so in my current classroom, although it is now part of a broader focus on Indigenous self-representation in my curriculum. When teaching "Indian Education," specifically, I pair it with Cook-Lynn's (2018) pointed assessment of Alexie as a writer (e.g., "Describing the deficit model of Indian life is his

[24] This question of recognizing my students, in the Ricoeur-an sense, has been a pedagogical concern of mine for some time. After experimenting with a variety of writing programs and approaches, in the past couple of years I have done my writing instruction almost entirely through private, individual writing conversations. This is not the place to go into the nuts and bolts; the point is that a conversation between student and teacher about something so personal as writing has proved to be a far more effective way of building confidence and skills than anything else I have tried. I attribute the effectiveness of this approach, in part, to the requirement that I prepare to have a meaningful learning conversation with each individual student. I must *see* each one, uniquely, and focus on their capabilities, rather than on their deficiencies.

thing."). It's an effective juxtaposition. Where my (mostly white) students are initially content to accept Alexie's "word" about living on a reservation, Cook-Lynn's vigorous argument creates uncertainty in my students, suggesting, as she does, that his representations are damaging to Indigenous people.

This is but one small example of how I envision recognizing—as a language arts teacher—the capacity of authors and communities to narrate and narrate otherwise, in an effort to complicate my own and my students' received (white settler) understandings of narratives of violence and trauma. I see this work as just beginning, and requires, on my part, a lot of learning, and an interminable suspicion of my own allegiances and motivations.

Future Directions

Further questions emerge from this dissertation, with implications for both my scholarship and teaching practice:

1. How might ambivalence (marked by "cosmopolitanism, anti-patriotism, non-commitment," (Bauman, 1991, p. 79)) inform my curricular and pedagogical choices, especially in teaching narratives that deal with violence or trauma? Might such ambivalence be a generative interpretative lens for approaching difficult subjects and texts with secondary language arts students?
2. How might I attempt to recognize the capacity of others (and not merely published authors) to narrate, including such a capacity's multiple and contradictory expressions? By "others" I mean those communities of

people traditionally tokenized and/or ignored by the language arts canon, especially Indigenous peoples.

These are both very practice-oriented questions, yet their foundation is in the theoretical and methodological commitments of this project, and would require further elaboration of both.

III: Implications of this study

This dissertation rests on the assumption that violence, in all its complexity, is imminent in our lives (Bernasconi, 2013), and as such is inevitably taught (about), learned (about), and lived/encountered. Despite this imminence—or perhaps because of it—violence is often explored in scholarship in terms of often distant *others*, others who are victims, others who are perpetrators, others who are bystanders. By contrast, I have oriented this inquiry towards violence that is proximate to me, as a language arts teacher and as a person who is still in the process of becoming. My focus on what is near has necessitated novel methodological and conceptual approaches, which have implications for how violence is explored, in scholarship and in our lives.

Methodological Contributions – A polyvocal autobiographical approach

In the context of this inquiry, I required a methodology that encouraged complexity and nuance, as well as ethical accountability to others in my narrative-writing. Violence is experienced and/or understood as part of a life—a life that is lived in relationship with others, where the stories of others, including historical others, become part of one's own (my own) narrative identity (Ricoeur, 1988, 1992, 2005).

Ricoeur's (1992) understanding that we are not the solitary authors of our own life story, but rather co-authors of its meaning, provided the methodological impetus for

expanding my understanding of what constitutes autobiographical knowledge, from the vantage point of a teacher. This led me to have conversations about violence with family members, community members, and another teacher. Not only did these conversations clarify, elaborate, and often challenge the stories of/about violence that I thought I already knew, but these conversations became themselves part of my narrative identity going forward, as a person, as a language arts teacher. In using this methodology, in writing these polyvocal narratives, and at times employing the very words of my participants, I am constantly reminded of the way that my life is entangled with others, and that what I do and experience has ramifications beyond what is narrowly "mine" and "yours."

Furthermore, in sharing the narratives that I had written with my participants for their review, my writing process demanded that I keep in the front of my mind Dodd's (2013) injunction, that how we conceptualize, how we talk about violence has implications for the lives of real people, not merely people in the abstract. Again, where violence is rendered distant and its discussions impersonal, it is easy to overlook the fact that the way that one talks about violence matters. It was vital to avoid misrepresentation in working with the stories that others had placed in my care, and measures were in place (i.e., participant review of the narratives) such that I would find out if I had made misrepresentations about them.

Pinar (2004) suggests that curriculum is a "complicated conversation," and we engage in such a conversation "with our academic subjects, our students, and ourselves" (p. 9). Including in such a conversation the company of those who have most closely shaped our lives offers new avenues for "subjective and social reconstruction" (Pinar,

2011, p. 2), for better recognizing who we are so that we might more honestly and effectively work towards a less violent society.

Conceptual Contributions – Baumann's (1991) Ambivalence; Ricoeur's (2005) Recognition

The novel implications of my research are not limited to merely "how" to "learn" about violence and narratives of violence, but extend to how to avoid simplification when working with such narratives. This is especially pertinent to the teaching of language arts, where narratives of/about violence are regularly featured, and where the expected response is usually "understanding" or "comprehension."

Baumann's (1991) concept of ambivalence provides an ethical alternative to the totalizing, and ultimately dismissive, impulse to "understand" or "comprehend" narratives of/about violence. He frames ambivalence within the figure of the stranger, who, in response to (narratives of) violence and trauma, finds him/herself no longer at home, no longer able to complacently view the world as 'just fine.' This position supports an "intellectual vigilance" (Dodd, 2013, p. 52) where violence is concerned, where such vigilance makes more difficult the lazy and complacent confidence that one truly knows who one is in this world.

Finally, if confidence in one's knowledge about one's self and one's world, let along other human beings, is necessarily circumscribed, Ricoeur's (2005) conceptualization of recognition, especially mutual recognition, offers an alternative. As he argues, the very point at which one is confident that one knows another person is the moment of greatest misrecognition, and offers in its place the model of gift-giving, not for one's own sake, but for celebrating another's joy in being seen for who s/he really is.

I am necessarily cautious in ascribing to either of these conceptual lenses some sort of solution to the problem of violence, and the problem of teaching about violence. Instead, both offer an alternative to throwing up one's hands in despair or frustration and leaving the room. As teachers, *we must not leave the room*. Being truthful about our discomfort and the attendant sense of loss—of home, of what we have "understood"—is necessary. But instead of fomenting such loss into bitterness and resentment, we might begin by asking ourselves, when have we, in our lives, been truly seen, recognized for who we were and were capable of doing and being? This can be the beginning of learning what a gift might look like for someone other than ourselves: for our students, for the people who tell the stories that we use in our professional life.

IV. Last words.

There is always a kind of arbitrariness in looking at the stars. The particularity of our field of vision and the localness of our planet constrain what we are capable of seeing, of describing, of calling into being through our observations. Still, the alternative is not looking, which wastes what we might have—and might still—see. With regard to the subject of violence, I am glad I looked, even if, in the end, I am still small, and my vision is still limited.

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