

A STARING CONTEST WITH THE SELF: KARL OVE KNAUSGAARD, LINGUISTIC
INQUIRY AND WORD COUNT, AND EXPLANATORY STYLE

by

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THESIS

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ABSTRACT

Shame as an emotional response in the late 2010s has been discussed in both high and low sectors, from a high level of shame with social media use in high school classrooms, to the lack of shame by the president of the United States. My thesis addresses the topic by analyzing Karl Ove Knausgaard's two autobiographical works, *My Struggle* and his Seasonal Quartet. Readers, critics, and Knausgaard himself have described his work as a focus on the shameful moments of his life. Using positive psychology's term "explanatory style," coined by Martin E.P. Seligman, I do a structural reading of explicit moments of shame. Combining this with computer text-analysis software, Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count, devised by James Pennebaker, I create a thorough reading of shame in Knausgaard's work. The thesis addresses the question of shame's effect on the style of writing for the multiple volumes, as well as document possible moments of pessimistic mental health. I conclude that Knausgaard operates in typical literary arcs, regardless of his self-proclaimed thesis statement, and I discuss the importance of emotional changes in Knausgaard's work.

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my wife, Claire.

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INTRODUCTION

In the span of a single year, we publish millions of books around the world. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, world literacy in 2018 stands at approximately 86%. While the technology required for the production and dissemination of books proliferate to almost absurd degrees, the same holds true for music albums, movies, television shows, video games, magazines, newspapers, blogs, and so on and so forth ad nauseum. We produce over 11,000 movies on average per year. Over 6,210,000 music tracks are recorded. It is not just the number of available items, it is also the access. Relatives are introducing their younger siblings to digital libraries with the tap of a registered library card. Internet use and access to mobile phones are over half of the world's population, a number that would have seemed unheard of thirty years ago. Get on a train and see young students reading on kindles. Walk the beach and see people laying back, glistening with sweat, with little bluetooth earbuds wirelessly connected to their smartphones. Invited relatives log into a Netflix account on a tablet in your house to catch up on the latest season of whatever. With the ubiquitous help of the internet, much of it is housed and accessed with relative ease, giving credence to that short Emily Dickinson poem:

Incredible the Lodging

But Limited the Guest (548)

“Change” as a word to describe what we’re experiencing is a massive understatement. For the academics, we become embarrassed when we realize we used to have fights over the literary canon. Now, a more playful interdisciplinary work is afoot in the humanities, allowing us to wield the larger hands of computer technology, as well as pay careful attention to latest

developments in such scientific fields as neurobiology and the psychology of well-being. For the readers, the field shortens to the terse, powerful statements on Twitter, the hilarity of blunt videos on Vine, and the physical shrinking of devices on which we carry our textual ideas. But on the other hand, the ability to stretch ideas and concepts to their deepest limits allows video gaming at unprecedented 100+ hour levels, youthful fanaticism associated with following a series of fantasy books, or dressing up and appearing as a fictional character at any of the numerous conventions available globally. Combine this with increased leisure time through the end of the twentieth century, thanks to increased automation in the workplace and labor saving devices in the home, and now the growing pains of becoming a reader or viewer or listener have never been so muted.

But for the creator of a piece of art, while the world opens up for readership, a huge swath of simultaneity lays at the foot of every player in the game. Books and ideas must now compete on a scale which has hitherto been unattempted in human existence. Writers, musicians, directors of film, plays, television, and the purveyors of analog art must now lay claim to a present which is snugly filled with works of the past. Fiction floods so far into the workings of ordinary life that the concept of what we might feel to be authentic, individualized, experience becomes harder to define. It ranges from as simple as wondering whether to write a story that contains cell phones, to having a crisis with the art form one chooses. Unfortunately for those involved in the production of moving works, nothing is simple.

It was this acknowledgement for myself at this crossroad of reader, writer, and academic that I began to read Karl Ove Knausgaard's autofictional series *My Struggle* in the autumn of 2017. Wholly representative of an older age attempting to reclaim the "authenticity" of a longer attention span, Knausgaard's series is six volumes of a man's life in Norway and Sweden. Much

of the story concerns him fending off personal problems as mundane as how to urinate off a cliff as a small boy, to the terrors of infidelity and alcohol abuse. Reading the series, plotless and meandering though it may be, it features the same clarity and calmness of approach as recent titles from Rachel Cusk. Here is an author who deals with the pain and hardship of social intelligence, of knowing when (in the social welfare state) to argue with a downstairs neighbor in an apartment complex, or what it feels like to receive a text from a loved one asking to bring home groceries after a long day working. Despite the relatively comfortable experience of countries like Norway and Sweden, the most common places he resides, much of the series has Knausgaard commenting on the irony of twenty-first century existence. In one moment, he is complaining about young Swedish children eating whole grain pasta, in the next he is waxing philosophically on Heidegger. His tedious approach to his world caught on: one in nine Norwegians owns a copy. A new author for a new world.

Karl Ove's thesis for the series comes out in volume two of a familiar conflict we seem to have in our digital age. A moment of simply too much:

Over recent years I had increasingly lost faith in literature. I read and thought, this is something someone has made up. Perhaps it was because we were totally inundated with fiction and stories. It had got out of hand. Wherever you turned you saw fiction. All these millions of paperbacks, hardbacks, DVDs, and TV series, they were all about made-up people in a made-up, though realistic, world. And news in the press, TV news, and radio news had exactly the same format, documentaries had the same format, they were also stories, and it made no difference whether what they told had actually happened or not. It was a crisis, I felt it in every fiber of my body, something saturating was spreading through my consciousness like lard, not the least because the nucleus of all this fiction,

whether true or not, was verisimilitude and the distance it held to reality was constant. In other words, it saw the same. This sameness, which was our world, was being mass-produced. The uniqueness, which they all talked about, was thereby invalidated, it didn't exist, it was a lie. Living like this, with the certainty that everything could equally well have been different, drove you to despair (561).

It is ironic considering that part of Knausgaard's charm is in the reference of so many particular pieces of classic literature, renaissance painting (especially Rembrandt), and the occasional dive into scientists and philosophers. Yet his writing style, as we'll see later, is not overbearing. It contains both the highs of culture, and the lows of immediacy and readability. Most important is the observation made by many of his contemporaries of the addictiveness of his writing, brought on by a masterful sense of pace. At all times, he is writing about a world charged with meaning, desiring so much to push past the point of the culture sold to us as product and more attempting to blend what he feels to be "natural" with essential and human characteristics. Yet the work is methodically slow. By slowing down and zooming in, Knausgaard hopes to go deeper into the beautifully mundane, similar in thesis to John Updike. Paul Auster in his memoir *Winter Journal* offers a similar pronouncement, calling what Americans eat and watch "junk." The problem that these modern authors are describing concerns the loss of meaning as discovery. The problem we're considering in art, therefore, concerns a quality of the mind.

Critics responded to the series with praise for Knausgaard's attempts to change perspective on literature, but also for its brutal honesty. Rachel Cusk, reviewing volume two in *The Guardian* wrote, "What unfolds is a painstakingly detailed account of mid-life." Responding to Knausgaard's grand attempts, Jonathan Lethem wrote in the same periodical, "A living hero who landed on greatness by abandoning every typical literary feint." Jeffrey Eugenides himself,

author most recently of a collected set of short stories, revealed in *The New York Times Book Review* of an embarrassing interview with Karl Ove Knausgaard that he himself gave, and followed up with an analysis and judgment of how he believed Knausgaard created his moments. “That’s exactly what he does in ‘My Struggle.’ Knausgaard’s life is a grab bag of events and recollections, and he uses whatever is handy. He doesn’t lie or make things up (so far as I know). But the selection process he subjects his memories to in order to fulfill the narrative demands of his writing rises to a level of considerable artifice.” He goes on to say that, regardless of the circumstances surrounding the methods for writing, “his pacing is flawless.” There are few times in literary criticism when *this* many well-established authors come out of their holes to rave about a work. Not every critic gave Knausgaard his due of course, and sales in the United States are not quite that of Norway in proportion, but there *is* a literary community that is pushing for writing like Knausgaard’s to become the new normal in literary achievement.

Critics also identified underlying themes, although Knausgaard himself clung to a particular pronouncement of his writing that followed him ever since. That theme concerns shame. In 2016, Knausgaard wrote in *The Guardian*:

So when, after 10 years of trying, I sat down one day and wrote a few pages about something that happened to me, something I felt so ashamed about I had never mentioned it to a living soul, and did so using my own name, I had no idea why I went there, nor did I to begin with connect it in any way to the novel I wanted to write, it was just something I did. I sent it to my editor, who described it as ‘manically confessional’, and I got the impression he took a step back, so to speak, because it was so disconcerting and not good in any literary sense. But there was something there, nonetheless, and both he and I saw it (“Karl Ove Knausgaard: The Shame of Writing About Myself”).

Knausgaard, rather than caged in by autobiographical impulses, feels liberated from the trappings and tonal expectations of what we know to be literary. But he also taps into an important dynamic of modern existence. We are now at an age of such improvements to health, quality-of-life, literacy, and the reduction of personal and political violence, there are books written in 2018 like Hans Rosling's *Factfulness* and Steven Pinker's *Enlightenment Now* that have to remind us to step out of a default negativity. Yet we've built our shame as a support for social cohesion with thousands of years of evolutionary training. Now it becomes difficult to reconcile this faster culture with our ancient brains.

Is shame the real, overarching plot of Knausgaard's writing? Forget the typical shrink wrap found in each volume: the first volume concerning his father's death, the second his role as a young father, the third his childhood, the fourth his young adult time as teacher, the fifth as a burnout in Bergen, and the sixth the legacy of the series of as a whole. Is there a larger theme at work? Can the shameful style he writes be identifiable? If so, how would we be able to track such a miniscule question across such a large corpus of work? How would we do so reliably and consistently, regardless of the attention and quality of the reader at the time? This thesis will explore the effects of Knausgaard writing on shame, using both qualitative and quantitative measurements. The first chapter will attempt to find a reliable qualitative method for calculating trends in Knausgaard's mental state during writing by drawing on positive psychology. The second chapter will attempt to use linguistic computer analysis to find fluctuations in style, combined with empirical studies that apply these fluctuations to questions of physical and mental changes. Once we find a structural set of codes, we can perform an analysis on the entirety of Knausgaard's autofictional work.

Because here we have an intersection of such lovely ideas. We have an author who

produced, what seems like effortlessly, 3,500 pages over the span of two years. Just to compare, David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* took an additional year, and produced only half the words. Before that, Knausgaard had simply a novel, and after *My Struggle*, he wrote a seasonal quartet, also autobiographical. In ten years, an author wrote in self-deprecating ways, in a densely packed span of time. An author of such novelty (whether you believe in that term or not) deserves just such a research response, one which amalgamates the ideas of empirical study in psychology, and the consistent results of computer analysis, to form a coherent understanding of what exactly Knausgaard means, how he captivates an audience, and what he accomplishes by writing about shame.

Chapter one uses what I consider to be a somewhat more consistent method of qualitative analysis. We define shame as a concept as how we talk to ourselves. How we react after an action, especially if we accept it by the community to be a destructive element, can be either a paralytic, or a form of self-policing, depending on your personal outlook. To explore Knausgaard's shame, the chapter will open with how we consider shame in twenty-first century terms, and what work psychologists do to address it in cognitive and proactive ways. I am speaking here of positive psychology and the work of Martin E.P. Seligman in his book *Learned Optimism*, and what he calls "explanatory style." When we receive either good or bad reinforcement over a particular action, how we describe the event to ourselves has consequences for our future mental health. If we are passed over for a promotion, we can either say, "I'm bad at my job," or we can say, "I did not work hard enough this month." Whether it is a negative and permanent fixation, or a proactive and temporary setback, how we conclude the event for ourselves is explanatory style. This relatively simple finding has huge implications for the implementation of cognitive behavioral therapy. In Knausgaard's autofictional work, his

explanatory style crops up everywhere. To find the best results, I used the word “shame” as well as other synonyms like “guilt” and “anxiety” to track down some of Knausgaard’s most painful life situations. These are not all of them, but they do highlight throughout the series a set of major life moments that call for reaction. The questions to ask are: does his explanatory style get better or worse over the development of his work? And does his explanatory style have something to do with his popularity amongst critics and readers of his work?

The work of researchers in the digital humanities has been to find reliable and consistent results to long-standing questions concerning the written language. Love it or hate it, the fact is that using computerized methods of inquiry in humanities research is not so new. As Geoffrey Rockwell and Stéfan Sinclair write in *Hermeneutica*, text concordances had been around for centuries, and were priceless to the clergy in the preparation of sermons. For a work like Knausgaard’s, it is a necessary tool. The first thing to consider when researching an author like him is to understand that his voluminous writing makes it difficult to draw effective conclusions. As he himself lamented in the “By Heart” series of interviews for *The Atlantic*, it takes “300 or 400 pages to say something significant” (“Karl Ove Knausgaard on the Power of Brevity”). Second, we are dealing with an author who is, in a sense, time traveling. Although he was an author entering his forties when he put *My Struggle* on paper, he writes about a wide range of ages, from boyhood to his time as a young father. From what we know and understand about memory, it cannot compare to ink, or film, or audio recording. Retrospectives, as anyone heading a longitudinal study will know, is fraught with inaccuracies associated with the current age, gender, income, or even whether they were in a car accident on the way to the recording center. We are not discussing Knausgaard’s state when he was a child: we are speaking of his state *at the time of writing*. What better way to evaluate that than with computer technology that hides

context and reveals fluctuations?

The program that I decided to use is called Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count, devised by James W. Pennebaker at the University of Texas in Austin. The overall idea of the program was to find reliable methods of identification of the very basic components of our writing, from nouns and verbs, to pronoun use, to eventually the more advanced work of formal, analytic, and narrative thinking styles. Chapter two will explain Pennebaker's research in the formation of the program, and will apply it in two sections: physical and mental health. Using flashpoints in Knausgaard's explanatory style, we can correlate these spikes to changes in his writing.

Despite the work that can be researched at a textual level, Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count, like other programs, is not so good at context. Trying to imagine the word "mad" used in all its connotations sends us all the way to *Alice in Wonderland* and back. A higher word count can help with building the accuracy of the program (no problem there, as Knausgaard gave us *plenty* to work with). But I am not so satisfied as to leave it at that. Both the quantitative *and* qualitative measurements make sure that we are seeing in the context of the scenes and details the same things we recognize in the word choice of Knausgaard's multiple volumes.

There are some larger caveats to address here in the introduction. The thesis has some larger limitations that we should take into account. The first is that I am operating as an American writer analyzing a Norwegian author. Not only are there cultural problems when it comes to understanding shame as a social phenomenon compared to middle class American existence, but also linguistic problems with a work in translation. Don Bartlett translated *My Struggle* and Ingvild Burkey translated the seasonal quartet. Second, using Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count on a work in translation could make several examinations of articles, pronouns, and other style words difficult to parse out. At least, with the two translators working through the

entirety of the work, a certain consistency can be applied, but function words also represent a majority of a person's writing, and as such can be easily manipulated by the task of translation. Hopefully with the breadth of this research and the myriad examples of the methodology, I can find ways to work past the dilemmas of cultural and linguistic effects.

With all that said, the conclusion will be an evaluation. If Karl Ove Knausgaard does represent a smaller sector's desire to shift directions for fiction and literature into a more "human" and "essential" and "raw" point of reference, yet his writing caused painful ripples in his personal life, is this kind of writerly suffering something we want to continue? Stereotypes abound for the tortured artist. In a newer age of abundance, is it a requirement? We witnessed a movement from art as product to art as communication. Snapchat is a particular example of something that took the democratic flattening of technology (the camera) and turned it into quick, emotional expression. If the gods that be wish to see this done with *every* new artform, then perhaps we better start evaluating what works for our well-being, and what does not. This methodology seems the best kind to match the long-winded and labyrinthine movements of an author who ended up having the longest staring contest with himself.

CHAPTER 1

EXPLANATORY STYLE

This chapter explores shame and Knausgaard's explanatory style. Shame as a concept is everywhere, both in literal word form, in context, and in the choices that are made in our life based on needs, desires, wants, and even fears. Knausgaard himself says as much outright that *My Struggle* is concerned with shame. Its topicality in the United States is beyond question. In separate interviews, with Knausgaard on Lit Up, and Zadie Smith for the Louisiana Channel, both remark on our current president as a man people describe as "shameless." Both have lofty ideas of shame, that it is an important form of temperance in a world that is screaming to have your attention, and your money. My goal is to look at Knausgaard's shame, to discover its hidden or underlying structural elements, to research the effects of shame in evolutionary biology and try to connect it to explanatory style as best I can.

Evolutionary theory points to shame as deeply embedded in our psyche from an older world of violence and aggression. I hope I do not surprise you when I say that the history of mankind has largely been one of violence and destruction. Love and empathy are present of course, but the further back we go in history, mythology, and religious texts, the more we see a world of domination, aggression, and warfare. Steven Pinker's book *The Better Angels of Our Nature* does point to promise: we are far less violent than our ancestors in various factors. Shame, for a greater part of our evolutionary arc, was designed to prevent tribal and community connections from breaking apart.

But is it an answer in a newer age of the welfare state, justice departments, and trial by jury? Peter R. Breggin, author of *Guilt, Shame, and Anxiety: Understanding and Overcoming*

Negative Emotions does not seem to think so. After a long history fighting the likes of prescribed medication and electrotherapy as short term solutions for patients, Breggin has advocated, along with others mentioned later, in positive psychology. Newer fields of psychology in the latter half of the 20th and early 21st centuries have attempted to blend various fields of biological determinism, and pavlovian style behaviorism into what positive psychologists emphasize as cognitive choice. What if our well-being was largely influenced by us? What if what mattered more wasn't necessarily simply the environment that our minds were presented with, but also the coping mechanisms that allow us to process and reevaluate the world for future experience? After all, isn't shame a form of coping? We ruminate on the past and discover what it was about ourselves that we did not like. This shame we carry can be a burden or a blessing, depending on your personal outlook. But it is most certainly a mechanism that decides behavior.

Human civilization has grown since the early tribal days of when shame was just as necessary a tool as a spear for promoting cohesion and security. And Breggin believes that shame is a deleterious feature of an older brain in a modernized world. "...prehistoric emotions cannot be used in mature adulthood as the standard for mature ethics and conduct. They are too primitive and potentially irrational in their origin. They are built-in, relatively inflexible responses unsuitable for adult decision making" (73). To Breggin, shame is not an enabling feature of modern thought, but rather an imprisoning response, one which places us in indecision, anxiety, and prevents us from building proactive selves. Breggin summarizes:

In shame, the painful emotions seem to emanate from outside us. Shameful feelings seem inflicted upon us by other people or circumstances that make us feel worthless and powerless. As our anger builds up in a conflict, shame inhibits our willfulness and aggression by making us feel too intimidated, powerless, or insignificant to assert

ourselves. We fear that if we were to take a stand, we would fail and undergo further humiliation. Shyness and a tendency to withdraw from others are the direct results of shame, and they prevents us from being self-assertive (110).

This internalization is everywhere in Knausgaard's writing. On several occasions, he will do anything to prevent conflict, and will keep himself away from trouble in order to appear calm and educated. This numbness is an unwillingness to express emotions, despite the fact that Knausgaard too admits that he operates on responses to his emotions. In *A Man in Love*, volume two of the series, after the birth of his first child, Vanje, a problem with a Russian neighbor comes to a head. Before, the Russian neighbor would play music at all hours of the night, very loudly, and was obviously an alcoholic and may even have been an escort. But, ironically, it was always the Russian that would complain of Knausgaard and his family. What was once before an opportunity for avoidance whenever the Russian woman complained of noise or laundry or how they left the stroller in the hallway, comes a tense moment where Knausgaard reacts with such fury and expletives as to silence her in the stairwell. These are the modern questions Knausgaard is addressing in *My Struggle*. In the developed world, the plot turns and twists are no longer the gunshot as the killer jumps out the window, or the conspiracies latent in the modern nation state. These conflicts are embedded in the miniscule world of social intelligence and the quest for well-being.

Repeatedly, Breggin uses the phrase "learned helplessness" which took me to positive psychology as a whole, and Martin E.P. Seligman in particular, who has spearheaded the new trends in psychology since the 1970s. They discovered that the traditional methods of BF Skinner's reinforcement theory in the environment of people did not apply to many situations, but rather it was a combination of environment and cognitive reaction that determined future

choices. *Learned Optimism* was originally published in the 1990s, and admittedly has that strange whiff of self-help books. But I believe what sets Seligman apart is his commitment to empirical testing and collaboration.

The problem with negative explanatory style and rumination as a response to shame, Seligman writes, is that it leads to nothing good. It is a vicious cycle that can very well cause depression, if not a selected series of pessimisms throughout an adult life that damages the immune system, ages the body, and promotes a lack of appetite in food and other avenues of desire. On the other hand, we have been told that writing, especially about one's own life, whether in journals, or producing memoirs, has been shown to promote coping mechanisms. This is known in psychology as sublimation, a positive and mature form of a coping mechanism that redirects emotional response into a pursuit or craft, such as painting, drawing, social involvement, or in this case, writing. Knausgaard took this to heart, as he repeatedly mentions in interviews that at age 40, he was not feeling happy. When asked about the upbringing of his children by the *Wall Street Journal*, he had this to say: "In my world, there is something wrong with people who become writers. If someone wants to write, that means there is something incomplete in them; if they're writers, it's a certain sign of unhappiness." (Schillinger) So, the question here has been pinned down to: how does Knausgaard write about himself and his shame, is it the negative product of rumination, or is it the positive and healthy activity towards sound mental health? If it was a net gain, how was Knausgaard able to thwart more of a psychological meltdown? If it was a disaster, where in the writing leads us to prove that Knausgaard dwelt on shame too much? Can we find that in his style?

How each person approaches the act of coping or readjusting to a moment the world perceives as wrongdoing can vary. For some, the act of suffering continues to circulate in the

mind, and the subject in question will give very permanent and long lasting blame on themselves, others, and the community they inhabit. For others, tragedy is always temporary. Unless it is something good, then a person with a little more optimism will associate the goodness with permanent features such as, "I'm always good at writing." This is what is known, using Martin Seligman's term, as "explanatory style." Much more than the tragedy that befalls us, Seligman says, it is the way we cope with it, or express why it happened to be that way, that makes the difference between a resilient individual and a pessimist that lingers on depression.

Does the writing exhibit a temporary shrugging off of shame as the work of a particular moment? Or does the shame build and become a force in Knausgaard's own life that almost ruined him? Is the seasonal quartet, *Autumn, Winter, Spring, and Summer*, just a new direction for Knausgaard's writing? Or was it a survival technique of externalization so he did not obliterate himself with a gradually demeaning explanatory style? I will be going through each book where moments of deeply felt shame occur, moments of explicit hurt and horror, to determine what kind of an effect it has on future writing. The questions to ask are, does he make permanent and lasting explanations for why a shameful moment occurred, either outward at the world, or inwardly toward himself? Does the explanatory style increase or decrease as Knausgaard writes? If it does, then ruminating on the past, even writing about it, can have deleterious effects if not handled in the correct manner. If it does not, then perhaps writing about it is a healthier and more effective way of managing shame and guilt and anxiety than the cost to the brain of mentioning it.

I attempted to categorize each moment of shame, guilt, and anxiety and approximate as best I could how Knausgaard writes his way out of that situation. I provide a quote of where the words shame, guilt, or anxiety occur, and I explain a little of the context for those that read

Knausgaard a long time ago, or for those who have not read him at all. I then describe why I coded the passage the way I did in an analysis section.

To code each segment, I borrow Seligman's "three P's." The first is "permanence," and is tailored to a person's sense of time. If a student fails a math test, they may say something temporary and therefore positive, such as "I did not study properly enough." If the statement is permanent, "I am a bad student," this is a negative reaction.

The second word concerns space, called "pervasiveness." If a negative or positive event affects one area of life, it can affect others. Perhaps hearing about bad weather may make a teacher shout at a student? For the sake of the thesis, we cannot predict how it affected other aspects of life unless he mentions it in his writing. Therefore, I will also look at what Knausgaard writes about before and after that moment and also take that into account. The space of the words nearby is important for this category.

The third, and possibly most important code for Knausgaard (as you'll see below) is "personalization." If a person blames themselves, this is a negative reaction. But if they have some external reason for their behavior, such as a person, alcohol, drugs, fatigue, and so on, this is a more positive approach, because it temporalizes behavior into a single moment, and not some permanent aspect of his or her character. These three codes can help us to itemize what critics refer to when discussing Knausgaard's shame, and from there we can draw conclusions on the psychology of the volumes themselves.

Book 1

After the item was over there was the sound of my father's voice, and laughter. The shame that suffused my body was so strong that I was unable to think. My innards seemed to blanch. The force of the sudden shame was the sole feeling from my childhood that

could measure in intensity against that of terror, next to sudden fury, of course, and common to all three was the sense that I myself was being erased. All that mattered was precisely that feeling. (25)

Context: Karl Ove reminds his father that the body of a diver is going to show up on late night television. He sneaks up to the living room to hear his reaction.

Analysis: Karl Ove is writing about his childhood in a permanent way, discussing shame as the sole experience. After he hears his mother and father laughing, he cries himself asleep, embarrassed. He blames himself.

Permanence: Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

And at least as corrosive is the awareness that I am dealing with children. That it is children who are dragging me down. There is something deeply shameful about this. In such situations I am probably as far from the person I aspire to be as possible. (34)

Context: Karl Ove is discussing what it is like becoming a young father.

Analysis: His role here at the beginning of book one fluctuates in specificity. He relents that no moment in the course of his life prepared him for being a father, which is a more permanent explanation for feeling this way, but he also expresses great joy in knowing that what makes the children happy is easy. “A trip to the western harbor” he goes on to say. Knowing that these are “such situations” and acknowledging both moments of blight and moments of happiness, he resolves the situation in temporality. Knowing they are children, he blames himself before them.

Permanence: Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Optimistic, Personalization: Internal

She had been in such a cheery mood when she rang. A pang of unhappiness went through me. How could I possibly have met her anxiety and hope with annoyance? I stood stock-still in the middle of the floor, as if the pain radiating from my body might disappear of its own accord. But

it didn't. It had to be removed with action. I would have to make amends. The very thought was a help, not just through its promise of reconciliation, but also through the practical follow-up it demanded, for how could I make amends? (198)

Context: Knausgaard realizes he is late for dinner, and discusses its effects.

Analysis: This is a near textbook example of the power of learned optimism. Rumination did nothing, so Knausgaard acts by thinking of ways to bring himself back to Linda's side. The anxiety becomes temporary, the pervasiveness centered around losing track of time, while he internalizes by saying that he met her hope with annoyance.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Optimistic, Personalization: Internal

*Of course. He put on the headset and pressed play while I **anxiously** scrutinized his face. He smiled and stared at me quizzically. After a few minutes he started laughing and removed the headset.*

"This is crap, Karl Ove," he said. "This is a joke. Why are you bothering me with this? Why should I listen to this stuff? Are you kidding me?"

"Crap? What do you mean crap?"

"You can't play. And you don't sing. There's nothing in it!" He threw out his arms.

"I'm sure we can improve," I said. (91)

Context: Karl Ove is discussing his adolescent guitar playing in a band with Jan Vidar. He wants Pål to listen and provide feedback.

Analysis: Karl Ove's defensive optimism shines through. After this selection, Knausgaard even externalizes his impressions on his friends opinion by criticizing him. He complains about his openness, and belittles his opinion by saying his response, "didn't really matter."

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Optimistic, Personalization: External

I just turned and went back up the stairs. I did not want to give him the pleasure of seeing my moist eyes. The shame of being on the verge of tears at the age of fifteen, soon sixteen, was stronger than the ignominy of his mimicking me. I did not usually cry anymore, but my father had a hold on me that I never succeeded in breaking. But I was certainly capable of registering a protest. (41)

Context: Karl Ove's father ridicules him for his speech impediment by saying, "Fweezing" back to him. Knausgaard gathers his things and leaves the house.

Analysis: Not usually crying anymore labels this as a temporary response, but at the same time suggesting that his father always had a hold on him creates a complex scene. He says his father would "sometimes" mimic him in order to express a very specific instance. While the scene is temporary, in a way he is protecting his father, internalizing the problem as something Knausgaard "never succeeded in breaking." He leaves the house to make a point, but very soon returns once he receives a nonverbal apology in the form of lighting a fire from his father.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Optimistic, Personalization: Internal

I always had a bad conscience whenever vehicles had to stop because of me, a kind of imbalance arose, I felt as though I owed them something. The bigger the vehicle, the worse the guilt. (195)

Context: Knausgaard is talking about his time as an adult wandering through a city, performing routine errands.

Analysis: Always having a bad conscience is permanent, the pervasiveness occurs because of crossing the street, which is a singular occurrence, but he blames himself for the act, and does not externalize.

Permanence: Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Optimistic, Personalization: Internal

Yngve was not allowed to fail, he was not allowed to make a fool of himself, he was not allowed to show weakness. When, however, he did, and I was watching, shame-filled, the shame on his behalf still was not the crux; the crux was that he mustn't notice, he mustn't find out that I harbored such emotions. (332)

Context: Karl Ove is discussing what it is like to have an older brother, and the amount of weight Yngve has to bear in order for Knausgaard's life to have order.

Analysis: This is a complicated segment, because Karl Ove is feeling shame on behalf of his brother in times of weakness. But when it occurs, Karl Ove hides his shame, which is more of an internal response than external response. The anecdote later, about a time with his brother, culminates in an opportunity to right a wrong that Yngve spoke about a certain topic. "I was often this cowardly," Karl Ove says, because he's unable to do it. Because of this, there is a sense of permanence between the brothers based on a social expectation for shame when combined with formality. It is also a pervasive account. Karl Ove isn't just talking about being cowardly with Yngve. He says afterward, "I didn't want to upset anyone, and held back what I thought." This is a textbook explanation of pervasiveness, where problems in a specific context bleed into a more universal application. And like before, Karl Ove blames himself.

Permanence: Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

I began to write up the interview from the recording as soon as I came home because I knew from experience that the resistance to the voices and questions and all that had happened would increase quickly over time, so if I did it there and then while I was still relatively close to it, my doubts and the shame would be manageable. (340)

Context: Knausgaard and his friend Espen, along with Yngve's friend Abjørn, interviewed Olav H. Hauge for a student newspaper.

Analysis: This is an explicit coping mechanism for rumination. The fact that Karl Ove has to type the interview up as quickly as possible before shame envelops him is a permanent understanding of the way time affects his writing, as he assumes this is always the case. The reception of the interview went well, but Knausgaard externalizes his and Espen's success by stating that it was the way Hauge wanted to see him. He blames himself, of course, for how the results of an interview carry out.

Permanence: Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

Hot with shame, on the verge of tears, I stuffed the letter in my back pocket and waited by the bus which had arrived at that moment, boarded, and sat in a window seat at the rear. The shame burned through me as the bus went at a snail's pace towards Haukeland, and the same thoughts churned around my brain. I wasn't good enough, I was not a writer and never would be. (344)

Context: The interview that Yngve and Knausgaard take with Kjartan Fløgstad is rejected in writing.

Analysis: Knausgaard here obviously makes the permanent declaration that he will "never be a writer." Later he contrasts his reaction with Yngve, who recommends that he observe the comments that Fløgstad made and attempt to rewrite the interview. While Yngve externalizes the situation into a miscommunication between rational adults, Karl Ove laments on the moment as a failure on his part. Later, Knausgaard uses the event as a funny anecdote to friends, but it takes six months before the shame burned away, whereas Yngve's disappointment is externalized yet again. Yngve felt the questions were good and the communication meaningful. This is a particularly low point for Knausgaard specifically because it has to do with a key creative pursuit, which is his passion for writing. To fail at this is a personal matter.

Permanence: Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

Why the hell had we done it? How could we have been so stupid? It wasn't what I had wanted, in fact it was the very last thing I had wanted, to sit drinking with her, here of all places. Yet that was precisely what I had done. How was that possible? How the hell had that been possible?

It was **shameful.** (404-05)

Context: Karl Ove and Yngve drink liquor with their grandmother in the place where their father died of chronic alcohol abuse.

Analysis: If there is a climax in this book, it is here. It raises some very serious questions about alcoholism and how it seems to persist in Knausgaard's family. The literary background in me wants to say this is simply the establishment of a theme that lingers throughout the rest of the books: Karl Ove's problem with alcohol abuse. Whether it really happened this way or not, Karl Ove writes that Yngve is the one that starts the drinking, when he says that he they would ask in the evening, and he repeats it here again when he states that it, "was the very last thing I had wanted. So in a way, he is externalizing this on the circumstances. They are able to wash up and get to the funeral home later. In fact, he is able to take the toothbrush and toothpaste out of the kitchen because "something in me said it was not right." He is also able to continue cleaning the house afterward, so there is little pervasiveness here. There is also little to consider in permanence. The stupidity Knausgaard feels only registers here, because they are in his grandmother's house, drinking with his grandmother. What's ironic about this moment is not the horribleness of the moment, it's how little of it impacts Knausgaard's psyche. Either these moments are ones that Karl Ove hides in his writing by externalizing his style and temporalizing his shame, or it represents a moment of clarity in the recognition that temporary moments like these can pass.

Permanence: Positive, Pervasiveness: Optimistic, Personalization: External

Book Two

All these holes, all this unthinking darkness over so many years in which some mysterious almost ghostly event could be played out on the periphery of my memory had filled me with guilt, large tracts of guilt, and when Geir told me I had said I'd had a relationship with a thirteen-year-old in northern Norway, I could not, with my hand on my heart, say no, I hadn't, for there was some doubt, so much had happened, why not this too? Part of this burden was also what had happened between Tonje and me, and not least what was going to happen. (139)

Context: Knausgaard discusses his time in his first marriage in Bergen and recent meet up with Geir in Stockholm.

Analysis: This is a thickly permanent sense of shame, where it affects quite a bit of his life, even to the point where things that he thought did not happen he can no longer be sure about. This is not too much of a surprise considering what we know now about how memory can be worked and molded based on extenuating circumstances. It continues later when he writes, "All I wanted was to be a decent person...but such was not the case." It's a pervasive moment, because he writes later about how he had become a deserter and he "did not give a shit about himself" to Geir. He views all of it as his fault.

Permanence: Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

In the living room the music was turned down as two women in their early thirties were about to read their gushing poems. I passed Linda her jacket, put on mine, said goodbye to Cora and Thomas, my shame seared inside me, but the last duty remained, I had to thank Micke for what he had done. (33)

Context: Linda is locked in a bathroom at a party hosted by "Cora" and Knausgaard asks a boxer named "Micke" to kick the door down. He does.

Analysis: Karl Ove is comparing himself to other men and feels a sense of inferiority towards them. It's pervasive because he continues, "No, there was something else, and whenever I met it I came off worse, I saw myself as the weak trammelled man I was, who lived his life in the world of words" suggesting it has more to do with his own internal pessimism than it does with particular people endowed and trained with personality traits and skills. His permanent awareness of himself as not that kind of person makes him incapable of taking action. How wonderful would it be to kick down a door for free? How many of us get such a weird and exciting opportunity? But Knausgaard admits that he visibly shakes with anxiety at the idea that it wouldn't budge.

Permanence: Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

I put Vanja in the buggy, strapped her in and pushed her out as fast as I could without drawing attention to myself. Outside on the street I felt like shouting till my lungs burst and smashing something. But I had to make do with putting as many metres between me and this hall of shame in the shortest possible time. (69)

Context: Karl Ove is embarrassed when he dances with his daughter in front of a music teacher he describes as beautiful.

Analysis: Another complex entry. Karl Ove's repugnance with domestic duties, combined with the progressive and overly "granola" culture of Stockholm creates frustration and embarrassment. But there is some ambiguity in the passage over whether the shame is directed more towards the act of dancing, or because it is in front of the woman. In either case, the shame is simply in one "hall" and is not permanent. It is, however, pervasive, because later in the book we hear him writing of the time he also felt insecure in his own body when in the presence of another woman, this time in a grocery store. This is most likely an externalization, because he

blames Stockholm and its weird taste for mandating “attachment activities” in families.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: External

Every evening two or three people read to the others. I looked forward to my turn, Linda would be there, I would show her who I was. I read well, I usually got applause. But not this time, from the very first sentence I began to doubt the text, it was ridiculous and I felt myself becoming smaller and smaller, until, flushed with shame, I sat down. Then it was Arve’s turn. Something happened when he read. He had us all spellbound. He was a magician. ‘That was incredible!’ Linda said to me after he had finished. I nodded and smiled. ‘Yes, he really is good.’ Furious and desperate, I left, got a beer and sat down on the staircase outside the room. (161)

Context: Knausgaard writes of his early acquaintance with Linda in a writing course.

Analysis: He usually looked forward to these events, and earlier he boasts that his writing happened to be better than the rest, so this particular occurrence is short lived. Knausgaard internalizes based on the quality of his own writing, but also externalizes in comparing his work to Arve. Jealous of being beaten in front of Linda, he leaves, and secretly wishes that Linda come outside with him. This is a similar example to the moment in book one that also concerned writing. There is a pervasive behavior when it concerns writing, because of his deep connection with it, and how it suffuses his life.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

I smashed my fist against the bedhead. I had to face the music. There was no way out. I had to face the music. I packed my things in my case, with my face smarting, and inside I was smarting as well, I had never experienced such shame before. I was marked. I grabbed the case and walked out. At first no one looked at me. Then someone cried out. Then everyone looked at me. I stopped. (166)

Context: After the end-of-course party, Linda rejects Knausgaard in favor of Arve. Knausgaard cuts his face with broken glass. He wakes up and realizes he has to leave with everyone seeing him.

Analysis: One of the most harrowing moments of the entire series. Knausgaard's complicated childhood, combined with his age as a young adult, at a time where alcohol is present, and after being rejected by the person Knausgaard is pursuing in order to blow up his first marriage, turns out to be a lot to handle. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, the behavior may be part of a "larger condition" and they recommend cognitive behavioral treatment that Seligman contributed to in the latter half of the 20th century. This is a pervasive act, but it does not seem to appear in his writing. Twice afterwards he explains it away to those who see his face as simply being, "very drunk." It seems in Knausgaard's writing there is a pressure valve system, that lets loose during minor infractions and holds back during the larger bouts of shame. Knausgaard here is internalizing shame, obviously: he views something wrong with him as a person when Linda rejects him, and he cuts his face as punishment.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Optimistic, Personalization: Internal

The walls were cold, the alleyways empty, the canals full of coffin-like gondolas. What I saw was dead, what I wrote of no value. One day, sitting like this, alone in the cold Italian apartment, I happened to recall what Stig Sæterbakken had said the evening I got together with Linda. That in his next novel he would try to write a little more like me. Suddenly my face burned with shame. The comment had been sarcastic and I hadn't understood. I thought he had MEANT it. Oh, how conceited do you have to be to believe that sort of comment? How utterly stupid can you be? Were there no limits? I got up quickly, hurried down the stairs, put on my clothes and dashed round the alleyways along the canals for an hour trying to find the beauty in the filthy deep

green water, the ancient stone walls, the splendour in the whole of this crooked and crumbling world, to stem the enormous bitterness against myself that the recognition of Sæterbakken's sarcasm caused to flood over me time and time again. (208)

Context: Knausgaard returns to a comment made about him by another writer at a party.

Analysis: One of the lowest moments in book two occurs here. It's permanent in the sense that he is calling himself stupid. It's internal because he blames himself for not seeing the reality of the comment (whether it was intended to be sarcastic or not), and it is surprisingly pervasive.

Here he observes the world in brutal and harsh perspectives. Later in the story, he discusses a surprise trip for Linda to go to Paris, as a way of making up the disagreement over Christmas: Knausgaard was not ready for Linda to meet his mother. Paris turns out to be a disaster, as Linda ends up despising the city.

Permanence: Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

*...nor between the fact that I had got drunk and the pregnancy test she was holding in her hand, but she didn't see it like that, for her this was all the same, she was a romantic, she had a dream about the two of us, about love and our child, and my behaviour smashed that dream, or reminded her that it was a dream. I was a bad person, an irresponsible person, how could I even imagine becoming a father? How could I subject her to this? I walked beside her, burning with shame because people were looking at us, burning with **guilt** because I had been drinking and burning with terror because, in her unbridled rage, she went straight for me and the person I was. (222)*

Context: Linda is upset with Knausgaard for drinking too much with Eirik while Linda is attempting to become pregnant.

Analysis: Karl Ove's alcohol abuse is most likely the defining feature of his larger mistakes in

his adult life. While that is a topic for another time, here he makes these bouts of drunkenness permanent by suggesting that he is a “bad person, and irresponsible person.” This is an internalization, and Knausgaard writes that he broke down and cried afterward in a way that Linda had never seen.

Permanence: Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Optimistic, Personalization: Internal

The only time in my life I send back food to the kitchen and they don't accept what I say.

Anywhere else on earth they would have given us an alternative dish, but not in Florø. My face was red with shame and annoyance. If I had been alone I would have eaten the bloody soup, no matter how bad it was. Now I had complained, however embarrassing and unnecessary I thought that was, and they met my complaint with resistance?! I got to my feet. 'I'll go in and have a few words with the chef,' I said. (229-30)

Context: Linda, Karl Ove, and his mother arrive early and decide to eat at a restaurant that serves terrible fish soup.

Analysis: Here is another example of ambiguity. Is Knausgaard feeling shame because of the way he is rejected by the restaurant with a lack of alternative meal? Or is he ashamed because he is forced to do something by Linda that he does not want to do? Earlier in the scene, Linda becomes obsessed with her pregnancy and wants to go home, but Knausgaard states that he hadn't seen his mother in six months. He states the first reason he talks to the waitress about the fish soup is because he, “couldn't put up with any more moods,” implying that to ask the waitress was a net gain to arguing with Linda again. It's external, lamenting the effect of being in Florø. It is also not permanent, as Karl Ove says he typically does not send food back to the kitchen. It's not pervasive: afterward he discusses how Linda was light on her feet again and the baby appointment turned out to be fine.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasive: Optimistic, Personalization: External

Interlude

After everything finished with Tonje I went to an island and lived there for two months. I had been there before, I just had to get on the phone and everything was arranged. A house, a small island, right out in the sea, three other people there. It was the end of the winter, so the whole island was frozen and stiff. I walked all over it thinking. And what I thought was that I would have to do everything I could to become a good person. Everything I did should be to that end. But not in the abject, evasive manner that had characterised my behaviour so far, you know, being overcome by shame at the smallest trifle. The indignity of it. No, in the new image I was drawing of myself there was also courage and backbone. Look people straight in the eye, say what I stood for. I had become more and more hunched, you see, I wanted to occupy less and less space, and on the island I began to straighten my back, quite literally. No joking. (406)

Context: Karl Ove's conversation with Geir moves toward ideas of shame and superego.

Analysis: I wanted to place this particular moment in an analysis, because really this writing has little to do with a conversation that he remembers and more to do with writing at the time. No person remembers conversations to the degree that Karl Ove could claim here. No, it is only a representation, which is built on the current trajectory of the writer. It has elements of refraction in it: later he talks about Hitler, which comes up again and again as of course the title of *My Struggle* is the same as Hitler's own autobiography. This passage *does* give us a hint at how he viewed himself when he was younger, as being shamed "at the smallest trifle." The basis for his desire to be a good person is less a permanent state and more gaining recognition of life and coping with it. "The point is that all this is about perspectives. Seen in one way, everything offers pleasure. Seen in another, just sorrow and misery." He seems to be aware that perspective

determines much of the outcome for future health and personality, but he is also plagued by past behavior.

Book Three

*How could you laugh when your mother has hit you? In fact, when anyone has hit you? I had looked at his mother, and had a vague sense of **guilt** when I did so, because she was almost naked, but not at her butt, why would I do that? It was the first time I had been to John's house, and it would be the last. We played soccer and went swimming with John, but he was not someone whose house we went to. (77)*

Context: Karl Ove sees John's mother in a bikini and witnesses John and his mother's odd relationship.

Analysis: The only moment in *Boyhood* where shame, guilt, or anxiety is used in a personal way, it is external because his guilt is based on her near nakedness, not on any realization of perversion in his own psyche. The very next paragraph has him writing on a trip to the Fina station with Geir, so it is not pervasive. Nor is it permanent. The one moment that guilt, shame, or anxiety occurs enough to mention it explicitly, it is shrugged off as an external and temporary event. Such is the power of reminiscing deep in the past. While much of book three does have bouts of fear, and embarrassments over shower caps, they are externalized in a way that expresses a sense of dominance over the events.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Optimistic, Personalization: External

Interlude: The shower cap incident

One of the limitations of this activity is that it only addresses explicit moments of shame, guilt, or anxiety, moments where Knausgaard himself is so convinced of its power and hold on a segment of his life, he puts the words in himself. But what about a moment where this does not

happen? I'd like to talk about the moment that should have been begging to be internalized, but it ends up being simply another scene.

Karl Ove needs to learn how to swim, and in order to do that, each young student is required to wear a swimming cap. His mother forgets, and on the night of the first practice, she rushes back out and comes back with a swimming cap that is designed, in Knausgaard's opinion, for women. It's pink and covered in flowers. At practice, Karl Ove hides the cap until the last minute when the teacher forces him to put the shower cap on. A couple students make remarks, and this is how Knausgaard responds. "But I didn't escape so lightly. All around me there were grins, nudges, and amused grimaces. The cap seemed to be burning on my head" (97). In any other *My Struggle* book, he himself would have been burning with shame, not the cap. The very next line has Knausgaard going to practice as normal and conversing with his friends. His friends continue to tease him, and even take the shower cap and play keep away until he starts crying, but there's no internalization here. "'Oh, the poor baby. Do you want this lovely cap back?' he said and threw it to where I had been sitting. I walked back, put it in my bag, took my towel, and went in for a shower..." (99)

The first thing that is obvious is that Knausgaard is very young in this scene. Trying to address interiority in a time 35 years ago would be difficult for anybody. But I also think it assists in the idea that looking back far enough tends to level off the moments we would consider shameful, hurtful, embarrassing, because our memories are designed to keep us moving forward. When Knausgaard returns to his mother, here is how he replies when she asks if they had a good time: "'Yes it was fun,' I said. 'But the teacher was strict.'" (100)

Book Four

...I felt bad about Hilde and what I stood for when I was with her; if I was at Hilde's place and

*talked about freedom or beauty or the meaning of everything, I could feel pangs of **guilt** toward those I went out with, or toward the person I was when I was with them, because the duplicity and hypocrisy that Hilde, Eirik, and I talked so much about was also present in my own heart.*

(21)

Context: Knausgaard tries to reconcile his affection for Christian girls like Hilde while being involved with friends who hypocritically despise the Christian religion.

Analysis: This is not a permanent situation, because it seems centralized on certain friends.

When he and Hilde are alone, the situation is different. The guilt *is* pervasive, however, as later he discusses one of many moments of premature ejaculation at being at his new mission of what he calls, “booze and fornication.” His guilt is directed towards his own temporal self or his friends, so it may seem like he externalizes, but he relents when he says that it is in his heart, meaning it is something intrinsic to his being.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

*I sank back down into dark, heavy slumber, where I stayed until the alarm clock rang and I opened my eyes to a room full of light and to underpants that were sticky with semen. At first I had feelings of **guilt**. God knows what I had been dreaming about. Then, when I remembered where I was and what I was doing, the pressure in the pit of my stomach returned. (61)*

Context: The night before his first day teaching, Karl Ove has a wet dream.

Analysis: This is a complicated segment, because of how short it is. Mostly, Knausgaard discusses the nerves of being a teacher. It is pervasive as he writes later, “...for I was not a teacher, I wasn’t even an adult, I was just a ridiculous teenager who knew nothing about anything.” It is unclear whether this is a permanent explanation, but I would label it as temporary because of the way the moment is temporalized in the dream, rather than who he is as a person.

But it is him dreaming, and not someone else.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

*I realized that what for me had been a minor matter, a maladjusted boy who cried over nothing, for him was major, it filled his life, indeed it was his life, everything he had. My **guilt** burned in me like a forest fire. (406)*

Context: Karl Ove feels guilty over the thoughts about Jo, a student routinely made fun of by other students in his class.

Analysis: Karl Ove internalizes a mistake he made about the thoughts he has about a particular boy who is a student in his class. His guilt hurts, but it doesn't lead him to conclude that he is a terrible person so much as he believes his thoughts about Jo to be unkind. His guilt leads to very real action with the father, stating that he would have a word with Hege, the school principal. But the moment is pervasive, as the very next scene concerns a betrayal over words written by Tor Einar on Karl Ove's typewriter. The writing was designed to look like Knausgaard's style, and for that, Karl Ove drinks and feels personally victimized and betrayed. To use the word, "betrayal" in both scenes emphasizes a connection in theme, regardless of whether these moments happened adjacently in time or not.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

*When I woke up in bed the next day there was something surreal about all that had happened, I wasn't certain of anything, other than that I had been more drunk than I had ever been before. And that Dad had been drunk. I knew how drunkenness appeared in the eyes of the sober and was horrified, everyone had seen how drunk I had been at my father's wedding. That he had also been drunk didn't help because he hadn't shown it until right at the end when we were alone in his flat and all his emotions were flowing freely. I had brought **shame** on them. That was what I*

had done. What good was it that I only wanted the best? (233)

Context: Karl Ove is embarrassed that he got drunk in front of his family on the night of his father's wedding.

Analysis: A lot of Knausgaard's difficulties feature alcohol use. That's no surprise. But his statement at the end of the scene is a lamentable explanation that is existential in nature. To me, that is a permanent statement for why Karl Ove strives for a meaningful experience in what he views to be all the wrong ways. It's not a pervasive declaration, as later he spends time with Yngve and talks about this girl that approaches him and says he looks like a singer. But Karl Ove blames himself, because he is aware of what being drunk looks like on the outside.

Permanence: Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Optimistic, Personalization: Internal

I put my hand between her legs, no, she says, absolutely no way, and I get up and take off my underpants and stand in front of her in all my glory, which can't have impressed her as much as I must have imagined it would because she laughed at me and said no again. I held my head in shame. I had of course registered long ago that she wasn't there, but I hadn't considered where she was until the next second, when I sat up and said hello into the empty room. (237)

Context: Knausgaard fails to woo a girl into sex and suffers shame from it.

Analysis: One of many strings in a running theme in *Dancing in the Dark* is his mission, self-declared, to lose his virginity. Almost comic in its representation, Knausgaard accomplishes this at the very end of the volume, but here he tries and fails with the ice cream lady. The shame is not pervasive, he continues his life as normal afterward, according to the style of his writing. He even admits to being okay with Yngve and his date forcing Knausgaard to taking a mattress and sleeping in the bathroom. He exhibits shame in a temporal way. But he does blame his own "prowess" so to speak.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Optimistic, Personalization: Internal

*Actually doing things, not denying myself anything when I was drunk, in that intoxicating state of total freedom, had in the course of these months gradually begun to take its toll. At gymnas I was either hungover or not, there were no other consequences. If I felt any pangs of conscience at all, they were pinpricks, nothing a hearty breakfast and a walk to town couldn't cure. Up here in the north, however, it was different. Perhaps the gulf between the person I usually was and the one I became when I drank was too great. Perhaps it was impossible for a man to have such a wide gulf inside himself. For what happened was that the person I usually was began to draw in the person I became when I was drinking, the two halves slowly but surely became sewn together, and the thread that joined them was **shame**. Oh hell, did I do that? the cries resounded inside me the next day as I lay in the darkness. Oh no, shit, did I say that? And that? And that? I lay there, rigid with fear, as though someone were throwing bucket after bucket of my own excrement over me. Look what an idiot he is. Look what a stupid fool he is. But I got up, started a new day, and I always got through it. (327)*

Context: Karl Ove is generalizing his alcohol abuse as a young teacher in northern Norway.

Analysis: Knausgaard's alcohol abuse begins here and continues throughout book five, and this is one of many explanations for why his behavior drifts toward drunkenness. Knausgaard drunk is the best of himself, according to his own declaration. All his inhibitions and neuroticisms go away. Here, he makes his behavior permanent and temporary at the same time. It is pervasive.

He goes on to lament the pain and devastation the shame waged on his teaching. He personalizes his experience.

Permanence: Optimistic/Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

But nothing happened. I went to school the next day and no one there said anything about what

*had happened, everyone behaved as they normally did, even my pupils, who I thought might have heard about it, some of them probably knew her. But no. Could it simply pass, just like that? The only place it existed was in me. And if I let it stay where it was, there was no problem, it would slowly lose its power and in the end vanish, as sooner or later all the other **shameful** things I had done had vanished. (429-30)*

Context: Knausgaard tries to understand what happened on a night that he believes may have had him kissing a 7th grade girl.

Analysis: Most likely the climax of the book, Knausgaard writes with a style of scorched earth about this period. We know that this period, combined with his time in Bergen, happens to be the worst period in Knausgaard's early life. Here, however, he compartmentalizes this event in a way that expresses the power of time over actions that build or cause shame. It works for the style of writing, as the next scene has him excited and calling family over his acceptance into the Writing Academy in Bergen.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Optimistic, Personalization: Internal

Book Five

*I stopped outside the block of apartments where Jon Olav lived and rang the bell. No one answered, I walked on, up the hill and down past Støletorget, and soon I was crossing Torgalmenningen, burning inside the whole time, I was a fool, I had nowhere to go, no one to visit, I just walked, burning with **shame** about everything. (173-74)*

Context: Karl Ove ruminates over his loneliness in Bergen after the realization of Yngve and Ingvild.

Analysis: One of the more disappointing moments between Karl Ove and his brother concerns Yngve dating Ingvild, a woman whom Knausgaard was in love with only moments before. But

Karl Ove makes the situation permanent by making it more than just affection, calling himself “a fool.” He also labels the loss of Ingvild as an excuse to describe his own loneliness in Bergen.

Permanence: Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

*When I awoke I was in hell. It was completely dark outside. Tonje was in the living room watching TV, I could hear it. My clothes, which lay in a pile beside the bed, smelled of perfume. I smelled of sex. The thought of what I had done, the **guilt** and the shame and the angst, were so great there was nothing else. It was bottomless. I was paralyzed, I couldn't move, I lay there in the darkness knowing the only way out of this was death. I hadn't moved since I woke up, it was as though the darkness was pressing down on me, it hurt so much I wanted to scream, but I lay there, motionless, perfectly still, from the living room came the sound of the TV, and then she walked through and stopped in the open doorway. (550-51)*

Context: The immediate reactions following his affair with Tonje.

Analysis: The first of many occasions of self-loathing when considering the actions he had taken towards the climax of the volume. The shame he recounts is so bottomless and unending, he exhibits a paralytic helplessness.

Permanence: Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

*The fear and **shame** when I awoke were so great that I felt I was going to split open. I could have stood up and screamed, I hadn't learned anything, I had been there again, where there was no control and there were no limits, where anything could happen. (231)*

Context: Karl Ove expresses shame once again of cheating on Tonje.

Analysis: The intensity of the regret here is noticeable, and becomes permanent remarking on how he learned nothing. It is most certainly an internal identification of the lack of inhibition associated with alcohol abuse. It is pervasive, considering the next scene discusses a rejection

letter, which he knew was coming but, “still disappointing. So deeply in fact, that I couldn’t bear to be alone.”

Permanence: Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

Usually it took a day or so for the fear to subside after a night out; if something special had happened, two, maybe three. But it always did. I didn’t understand why it came, why the shame and fear were so great, actually they got worse and worse each time, and it wasn’t that I had killed someone or hurt anyone. Nor had I been unfaithful. I had felt like sex, and I had done some stupid things to get it, but nothing had happened, I had climbed up a brick wall, for Christ’s sake, should I be afraid for three days because of that? Should I pace the flat and start at every tiny noise, jump every time a siren sounded in the streets, my insides aching all the while with an intensity that was unbearable, except that I did bear it, every time, all the time. I was a cheat, a traitor, I was a bad person. And I could deal with that, it wasn’t a problem, so long as it was only me involved. But now I was with Gunvor, and it affected her because she became someone who was going out with a cheat, a traitor, a bad person. She didn’t think that, on the contrary, in her eyes I was a lovely person, someone who meant well, who showed her consideration and love, but that was exactly where the pain lay because I wasn’t like that. (333)

Context: Knausgaard ruminates over the power shame had over him when being unfaithful to Gunvor.

Analysis: Most likely the lowest moment in book five concerns where Karl Ove’s success, ego, alcohol use, and lack of inhibition all come together with his adulterous behavior towards his long term girlfriend Gunvor. He claims that he powers through it, but he permanently labels himself as a “cheat” and a “bad person.” It isn’t necessarily pervasive, because Knausgaard continues to talk about a novel that he’s fifty pages into. What is most interesting is the

ambiguity on how the shame affects him in a permanent way. He states that he always comes back after it, that he can bear it, only to change course and state, “actually they got worse and worse each time.” This is almost a stereotypical example of the power of rumination: that it causes either learned helplessness, or it can lead to more fatalistic behavior that threatens peace even more.

Permanence: Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Optimistic, Personalization: Internal

*The **guilt** I felt was boundless. The shame burned in me from the moment I woke to the moment I fell asleep. The thought of what I had done didn't leave me. It was always there. This was hell. Being torn into pieces by remorse, this was hell. And it was my own fault, it was me who had done it. (401)*

Context: Knausgaard laments an affair on Gunvor.

Analysis: Another rumination towards an affair. It is internal, permanent, and it is pervasive, in the sense that much of what happens later talks about his attempt to come out to Gunvor. It doesn't happen for a number of reasons.

Permanence: Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

*It didn't exist, she came back to Bergen and at first my **guilt** flared up again, I was a liar and a traitor, a bad person, an evil person, for some weeks that was what I thought when I was with her, but then that, too, dulled and lay like a constant though manageable emotion slightly beyond my consciousness. It hurt when she smiled, it hurt when she said she loved me and I was the best thing that had ever happened to her. Then it didn't hurt anymore. (403-04)*

Context: Knausgaard discusses the effect of cheating on his psyche when Gunvor returns.

Analysis: Karl Ove personalizes yet again a series of ruminations that border on the exhausting when looking at them condensed in an analysis like this. It is a *constant* sensation for a time, and

sends him pacing and sweating and losing sleep. It isn't pervasive for the obvious reason here, in which he claims at some point it stopped hurting. But also because afterwards he describes a story being accepted by Vinduet.

Permanence: Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Optimistic, Personalization: Internal

*I was stiff and unnatural, it was strange she didn't notice, but I presumed the idea that I might do something like this was so far from her perceptual world that it never occurred to her. My bad conscience was a constant, my sense of **guilt** toward her a constant, whatever we did, I was false and a liar, a cheat, a bad person, and the more affectionate she was with me, the closer she came, the worse I felt. I acted cool, but everything had been destroyed, everything had become a game. (553)*

Context: Karl Ove analyzes the period after his infidelity and how it affected other aspects of his life.

Analysis: This is obviously a pervasive aspect of how the affair interacted with other moments in his life, and how it poisoned everything around him. It is personal and permanent, as he feels it is endemic of something inherent inside him.

Permanence: Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

*Late that night I got up to go. We embraced, stood in the hallway holding each other tight, and then I went down the stairs, my eyes blind with tears. I had betrayed her, but now it was over and the **guilt** I felt was easier to bear as it only affected myself. (428-29)*

Context: Karl Ove and Gunvor are breaking up.

Analysis: Karl Ove internalizes the moment and temporalizes it by saying that he had "betrayed her" rather than remarking on an aspect of his personality he would describe as something more permanent. Afterward, Knausgaard discusses writing and reviewing other writers' books.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Optimistic, Personalization: Internal

*In the two weeks that passed before he phoned me, I was beset by dreadful bouts of **shame** and terror. At first, I tried to repress what I had written, pretend it didn't exist, but to no avail, and so to gain control over these overwhelming feelings of humiliation I sat down one morning and tried to read my text through his eyes. I switched on the computer, opened the file, and the title page shone up at me. (507)*

Context: Karl Ove discusses the fear and anxiety in the content of his first novel.

Analysis: Knausgaard discusses the effect his writing has when subjecting it for possible scrutiny by readers and publishers. He shares the beginning of the novel afterward with the reader, but afterwards reports that people who read it found it impressive. He internalizes the shame, viewing it as his writing, and he tries to repress it.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Optimistic, Personalization: Internal

*I sat down in Hotel Terminus and talked or I invited them home and sat at the living-room table and talked, and when Tonje came home I talked about everything I had talked about. Reading these same interviews, I burned with **shame**. I lay awake at night squirming at the thought of what an idiot I was. If nothing happened for a few weeks it felt like a complete void. I wanted more, and when more came it was always terrible. (541)*

Context: Knausgaard discusses the complication between desire and shame for public appreciation.

Analysis: Karl Ove discusses the permanent feeling of idiocy of seeing one's own comments fed back to him. He takes it personally as an aspect of a fault in his own personality. The cynicism of the later moments involving scenes of interviews and Q & A sessions suggesting pervasiveness.

Permanence: Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

*What was the point of all this? Flying all over Norway to read for ten minutes to four people? Talking smugly about literature to twelve people? Saying stupid things in the newspapers and burning with **shame** the day after? Had I been able to write then this might not have mattered. But I couldn't, I wrote and deleted, wrote and deleted. (542)*

Context: Knausgaard writes about his continued problems with interviews and his own responses.

Analysis: Karl Ove internalizes the difficulty he has with interviews by labeling his own actions “stupid things,” and it becomes pervasive when he discusses his inability to write, as well as further events in email squabbles and accepting awards and getting kissed by female strangers.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

Book Six

*I had changed lanes in a traffic jam outside Gothenburg without seeing a car coming from behind, and we only avoided a crash because the other guy was so quick on the brakes. The angry blast of his horn cut straight into my soul. After that I took a break from driving, and felt a little fear every time I thought about it, which was probably a good thing, but still, even passing a truck had become an ordeal, I had to force myself to do it, and any long drive filled me with **anxiety** for days afterwards, like a hangover. The fact that I had passed my test and was actually allowed to drive a car was something my soul cared little about, it lagged behind and was still living in the days when it had been a great recurring nightmare of mine that I got behind the wheel of a car and drove off without knowing how. (8-9)*

Context: Knausgaard describes his fear of driving.

Analysis: His fear of driving is firmly established across the novels, but here we see a clear portrait of the paralytic nature of anxiety in the way he gives up driving for a time. It is personal

because he believes it was his fault, and not the fault of some outside entity (like the other driver, or a bad education system, etc.). It is enough to persuade him not to drive. It is also personal: despite the driver's license, it was "something my soul cared little about." Is it permanent? Not necessarily. Never does he say that he is a bad driver, but rather that he has a fear of driving. He mentions a particular moment rather than his whole driving existence.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

I went as fast as I could, feeling guilty as always about being away from the family, or rather about leaving Linda to deal with the children on her own. I couldn't help it. (20)

Context: Karl Ove describes his connection as a father.

Analysis: Guilt for not being present is a common aspect of modern existence. Here Karl Ove is very permanent, labeling this a feeling that "always" occurs. It is not pervasive, as he continues to make his way home without further comment. He blames himself for his feelings. "I couldn't help it."

Permanence: Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Optimistic, Personalization: Internal

I blushed again, understanding that he didn't realize it was true. That he would never in his wildest fantasy think that a full-grown adult could behave in such a way. He was making a joke out of it precisely because it was unthinkable that I should have urged my daughter on so she could win over his daughter, and to have done so in such an unsportsmanlike way. They weren't even four years old yet. The girl's mother came over and said the same thing. Both of them took it for granted that it was Vanja who had pressed on and that I hadn't been able to stop her. They could understand a four-year-old not being able to show empathy with a friend her own age. But the idea of a nearly forty-year-old man being equally incapable was naturally beyond their imagination. I burned with shame as I laughed politely. (25-26)

Context: Knausgaard feels shame over a race he won over another child who fell before the finish line. Karl Ove did not stop to get up.

Analysis: A classic case of individual liberty versus civic duty, or perhaps social cohesion. Karl Ove blames himself for not being ready to help, instead choosing to win. The scene ends there, with Knausgaard choosing instead to discuss his children two years later as being wholly separate from him. The moment is permanent for the way that Knausgaard puts words in the other people's mouths, with them thinking that he is "equally incapable."

Permanence: Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Optimistic, Personalization: Internal

*The first book was all finished and would be back from the printers in two days. The second book was in its final stages, now it was to be edited, then proofed, and everyone I had written about would be given a chance to read it. The mere thought made me feel like I was burning up inside. Despair, **guilt**, and anxiety were the emotions that flared, and the only way I could keep **them** at bay was by the thought that as yet no one knew, nothing had happened, but it helped less and less, the day was approaching when I would have to give up the manuscript to Linda and she would begin to read what I had written about our life together. (37)*

Context: Karl Ove laments the very series he's writing in.

Analysis: A major theme of the final book is the legacy of the series, both in his personal life and the larger reading world. This is merely the beginning of it, and it pervasively carries us all the way to Linda's mental breakdown in the latter third of the novel. It is personal, as he blames himself in his choosing to write about his interpersonal relationships. At this moment, however, he blames publication, and not some permanent aspect of his psyche.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

*My eyes found the steps leading down to the Internet café. A new rush of **anxiety** surged inside*

me. For a month now I had been receiving the most abhorrent e-mails because of the novel I had written, and I knew there would be more, though not where they would be coming from. It was the same with the phone; every time it rang I froze. True, it had been that way ever since the night I had been called by a person demanding to speak to the rapist Karl Ove Knausgaard, but that was seven years ago and the alarm I had felt at the time had paled together with the recollection; with the book it all came back with renewed force, what I had written had to do with other people, their reactions were beyond my control, and what I had done to them, they could do to me, I knew that; everything I had ever done could be used against me. As long as it was private, as long as it stayed between them and me, I could handle it. But it was terrible, I was crippled with fear every time I checked my e-mail, every time the phone rang, so much so that I could hardly move, would sit paralyzed in a chair or lie paralyzed in bed for hours at a time, and yet I knew it would pass, sooner or later I would have battled my way through it and would be able to see things in their true proportions. But if it got out ... If someone went to the papers ... I knew I wouldn't be able to cope. (40)

Context: Continued anxiety in writing the *My Struggle* series.

Analysis: I include this whole paragraph for a couple reasons. First, it is a pervasive account of how paralyzing other human beings are to him when in conflict. Second, it shows a pervasive mixing of other traumatic events, such as the phone call he received in book five. The language used here is horrifying: “crippled with fear” and “I wouldn’t be able to cope.” Yet there is positivity in the lack of permanence, with “and yet I knew it would pass.” But it is *his* writing, and so he blames himself.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

“What are you thinking about?” asked Linda.

“Yngve,” I answered.

“It’ll be all right, I’m sure it will,” she said.

“That’s easy for you to say,” I said.

What I had written about Linda was much worse. But all I could do was take things one at a time. A new wave of horror and shame washed over me. (51)

Context: Karl Ove again worries over reader reaction.

Analysis: Each time Knausgaard sends the manuscript to readers, his anxiety intensifies. Here, we see a large and imposing impression of shame as a “wave” washing over him. What’s fascinating about these moments are the quick positive coping mechanisms in each passage. “But all I could do was take things one at a time,” connotes a Knausgaard growing accustomed to shame and learning to deal with it, or at least that’s how the writing is interpreted. Who knows what actually happened. But here we get a personal, pervasive, yet impermanent mode of thinking.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

During the next couple of days I checked my e-mail several times an hour. Whenever the phone rang I felt stabs of anxiety. But nothing was forthcoming. I took this to be a good sign, he was reading the novel and thinking about what to say and how to react. Either that or he was away at the cabin. (57-58)

Context: Karl Ove awaits a reply on his manuscript from Gunnar, his uncle.

Analysis: Gunnar does not take the *My Struggle* series very well at all, so this is clearly a revisionist take by Knausgaard on trying to recall feelings before everything blows up. He still has a pervasive tic with the phone, but he is also creating excuses for a lack of response from Gunnar.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: External

*When I left everything behind and moved to Stockholm at thirty-three, the fear was still inside me. Linda, whom I met soon after, was temperamental and often unreasonable in her outbursts, and yet I allowed myself to be intimidated completely, even the slightest raising of her voice was enough to fill me with **anxiety**, and the only thing I could think about would be to make it go away. Even as a forty-year-old, sitting on the balcony on a morning in August 2009, I was scared of someone being angry with me. Whenever I gave anyone reason to be, I became so terrified and despairing and so full of anguish, I never knew how I would ever get over it. (59)*

Context: Karl Ove discusses a personality trait.

Analysis: Karl Ove permanently claims to have issues with conflict, to such an extent that he will do anything to make it leave. This is a pervasive account, as it coincides with the theme of conflict in the final novel with Gunnar and the allegations concerning the facts of his father's death. He blames his own behavior: "I allowed myself to be intimidated completely." Rather than on other possibilities, like the corporal punishment and terror his father brought into his life.

Permanence: Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

*This fear of people being angry with me was the child's fear, it didn't belong in the adult world, where it was unprecedented, yet something inside me had never made that transition, never become adult and hardened in that way, so the child's emotions lived on in the adult. The adult, which is to say I, was completely at the mercy of the child's emotions, sometimes it hurt so much I could hardly bear it, knowing as I did that I was an adult and acutely aware that the feeling and everything to do with it was deeply **shameful**. Why was this? If my sense of self had been strong and whole, if I'd been more assured, I would have been able to say to myself that I did this and I'm accountable for it, and if anyone has another opinion that's their business, not mine.*

If they wanted argument, I'd give them an argument. But my sense of self wasn't at all strong or whole, I wasn't at all assured, and my self-confidence was completely built around what other people might think of me. My own thoughts and opinions didn't matter in that respect. I was still living in the world Dad had set up for me, where everything I did basically came down to not doing anything wrong. What was wrong was not defined by any set of rules, but was instead a matter of what he at any given time decided was wrong. These circumstances I transferred to my adult life, in which they no longer existed apart from inside me. But Dad was dead, he'd been dead for eleven years. I knew all this, but knowing didn't help, the feeling wormed its way through and did as it pleased. The only thing I could do was to meet it head-on and stick it out.
(59-60)

Context: Karl Ove analyzes his fear of conflict.

Analysis: I put this moment in because of its insightful power to wrap up quite a bit of the series into what Knausgaard considers a central dilemma of his life. It is yet another pervasive account, yet the personalization involved here is ambiguous. He mentions his father, but he also permanently admits that he lacks self-confidence, strength, and assurance. He claims that he transferred these traits to his adult life, which says quite a bit about his own views of agency, as if he is in complete power over his sensations, but he lacks the will to overcome them.

Permanence: Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

You can go and play again now. I turned and went back to my bench. I felt guilty, I ought to have comforted him until he stopped crying, but for one thing the reason for his disappointment was completely disproportional to his reaction and I didn't want him to start thinking this was the right way to deal with adversity, and for another, my strategy was to intervene as little as possible when I was out with them, I wanted them to be able to look after themselves. (72)

Context: Karl Ove discusses his parenting style.

Analysis: Knausgaard feels guilty for how he treats his son John, but he also believes it is important for his son (and the rest of his children) to be able to handle matters for himself.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Optimistic, Personalization: External

It took nearly an hour to get into the swing of things again. Not long afterward, Linda knocked on the door wanting to know if there were any clean socks anywhere or if they could just have bare feet in their sandals. I swiveled around and gave her my coldest look. She closed the door hard again. I was seething. Their voices came from the hall, Vanja and Heidi shouting at each other. I sensed she was having problems getting them to cooperate and felt guilty enough to go out and see if I could help, though not guilty enough to look her in the eye. (84)

Context: Karl Ove and Linda have complications with parenting responsibilities.

Analysis: Early in book two, Knausgaard declares that their family is not a normal family, as in a family that is put together. Here we see an example. It is a parochial moment, Knausgaard blames Linda, and the anger is not a permanent explanation.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Optimistic, Personalization: External

There was something about the prominence of being in charge that I didn't care for, as well as the fact that it also involved having to pass on any complaints about the cleaning from the staff to the parents who had been sloppy, which happened on occasion, and I could stand there wanting the floor to swallow me up, full of shame at having to inform them, because they were adults, and who was I to tell them they hadn't done their job properly and would have to do it again? I could do it once, twice in a pinch, but that was it. (96)

Context: Knausgaard discusses his role and responsibilities at the communal daycare the parents volunteer with.

Analysis: Here is an insight into Karl Ove's habits on the fringes of bourgeois society. His inability to involve himself as a manager with even the smallest levels of hierarchy reveals a person deeply introverted. Karl Ove even goes so far in this section as to inform the reader that he specifically chose the cleaning crew as it involved the least amount of responsibility and social interaction. It is a permanent declaration of his personality, as well as a pervasive discussion on the theme of interpersonal conflict once again.

Permanence: Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

He had warned me of it back when I was seventeen and had written disparagingly about Sissel Kyrkjebø in the local newspaper Fædrelandsvennen. Who do you think you are, he'd said, seventeen years old and writing so unfavorably about an artist who can sell two hundred thousand records? He was embarrassed by me, presumably also because we shared the same name and he would be associated with what I'd done. Kristiansand was a small town, and everyone read Fædrelandsvennen. I was proud my name was in the paper. But when he said those words to me I squirmed on my chair and blushed, what he said hurt. I measured the world by my indie yardstick, it was how I judged the quality of everything in the field of culture. He knew nothing about that world at all, to him it was nonsense, and that was what I felt, that he was measuring me by the real world. The adult world, the world of responsible people. I opposed that world, but that was when I was on my own, because no sooner was I confronted by it than what did I do? I bowed my head in deep and heartfelt shame. (112)

Context: Knausgaard recalls a previous event with Gunnar.

Analysis: Karl Ove here is linking together several experiences with Gunnar that helps to explain his perspective on what he takes to be the "real world." At that moment in his life, Knausgaard felt deeply embarrassed and blamed himself. It is not a permanent experience, as he is also

considering his “indie yardstick” and using the past tense to indicate that it was a standalone experience. But it is pervasive, as he is linking several disparate moments to explain the conflict with this uncle.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

If I opened my door and went into one of the other rooms, where Linda was perhaps, those thoughts would disappear again, bound up as they were with a time in my life that had been lost, whereas the time that surrounded me was alive and existed in all things, and by virtue of its being concrete and near made the past into what it was, spectral and vague. Nevertheless, I felt guilty. To ease my conscience, I occasionally told Linda what I was writing about, trying to make light of it, and she seemed to approve, until one morning she told me what one of her girlfriends had said when she'd mentioned what I was writing about. “You mean he's writing about his old flames?” her friend had said. “And you're putting up with it” (144)?

Context: Knausgaard again discusses the significance of *My Struggle* in his close sphere of existence.

Analysis: Pervasiveness rears its ugly head in this volume, as over and over we get a glimpse into how guilt can infect each scene. Here, Karl Ove discusses his relationships in his previous volumes, besides Linda's, and what follows is him calling Hanne, who plays a major role in the first volume of *My Struggle*. What is odd to document here is that it is pervasive in writing and *not* pervasive in action. The guilt he experiences goes away when he returns to his family. In the scope of this project, however, we should document the flow of the writing, not of his past events, as we cannot tell the order of experience, only the order of words. That is the central importance of pervasive explanatory style, as it concerns space.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

*But then that was me through and through, so I understood, because in the next sentence he was warning the publisher against me and my deceitful nature, manifested in the way I sat, hunched forward, and the way I held my head, always with my face turned away from whomever I was talking to, with a cheerless, scowling expression, eyes full of **guilt** and brooding speculation. They should not allow themselves to be fooled. What I stood for was not goodness and truth, despite the impression I tried to give, what I stood for was in fact the opposite. I was a notorious liar, I was a quisling, I was selling my grandparents and my father for blood money in a quest for fame, to which end I would shun no means, however shabby. (151)*

Context: Knausgaard summarizes Gunnar's attacks on him and his writing.

Analysis: This passage is in here to serve as a reminder of how Karl Ove synthesizes the information of others and evaluates himself as a human being, which is to say he thinks of himself very pessimistically.

Permanence: Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

*At first I found myself unable to answer and shifted uneasily in the chair, stuttering and stammering much as I sometimes had onstage, most recently in Munich, where many of the small audience that had found its way there had got up and left, something that consumed me with **shame** whenever I thought about it. But what was the point of wallowing in thoughts of weakness and wretchedness, I thought to myself, and looked up at the ground-level window just below the ceiling, through the cracked pane of which I glimpsed the asphalt outside. (168)*

Context: Karl Ove creates a scenario which allows him to discuss the situation between him and Gunnar.

Analysis: In a strange scene, Knausgaard places himself in a fictional witness box and answers questions on the importance of literature in deciphering the subtle differences between reality

and truth. It is pervasive not only because it continues his plight with Gunnar, but also because he brings in other moments when he is in public, such as the interview in Munich. At times Knausgaard reaches enlightenment: “what was the point of wallowing in thoughts of weakness and wretchedness.” The following paragraphs attempt to explain his reasoning for writing *My Struggle*. Here, because the shame is tethered to the event in Munich, as well as in this strange courtroom fiction, he starts out stuttering and shameful, but eventually finds his footing.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

We solved the issue by moving out. I still felt the panic grab hold of me if one of the children was noisy, if they happened to kick a radiator, for instance, or thump around on the floor. A chill of anxiety would run through me, and I'd be there like a shot to make them stop. Our neighbors here had never complained, it was the fear of our Stockholm neighbor that still lived inside me, three years after we moved away. (180)

Context: Karl Ove again discusses other examples of interpersonal conflict.

Analysis: We see pervasiveness leap and take hold of any and all events, this time we see a return of the horrible neighbors from volume two. It is obviously pervasive for his own psyche as well. But here he blames that neighbor on his own personality, which is rare for Knausgaard.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: External

There weren't that many children there, a lot of them were still on holiday. Of all the parents, we used the nursery the most, at least so it seemed to me, but perhaps it was just because I felt so guilty about all the times ours were on their own here while I was writing. (188)

Context: Knausgaard expresses doubts about writing when it comes to the care and enjoyment of his children.

Analysis: “All the times” is a pretty permanent and internal way to admit fault. It is not a

pervasive moment, as he moves on to the children getting picked up from the nursery.

Permanence: Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

My anxiety suddenly intensified, it felt like it came streaming from every extremity to lump together in my abdomen, and I looked down at Heidi walking beside me, the small steps she took as she gazed toward the windows of the shopping center on the other side of the road. I was in pain, such terrible pain. It was like everything had come apart. And although I knew the reason, the book I had written and the reaction it had provoked, I had no idea why the emotions it sparked should be so powerful, it was as if they had been separated from their origin and were now running wild. This was the anatomy of guilt. Guilt was in everything, spreading vaporously through my organism, pervading my very fabric with its ruin and destruction. It was a guilt that could no longer simply be traced back and attributed to the terrible thing I had done, it was now rampant in its own right. (317)

Context: Knausgaard experiences panic attacks with his children on the looming publication of *My Struggle*.

Analysis: If this is not a textbook example of pervasiveness, I do not know what is. Here, Knausgaard defines it as “rampant” and “running wild.” He blames himself for his writing. Is it permanent? In this scene, he goes past a temporary moment and makes it long lasting.

Permanence: Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

There was no getting away from the guilt I felt, it had transplanted itself from the abstract reality of the mind, where it could be countered by abstract means, to the physical reality of the body, where it could not be countered at all because the body had no means of defense but itself, and could only run, walk, sit, sleep, and a few other such things. It felt as if I were a room, and inside that room with me there was something horrifying. It was no use running, because if I ran, the

whole room ran with me. There was no escape, for the simple reason that it was there. It didn't matter if what I'd done was reasonable, if I was within my rights or not, because it was there, indisputable, inescapable, and all I could do was wait until it was something that was there no more. (325)

Context: Knausgaard ruminates on the possible damage to the reputation to his father.

Analysis: Anyone seeing these moments side by side could only feel that this was rumination.

The staggering amount of words written in volume six, combined with their content, is enough on its own to prove the deleterious effects of the damage it can cause a person. Returning to it again and again as an explicit choice to hammer home to the reader the psychological damage it had on him is unnerving to say the least.

Permanence: Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

That was the function of form here, to obscure the weakness of the individual. Any joining together, around a set of morals, a bureaucracy, an ideology, obscured the weakness of the individual. I knew this because it was what I saw, but when I encountered such things myself, that knowledge was preempted by my emotions, which mechanically fell in with them, slinging me off into the nightmare of feeling myself guilty or inferior. In my dealings with the tax authorities, the bank or credit companies, I was consumed with guilt. Sneaking around the subdivision gardens I was consumed with guilt. Dropping off and collecting the kids from nursery I was consumed with guilt. I knew that I was not inferior to anyone I met there, my weaknesses and shortcomings were no greater than theirs, but they weren't representatives of themselves, they were representatives of a system in which there were rules, and those rules were very simple: if you followed them you were a good person, if you didn't you were a bad person. I tried to follow them, but because I was undisciplined I often found myself breaking them. I knew

the reason, it wasn't because I was bad, sloppy, or lackadaisical, but knowing why could in no way make up for what the eyes of the system saw, which was someone who didn't follow the rules, and this I incorporated into the person I was. (333-34)

Context: Knausgaard finds insight into his own guilt with the systematized culture that allows modern social cohesion.

Analysis: What starts as a pervasive account of Gunnar criticizing him for drinking and smoking at sixteen, ends with permanent declarations of him being “undisciplined” but also with an awareness that these rules were placed on him by society.

Permanence: Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: External

*Being Christian was about being good and kind. All of us wanted that, but gradually, one by one, we fell by the wayside as we approached puberty. I held out for a long time, to me mopeds were bad, one-armed bandits were bad, even cola and peanuts were tinged with badness. To this day I remain wary of such deviations; driving above the speed limit fills me with **guilt** for days; killing a fly or watching a plant in the apartment die because I've forgotten to water it pains me unspeakably, for the desire to be good and decent has kept itself alive in me through all these years. (622-23)*

Context: Knausgaard discusses his personality.

Analysis: The guilt is associated with driving, a singular event. It is pervasive, however, because it continues to be another moment where he recognizes Gunnar's criticisms.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

It made no difference if Linda read this, she could do what she liked. If she wanted to leave me, she could. I didn't give a damn. I woke up unhappy, spent the day unhappy, and went to bed unhappy. If only I could have an hour, a day, a week, a month, a year alone, everything would be

*fine, I knew that. That is for me, not for her. For Linda it wouldn't be good, I knew that too. The very thought of leaving filled me with **guilt** and a bad conscience, in my mind I was living a double life. I was also afraid of facing all the fury and the abyss-opening fear which my departure would create. Linda was frightened, that was the point, she was afraid, whereas I was so conflict-averse that I would rather live in despair than say how things were. (901)*

Context: Knausgaard recounts Linda's mental instability.

Analysis: Knausgaard debates leaving and feels guilt associated with the thought. It's temporary, but it is pervasive, as later the book recounts her mental breakdown following the reading of *My Struggle*. He blames his own thoughts.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

*That the truth was not just in a letter to her, meant for her eyes only, but in a novel, meant for everyone's eyes, made what I was asking her to do actually inhuman. Fear and **guilt** accumulated in my chest like water behind a dam. I tried to subdue them by telling Linda there were a lot of terrible parts in the novel and she would be angry, but my intentions were not bad. She just smiled, she could take it, she said, don't worry. (902)*

Context: Knausgaard exhibits guilt on handing book two to Linda to read.

Analysis: The major theme of the final parts of book six, Karl Ove's guilt is temporary in the sense that it is tied to the book. It is a pervasive account, as later he relates Linda's reaction after finishing the book. He blames his own writing.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

*After I hung up, I was racked with **guilt**. The publishers were putting themselves out so much for me, they always had, and I was exploiting the situation, bringing family matters into the financial arrangements, allowing them to go out on a limb to help me buy a country cabin, which I didn't*

even want. (958)

Context: Linda and Karl Ove buy a cabin that requires more money. Karl Ove contacts his publishers for an advance.

Analysis: A temporary moment of guilt that is pervasive, as later he recounts that they ruin the garden: neither him nor Linda had time to take care of it. The old owner returns and is heartbroken. He blames himself for wasting the publisher's money.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

It felt like betrayal. It shouldn't have felt like betrayal because I was being torn to shreds and needed someone to talk to, but it still felt like betrayal because I was guilty of what I was being torn to shreds over, and it was not me who was suffering but Linda, so I had no right to the relief I gained from talking to someone who was unconditionally on my side. (1003)

Context: Karl Ove feels guilty for speaking to his mother about Linda.

Analysis: Knausgaard blames himself for seeking consolation from his mother for Linda's erratic behavior. The situation is temporary, but once again it is pervasive, as Knausgaard continues to discuss her state and the reaction of the press arriving at the house when book five is close to release. He blames his own mental weakness.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

Autumn

When I realised that no one had seen me and that no one would ever find out what had happened, the shock and shame disappeared and was replaced by a powerful but peculiar feeling of joy, for once the shame was gone, I could indulge in the vague yet distinct sensation I had had in my sleep: oh God, how delicious it is to pee yourself. (35)

Context: Karl Ove writes about a time as a fifteen-year old he peed himself.

Analysis: Writing about a time he drank too much pineapple juice and peed himself in a sleeping bag later that night, Karl Ove does not internalize it, and does not make it permanent. He is aware that the conditions that led to this are temporary. After this, Karl Ove talks about picture frames.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Optimistic, Personalization: External

One of my recurrent nightmares was that I was in a car out on the road without a driving licence; I would wake up with the same feeling of anxiety I got when I dreamed that I had killed someone or been unfaithful. I was thirty-nine years old when I got my licence, and that whole first year, driving, especially on motorways, felt like a transgression. I always felt anxious when I handed back the key to the rental company on Sunday afternoon, not unlike the anxiety I feel when I've been drinking the previous day. (86)

Context: Karl Ove discusses learning to drive at an older age.

Analysis: What starts as a permanent idea of driving at the beginning of this chapter, (“For a long time I thought I wasn’t the type to drive a car”) continues into learning and overcoming. The anxiety is internalized into his own psychology, as well as his family’s, but it is not a pervasive moment, as later he talks about driving just fine.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Optimistic, Personalization: Internal

*I considered my intellectual deficiencies, the cognitive stasis that marked me, as something fundamentally unchangeable, a trait of my character. The anxiety I felt when I simply wasn’t able to grasp what I was reading, for instance Julia Kristeva’s book *Revolution in Poetic Language* or anything at all by Lacan. And in a sense I was right that it was a flaw, that a certain kind of knowledge at a certain level of difficulty simply wasn’t for me, that I was too stupid, for in this respect nothing has changed. (89)*

Context: In “Experience” Knausgaard discusses the pain of reading difficult works.

Analysis: This is a permanent declaration that for Karl Ove there are certain works that, no matter the pressure and time applied, he simply won’t grasp. It isn’t pervasive, if only because Knausgaard discusses the complications with loneliness: it is sterile and can be viewed as a flaw. It is internal, that he does not blame the writer, but blames himself, the reader.

Permanence: Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Optimistic, Personalization: Internal

*But now as we sit around the breakfast table scratching ourselves like monkeys, and the lice, which arrive in the autumn, appear to have latched on to us and return after an absence of a few weeks after the delousing treatment, I am no longer modern but filled with something age-old: **shame** that we are a family with lice. (93)*

Context: Karl Ove analyses what occurs when lice invades a family home.

Analysis: It is not pervasive, as he discusses Van Gogh’s painting afterward, nor is it necessarily permanent. But it is personal, in the sense that he blames something biological on something social. The whole chapter is about what comes with lice, which is a feeling of lack of hygiene amongst a family.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Optimistic, Personalization: Internal

Winter

*...and from the wall below the staircase rises a small mountain of roller skates, bicycle helmets, riding helmets, riding breeches, gym bags, backpacks, and strewn about amid all this there are leaves, twigs, blades of grass, clods of soil and pebbles, in addition to caps and mittens, scarves and socks, I feel ashamed and want only for the visitor to leave, so that this **shame**, which flaps around in me like one of those large hollow figures through which air is blown and which sometimes flutter about outside shopping centres or fast-food restaurants, can die down (44).*

Context: Knausgaard discusses the messy family concept and its effect on his life and how they appear to friends of the family.

Analysis: This is a permanent declaration: earlier in the chapter he states, “We are one of those messy families.” It’s not pervasive, because later he cleans during Christmas time. It is personal in this sense that it is their doing and not someone else’s fault.

Permanence: Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Optimistic, Personalization: Internal

Premature ejaculation is of course the telltale sign of the infantile man, but it is also linked to anxiety, fear of the feminine, at least in my case. Once when a girl I was in love with returned my feelings, and we became a couple, I was so afraid of doing the only thing I wanted that I told her I thought we should get to know each other better before we slept together. She looked puzzled but accepted my suggestion. Several weeks passed, and I was permanently panicked. I fear women, and what I fear is that I will be found lacking, that I won’t be good enough. The irony, of course, is that it is precisely this fear that causes one to be found lacking, to be not good enough... (155)

Context: Knausgaard ruminating on bouts of premature ejaculation.

Analysis: Bridging book four of *My Struggle* and *Winter*, Karl Ove permanently fears women, but also seems to at least have a keen understanding of how rumination works when addressing himself to the opposite sex. Knausgaard discusses snowdrifts afterward, so it is not pervasive. But it is internal.

Permanence: Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Optimistic, Personalization: Internal

From the window where I am sitting and writing, I look over towards the house we live in. A few minutes ago a man came walking along the stone path, stopped in front of the door and knocked. People rarely come here, other than the parents of our children’s friends, so I felt a prick of

anxiety even as I guessed that he was working for a delivery service. (159)

Context: Knausgaard discusses the anxiety of a knock on the door.

Analysis: Pretty simple event. It's temporal, external, and not pervasive.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Optimistic, Personalization: External

Spring

*It lasted for a month. Then slowly you emerged, you became more and more present in the room and not just within yourself. And when I saw that, that you were emerging through your eyes, and that gradually there was even joy in them, my **anxiety** vanished. You were born a month early, and maybe that was why, maybe you needed those extra weeks to yourself. But the fright it gave me made me take extra care to speak to you, look at you, chat with you, fool around with you. (14)*

Context: Knausgaard discusses the anxiety of his fourth child's premature birth.

Analysis: It's not a permanent declaration of anxiety, nor is it internal, and obviously it is not pervasive. Once he sees his daughter take the extra month to sleep, and her personality seems to billow out, he returns to a feeling of calm satisfaction.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Optimistic, Personalization: External

*It was a routine meeting, they always arranged one when it happened, the thing that had happened here, but it didn't leave me unaffected, and not just because it was humiliating to sit in an office answering questions from two young women, both of them in their twenties, about my children and about our life, but also because it was **shameful**, since it meant that we as a family had approached the zone where third parties had the right to get involved, had the right to give advice, even had the right to enter our lives and take over. (20)*

Context: Karl Ove expresses shame over the family having to report to CPS due to Linda's

depression and possible suicide attempt.

Analysis: Whether Linda intentionally took sleeping pills to die or not is unclear, but here Knausgaard continues to lament that the idea of CPS looms over his own behavior, so it has a pervasiveness that even appears in the latter half of the novel. Knausgaard internalizes later with his behavior: he showers, cleans up, and appears as much a normal father as possible. He expresses anxiety over whether the characteristics he describes about his children to the two young women were in fact the “correct” things to say. But Knausgaard is also expresses a temporary explanation, that they had “approached the zone,” and not necessarily always been in it.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

*In my own eyes I was a calm person. I never got angry at others even when I had reason to, for instance when someone humiliated me. This was because I turned the **guilt** inwards, turned the rage inwards, towards myself, not because I wanted to but because that’s how I was. Every train of thought that I had before falling asleep at night ended in something either shameful or in a strong sense of **guilt**, and when the thought ended there, I had a mental image of shooting myself, with the barrel stuck into my mouth or aimed at my temple or my forehead, before I tried to think of something else, which after a few moments would end up in the same image, of me shooting myself. This became so habitual that I didn’t even notice it. The first time I did, I tried to make it stop, but I couldn’t, the image had become reflexive. (32-33)*

Context: Karl Ove discusses personality and predictability as a young father.

Analysis: Knausgaard has a distinct understanding on his tendency to internalize emotions and actions as something befalling his personality or his fault. But his capacity for anger flares up in certain moments that seems pervasive to this particular moment, as he talks about breaking the

armrest on the sofa by punching it. Not to mention the reaction his mind has of suicide. Although he typifies himself as a calm person, what he's describing is a permanent case of internalizing, which is a permanent statement. "Not because I wanted to but because that's how I was."

Permanence: Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

*But if I did, it wouldn't be the balance between us that was restored, I told myself, it would be the balance within me. It wasn't in order to do good that I wanted to go up to her, it was because I was weak. I wasn't capable of being firm, I wasn't capable of being consistent, I wasn't able to resist. If she turned to me with that look in her eyes, so full of despair, so full of fear, I gave in and tried to give it what it wanted. And if I defied that look, which my reason told me I must, since what went on here was so destructive, a storm of **guilt** and shame broke out within me. Why couldn't I just be good? Why couldn't I just be kind and loving? It did me good too, didn't it? But it wasn't that simple. For if I gave in, I would allow fear to rule our family. This holiday trip had been planned for nearly a year. It was an experience I wanted to give the children, I wanted them to see South America, see Brazil, see Rio de Janeiro, a trip I hoped they would never forget. Goddamned fucked-up shit. (89-90)*

Context: Karl Ove is explaining the reason for his behavior with Linda before their trip to Brazil.

Analysis: Knausgaard exhibits guilt because he resists Linda's pressure to cancel the trip. He eventually does cancel the trip, as Linda experiences a pall of depression over the pregnancy of their fourth child, and takes too many sleeping pills, which makes up the climax of the novel.

Here, Karl Ove is permanent, suggesting that he feels caught because he is not capable of being consistent, firm, yet to resist the darkness in Linda is to risk not being a good person. It is not necessarily pervasive, in the sense that the scene immediately after is waking up with the children, but the book does begin the thematic dissection of what might be an explanation for

their separation. Karl Ove does not blame Linda, but instead blames “fear” suggesting that it would “rule our family.”

Permanence: Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Optimistic, Personalization: External

They were completely absorbed in the game, laughing and joking and focused on each other. I told the mother that my wife was OK and not in any danger. I looked down as I said it, for I felt a burning shame that I had exposed her daughter to this. When I looked up and met her gaze, I realised that she wasn't thinking about that. I almost began to cry again, but didn't, the children mustn't see it. She said they had been fine, they had played at their house for a while, then they had wanted to come up here. They had eaten, and they had been happy. They stayed a little while longer, then she took her daughter with her and left (115).

Context: Knausgaard returns from the hospital to pick up his children from the neighbors house.

Analysis: Karl Ove's expression of shame is distinctly public here, very much in keeping with how shame operates, as it relies on appearances and decorum. It is personal, but it is not permanent, as it is focused on a single event. Nor is it pervasive: he writes of the children continuing to play, not noticing too much of their mother going to hospital, which has happened before. He does not blame Linda later either.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Optimistic, Personalization: Internal

Summer

When I woke up this morning unusually late, past ten, it was to a strong feeling of shame at what I wrote last night. I have never felt ashamed of anything I have thought, and never of my inner self, but only of what I have said, done or written, in other words when something in me has been made visible to others. It is odd, a kind of double standard, that everything is fine as long as it is hidden and not seen (76).

Context: Karl Ove is talking about his writing from last night concerning the small size of his penis during a rectal exam.

Analysis: Knausgaard discusses what he considers to be a weird personality trait: of being okay with thoughts and shameful toward writing and statements made in public. In this particular case, he moves between his embarrassment for his penis and considering the concept of smallness in other ways. He mentions doubting if Heidegger ever considered this same thought in his writing. He is blaming himself for his writing, viewing it as a permanent aspect of himself. He returns to the concept, even after moving on from the scene by reading Harry Potter to his son before putting him to bed, and he views this as a permanent trait in his psychological when it comes to public and private.

Permanence: Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

*I wasn't like that before, then I could sleep all day, watch TV all evening, be out all night, walk around aimlessly for weeks without being troubled by a bad conscience. Now it feels as if I am wasting time if I watch TV for half an hour; even reading, which after all is a part of my job, has become faintly dubious, something I can't do without feeling burdened with **guilt**, unless it is directly relevant to what I am writing or a book we are publishing. (91)*

Context: Knausgaard talks over his changing attitudes toward leisure.

Analysis: Knausgaard is discussing a changing set of feelings over what is considered a dutiful use of time, and what is not. This change is a temporary adjustment, his own guilt is externalized in whether or not he is working on a book, and he does not persist down this train of thought for long.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Optimistic, Personalization: External

'It is never good to be lonely,' she said. I think she is wrong, but maybe I think so because that

*would threaten my story, who I am to myself, which I stick to in all weathers and every season, even if it means waking up dejected every morning, and even if I am constantly harassed by feelings of **guilt** and shame, for despite everything it works, the way the shell works for the crab as it crawls sideways in the darkness at the bottom of the ocean, or the way subservience works for the dog, that too is a form, something fixed, to which it can therefore entrust itself. (100)*

Context: Karl Ove compares his life to his father's life and concludes that his personality is permanently set.

Analysis: What an intimate and important realization for the course of this thesis! Here is Knausgaard lamenting, like a dog or a crab, in what he considers a permanent aspect of his inner being, including our very words in this study: "guilt" and "shame." Of course, it is highly permanent, though it is not pervasive. Afterward he discusses a bicycle ride with his son. It is the story he tells himself, and therefore blames himself.

Permanence: Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Optimistic, Personalization: Internal

*He is almost always in a good mood, and he can talk non-stop for an hour if there's nothing to prevent him. My mother, your grandmother, says that I was just like that when I was his age. Just talked and talked about everything between heaven and earth. That changed abruptly when I reached puberty and ran into a wall of **shame**. I hope he never encounters it. But even though he maybe resembles me when I was his age, it's not like I recognise myself in him. (135-36)*

Context: Karl Ove compares his own self to his son at similar ages.

Analysis: A short use of the word shame, it is not pervasive, it is not permanent, in the sense that before there was puberty, and now here it is. His "running into a wall" seems like he is externalizing his shame as well.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Optimistic, Personalization: External

*I went back outside, crossed the road and sat down on the stone by the river once more in an attempt to regain the strong feeling of freedom I had had in the preceding days, the sense that my whole life lay ahead of me, that I could do whatever I wanted with it. But it was impossible, the **guilt** I felt was too strong, everything within me gravitated towards it. And this is how it has been whenever the gates of freedom have opened before me later in life, I have never felt **guilt-free** enough to walk through them. To kill **guilt**, as a free life demands, is something I have never had the strength for. (172-73)*

Context: Karl Ove laments abstractly the problems he has with freedom after an anecdote of moving out.

Analysis: An echo of the previous statement, Karl Ove in *Summer* has twice spoken in fatalistic terms about the chains of guilt that imprison his past. It is *very* permanent, using the word “never” twice. It is pervasive, as this is the second appearance in a short amount of time. It is also internal: it is his strength that is being questioned.

Permanence: Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

*As I pushed the mower around in ever-diminishing circles on the lawn, I thought of the previous evening, fragments of the conversation surfaced, and I was suddenly overcome by a paroxysm of **shame**, for I had sat there boasting. My cousin had asked me how Brazil had been, and I had told them how many people came to my event. He had asked me whether I travelled a lot, and I had said that I could travel every day of the year if I wanted, but that nowadays I turned everything down. India, I said, Argentina, Bali, Chile, South Africa. Why had I said this? It wasn't necessary information, it was just boasting. I passed into the long shadowy stretch along the fence where hardly any grass grew, just weeds and moss in between areas of bare earth, and I blushed. They were fifteen years younger than me and yet I still felt the need to mention that*

things were going well for me. It was like I was twelve years old. Twelve-year-olds couldn't be expected to control such urges. But a forty-seven-year-old? A father of four? (213-214)

Context: Karl Ove ruminates on previous conversations with a cousin.

Analysis: After all these years, Knausgaard's self-policing habit when utilizing shame continues to distress him. It is internal, and it is a pervasive moment, in the sense that it affects him in other activities (in this case, while he is mowing the lawn). It is permanent only in the sense that later he says, "That's how it was" as if this was not a temporary thing, but rather a more permanent aspect of his character. Relating himself to his father, he equates the situation as "running in the family."

Permanence: Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

And my mood rose slightly, for soon the lawn would be mowed and in the evening my brother was coming to visit.

Oh no, no.

*Another episode emerged from the recesses of **shame**. Our band was playing in New York, which was bad enough in itself, but during the whole trip I had talked about myself in just that way. Especially to the bass player. It was because I liked him so much and somehow felt I could let myself go with him, I could be as I really was, namely immensely self-centred. (214-15)*

Context: A continuation of past bouts of guilt and shame regarding family interactions.

Analysis. One pervasive moment into another. One can run a string through Knausgaard's writing and wonder if growth is possible with him. Here it is again, a permanent declaration of his self-centered behavior, not to mention that he views these moments as entirely part of his personality.

Permanence: Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

While we were in a recording studio this autumn, in Gothenburg, I had flown back and forth to Stockholm to take part in a talk show, and my shame at what I had said during the programme was so unbearable that on the return flight I thought about taking my own life to escape it. It sounds like an exaggeration, but that's how it is with me at times, small insignificant matters can suddenly take on gigantic proportions and become almost too much to bear. When I got back to the studio, it was all I could talk about. Talking about it was an attempt to cut it down to size, to restore it to its just proportion. Then the others could say, surely it wasn't that bad, and it would be as if a breath of cool air wafted over the fire. The next morning I sat on the sofa talking to the vocalist, still racked with shame, and when the bass player came and stood in front of the coffee maker to make coffee, I said, by way of excusing myself and showing some self-insight, 'Can you guess what I'm talking about?' I had expected him to reply, The talk show, but he didn't, he merely said laconically, 'Yourself?' That comment has burned in me ever since. (215)

Context: A further continuation of Knausgaard's analysis of self-centered behavior.

Analysis: For his latest book to be "racked with shame," this is difficult to read. It's clear that Knausgaard views his own behavior at a talk show as more of the same. It's pervasive, obviously, it's permanent as it has burned in him "ever since." And it is an internal problem.

Permanence: Pessimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

The struggle against shame is old, I have been battling it since I was thirteen, but part of the problem with shame is that it is always new, that it always comes as if for the first time – and that, I suppose, is something it has in common with the other emotions that take control over us, desire or infatuation, jealousy or shyness, they are pure, in the sense that they contain nothing but themselves, they are devoid of self-reflection or experience. One has to have a system to counter them with, one has to fence them in somehow to be able to stand outside them. The only

insight that helps me to overcome shame's total ascendancy is that it will pass, that one day it will reveal its true proportions, which are almost always minor. The important thing is not to do anything stupid while it is raging, not to act on it but ride it out. (216)

Context: Knausgaard resolves this section on shame with some conclusions about how best to cope.

Analysis: We finally see here some degree of effort to control shame's overwhelming influence. It is not a permanent moment, as Karl Ove knows that shame eventually goes away, it is not pervasive, as Knausgaard returns to the daughter as subject. I would suggest that it is personal, as it is his own battle, but on the other hand he labels shame as well as other emotions as that which "take control over us." Another moment has him finding ways to "stand outside them," which connotes externalization.

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Optimistic, Personalization: External

*The **shame** I feel so strongly occurs only on the surface of the soul, it is a bit like the flame over charcoal, it is fuelled by lighter fluid and dances above the blackness, lightly and almost non-committally, whereas the glow within the charcoal is something quite other and deeper. I haven't killed anyone, even though it sometimes feels as if I have, and the things I anguish so much about are inconsequential in the bigger picture, they have to do with superficial matters in the world of social interaction, what others might think or believe, and the anguish is inconstant and flickering, not embedded in anything essential. **Shame** really belongs in puberty, when the curtain goes up and you understand that you are part of a larger context, but if something goes wrong then, it can persist. (219-220)*

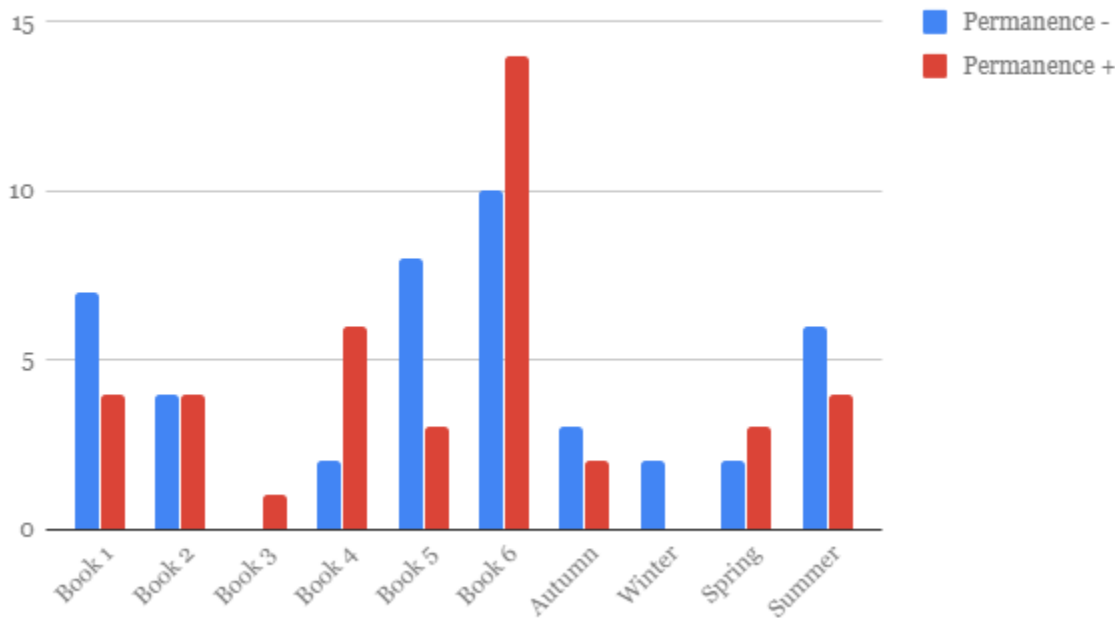
Context: Karl Ove once again concludes his experiences of shame in grand and abstract ways.

Analysis: One of the most interesting phrases occurs here: "but if something goes wrong then, it

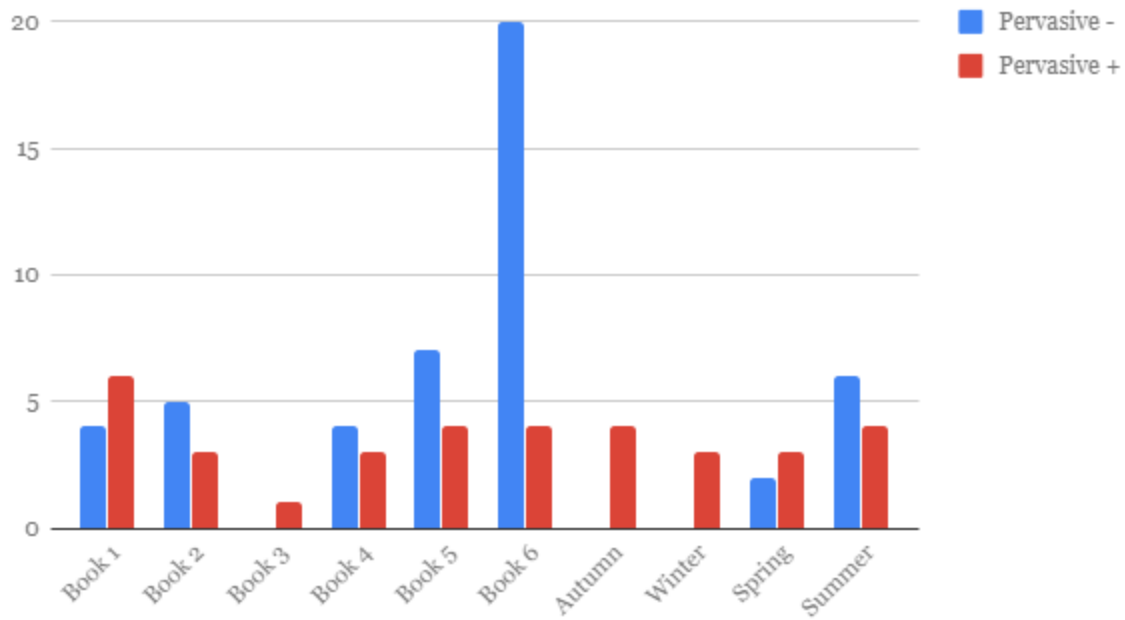
can persist.” This use of a comma, not to mention the concept of wrongness, seems to be an externalization. I believe he is targeting his father, in such a way as to blame an inconsistent upbringing as the reason for Knausgaard’s bouts of paralyzing guilt. It does seem as though Knausgaard is at least aware that a person can compartmentalize shame and keep it under wraps in temporary circumstances. It is more difficult to know what he really feels for himself, as he understands how shame works, but continues to suffer from it. Knausgaard’s discussions continue into an analysis of guilt of the fictional woman he creates in *Summer* and is therefore pervasive. Knausgaard understands the shame and blames himself for issues that he knows are “inconsequential.”

Permanence: Optimistic, Pervasiveness: Pessimistic, Personalization: Internal

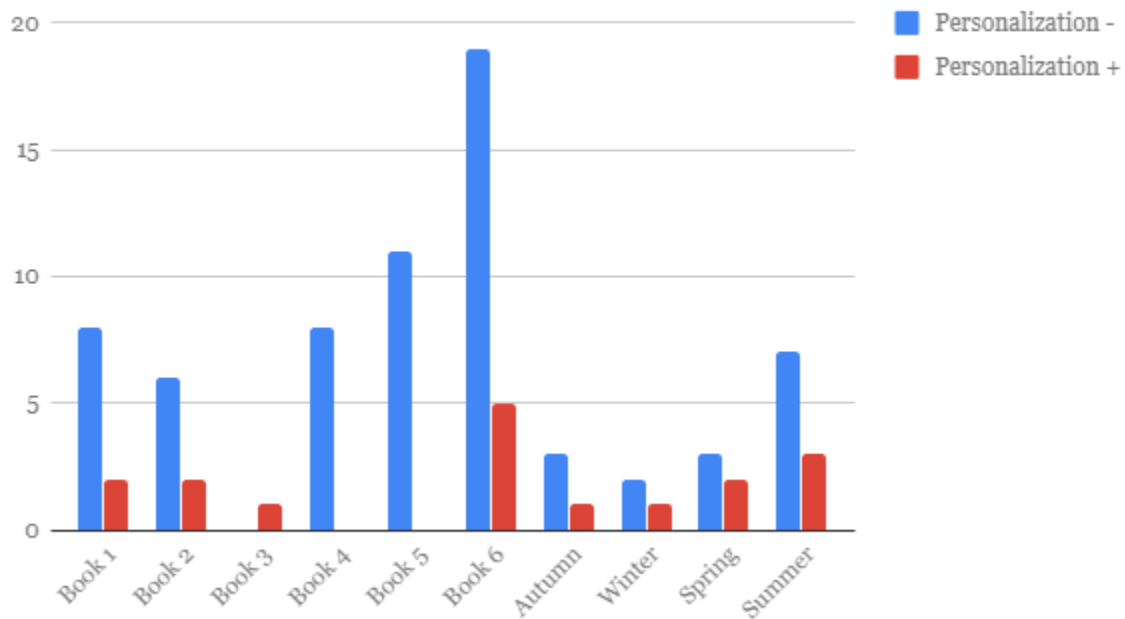
Permanent Explanatory Style



Pervasive Explanatory Style



Personalized Explanatory Style



Conclusion

Here are the tabulated accounts for explanatory style for Knausgaard's autofictional

writing. The first and most obvious conclusion to draw is the high degree with which Karl Ove personalized his mistakes. As Geir states in volume two, and as Karl Ove confirms here, many of what he considers mistakes are internalized and viewed as his failure. This lends credence to defining why his writing is so critically acclaimed. Honesty and self-effacement are key markers of successful creative non-fiction. In places where shame, guilt, and anxiety occur, Karl Ove leaves no quarter for himself.

We see a massive amount of negative pervasiveness in book six. The final volume leaves us with the legacy of *My Struggle*, which includes his conflict with Gunnar, and Linda's mental breakdown. But what is particularly surprising is the way this brings up past events either tangentially related to the situation at hand, or not even related at all. Book six is a clear indication of the negative indications of explanatory style to drag in other events from bygone places.

Another conclusion is to see the way the ratio of negative to positive leaps up in volumes four and five. With the exception of permanence in volume four, the rest of those moments accelerate towards the negative in a way that is alarming. Of course, these are some of the worst moments in Knausgaard's life, and even at the beginning of volume five, he outright states that in the fourteen years he spent in Bergen, nothing good happened there. In chapter two, we'll have to see what sort of effect this has on the writing style as a whole, and we'll have to address the question of whether this negativity was a deliberate choice, or whether it simply came out of a pessimistic and soon to be depressive mind.

CHAPTER TWO

LINGUISTIC INQUIRY AND WORD COUNT

This chapter concerns overall trends in Knausgaard's writing to detect physical and mental changes. While most would describe his writing as meandering and plotless, even at times tedious and slow, a larger display of pace is at work, governed by emotion and psychological outlook. We will detect fluctuations in writing style using the most miniscule of words, function words that we use so often they have become invisible. Articles like "an" and "the". Pronouns and personal pronouns. Adverbs and verb tenses. Even the length of words can generate some responses on the ways we think and act. Uncovering hidden meanings in style that convince us of larger plots of themes is nothing new of course: works like *Pynchon's Mythography* by Kathryn Hume have been written in the past as a necessary conduit to return experimental work to a methodological framework. But while Hume used seasons, elevation, descriptions of weather and time, here we will be using computer technology, the kind that provides firm footing for analysis for other scholars to approach Knausgaard's work from the same perspective.

Physical Health

In his book *The Secret Life of Pronouns*, James Pennebaker states that his research was largely from a social psychologist perspective. Originally, Pennebaker was less interested in literary scholarship, and more interested in the psychology first and foremost, while attempting to make connections between a writer and the work that he or she produces. Pennebaker helped uncover the impact of writing out our trouble, rather than keeping a traumatic experience secret to themselves.

Pennebaker's work with his computer program, Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count, has been used for a variety of purposes and with indelible results. Most of the research admittedly falls into two camps: psychology and trauma and the use of writing to identify or highlight problems and solutions, and also the recording and analyzing of social media in news and politics. Recently, previous research has been vetted using multilab analyses on idiosyncrasies in word choice for those suffering with depression (Tackman et. al). Work has also been done in the political spheres to evaluate the effectiveness of ads from the Internet Research Agency during the 2016 presidential election (Boyd et. al). Particular genres have been the focus of scrutiny, such as the changes in blog writing based on age and gender (Jonathan Schler et al.), discussing the importance of "literary" fiction compared to popular fiction in cognitive gains (David Comer Kidd and Emmanuel Costano). Research similar to this thesis has also been performed in fiction and non-fiction, such as looking at the use of I-words among suicidal poets (Stirman and Pennebaker), and analyzing correlations between autobiographies and longevity (Sarah Pressman and Sheldon Cohen). Most of the research done in genres is meant to connect an author's work to psychological effects. The trajectory of Pennebaker's research from thirty years ago to now helps to shed light on how computer analysis could be used for such a wide array of study.

In the 1980s, researchers had established that speaking on trauma was important for the health and well-being of people ranging from the mildly depressed to combat veterans suffering PTSD. If this was the case with speaking, could it also be the case for writing? The end result was better physical health, particularly better immune system function, compared to someone who held their trauma in.

"We began running experiments where people were asked to write about traumatic experiences for fifteen to twenty minutes a day for three or four consecutive days.

Compared to people who were told to write about nonemotional topics, those who wrote about trauma evidenced improved physical health. Later studies found that emotional writing boosted immune function, brought about drops in blood pressure, and reduced feelings of depression and elevated daily moods.” (10)

Certainly readers of *My Struggle* will understand how Pennebaker’s research will apply. Knausgaard wrote over 3,500 pages of what I would consider to be a string of traumatic circumstances. Did Knausgaard write in ways that would improve his physical health?

The next step in Pennebaker’s research was, does writing with a certain style help some people more than others? How on earth would you test that? The first submissions during trials left him and his graduate research students poring over mounds of handwritten or typed documents. This was the 1980s after all. And even *if* they managed to read through it all, the results were not consistent and reliable, since human readers had very different ideas when considering the effects of nouns, verbs, pronouns, and prepositions, just to name a few.

This is when computerized technology for text analysis rose to prominence. Pennebaker, along with help from students with computer science backgrounds, devised a system called Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count. In order for LIWC to work, first Pennebaker and his team had to take the words of the English language and place them in what are called “dictionaries.” Dictionaries are simply another word for “category” and range from the simple, like *personal pronoun* use (I, me, my) to more complex ones, like *positive emotion* (love, care, happy). When LIWC would find these words in a text that a student wanted to analyze, the program would register that particular word in one of these dictionaries, and would increase the percentage of that word in relation to the whole text. For example, writers of expressive blogs tend to use the word “I” just above six percent on average when writing a post, which is much higher than other

genres, like novels or news articles. It's not like the blog post changes in amount of "I" words, as a published work remains consistent. Consistent results in numerical percentages was the solution Pennebaker was looking for: they could now look at thousands of documents in a matter of seconds, and get returns on those documents for the dictionaries that were the same every single time. Over time, they could collect averages, lower quartiles, upper quartiles, as well as minimums and maximums. In laboratory study, they could now compare expressive writing with blood samples to determine correlations. Comparing style with different categories of words was a huge breakthrough in finding changes in physical and mental health, changes in style with age and gender, as well as identifying different thinking styles.

The most painstaking process was of course the concept of dictionaries for each word. According to Pennebaker's LIWC manual, as well as *The Secret Life of Pronouns*, the laborious task of placing words in categories for the LIWC program to register was specifically difficult because of the power of context in language. After all, as Wittgenstein says, "meaning is use." James Pennebaker comments on the task of the process as employing, "an army of students who evaluated every word that was part of any dictionary...panels of student judges had to all agree..." (11) In total, it took over three years to get LIWC to get up and running.

As a result, the program functions best when large samples are taken. The larger samples tend to mitigate the power of context. Admittedly, there are still problems with the ideas behind the LIWC program. On the one hand, this "objective" program was still developed by a local selection of students and faculty at a parochial university. Making the claim that words, especially content words that can dramatically change the main idea of a text, could be broadly recovered and calculated has its own troubles. I was glad to read that the categories had to be peer reviewed by not just Pennebaker, but by a wide selection of students at the school, but even

in the 2015 version of the program, I did not want to overreach using the program as a kind of miracle worker that cuts corners with rigorous analysis. Here in this chapter, I have attempted to find categories that have been statistically proven in other studies to reveal physical and mental changes. The categories of words that you'll see here have been used in studies and vetted through other researchers involving other patients and trials.

Pennebaker and his students could now look at those participants who showed the greatest physical health gains and look at their results in LIWC and discover what it was about their writing that correlated. Results indicated that the more people used positive words throughout their writing, the more their health improved. (Pennebaker and Seagal) You might be thinking that negative words were hardly existent at all for those writers deemed healthier, but that turns out not to be the case. Having a *moderate* number of negative words, not too many, but not too few, was ideal. Why? Possibly because using negative words was a sign of acknowledging a bad situation. For those that had too few negative words, Pennebaker wrote that they were in writerly denial, avoiding opportunities for reflection.

There are other factors besides positive and negative words. They also discovered that the healthy writer needs to feel as though they are learning something new about themselves, and constructing a story they never told before. If a person tells themselves a sob story and they repeat it to people over and over in the exact same way, they learn nothing from the moment and therefore do not move on. This is rumination, a psychological term meaning that a story can repeat in an individual's head without growth, and can be very unhealthy psychologically. To track whether writers were constructing a new story and learning about themselves, Pennebaker and his team looked at insight words (like think, realize, believe) and causal words (like because, effect, rationale). They discovered that the amount of words was not necessarily important, but

rather the *rate of change*. For those writers who increased their use of causal and insight words, throughout their writing exercises, the results are impressive. More so than positive and negative emotions, if a writer took a traumatic experience that they held privately to themselves, and then wrote about it in a way that denoted self-reflection and an intent to discover their own lives, they showed a decline in doctor visits and fewer reports of symptoms. Repeatedly, Karl Ove has mentioned in interviews that he writes on the moments in his life that, “I’ve not spoken about with anyone.” (Lit Up) But is it simply storytelling? If a writer was stagnant, and simply wrote a story that was already pre-built in their heads, it was simply a projection of rumination, and did not receive as powerful of health related benefits. Does Karl Ove have a story pre-made in his head? Or was this a discovery of emotional well-being?

It goes even further. Sherlock Campbell, a graduate student, along with Pennebaker, decided that it wasn’t necessarily the content of writing they should be analyzing more, but rather their style. As mentioned earlier, given time, the weight of our function words, words that we use to connect thoughts and ideas, end up being so much more numerous than content words. Take a look at the first lines of volume one of *My Struggle*: “For the heart, life is simple: it beats for as long as it can. Then it stops” (8). The memorable words to us might be “heart” and “life”. But on another look, we notice that other words are in here as well. Pronouns like “it”. Prepositions like “for”. There’s an article with “the,” and we see that the sentence is in the present tense. After so many years, our brains develop methods for avoiding these words because of our advanced reading skills. They seem to float by invisibly, yet they actually are *the* determining factor for discovering essential details about an author. *The Secret Life of Pronouns* has this as its central thesis.

Our use of those words says much more about us than we think. With this new awareness

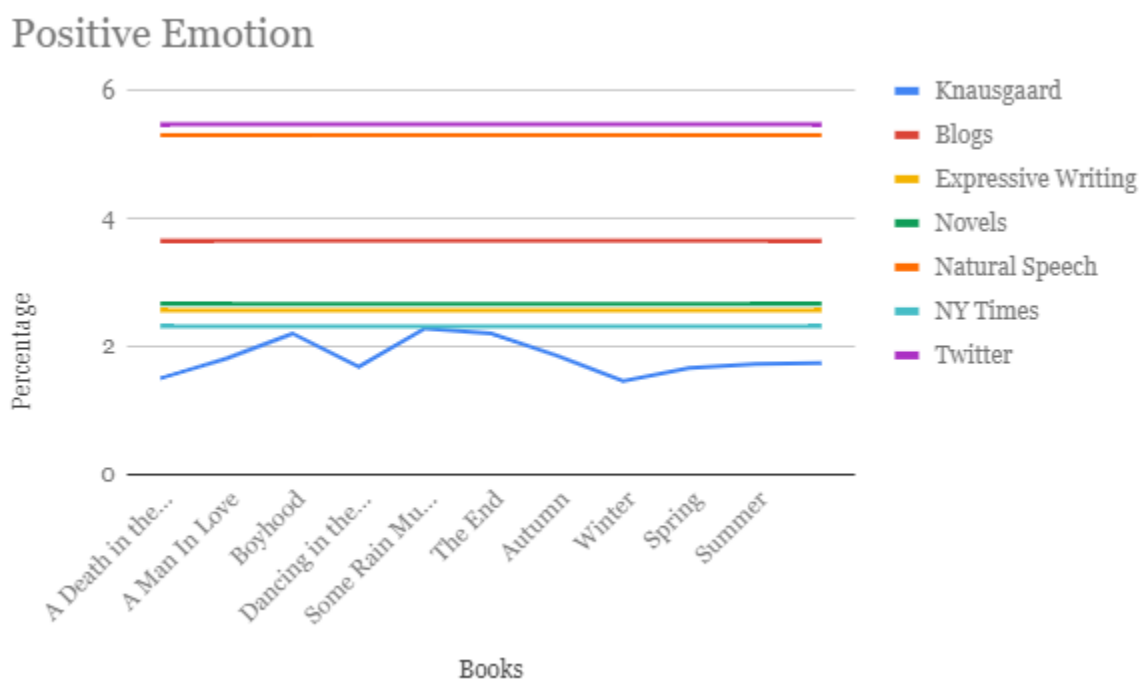
of how to approach writing, they discovered that a healthy writer will look at events from multiple perspectives. This means that their use of personal pronouns compared with other pronouns (like he, she, we) would fluctuate in ratio back and forth. When writers switched perspectives on an event and wrote from other points of view, they were actually trying to *understand* a traumatic experience, rather than just tell a story. It was a powerful and startling insight that looking at the world in another person's shoes, as cliché as it sounds, really does work.

Unfortunately, getting people to do this explicitly doesn't work. Simply placing them in a room and telling them to use the ideal style for the best long-term benefits: relatively higher than average positive words, a moderate amount of negative words, and requesting to have subjects increase their causal and insight words, while fluctuating in their pronoun use, doesn't produce the same health benefits. It has to come from the inside out, rather than outside in. This is what makes Knausgaard's writing so fascinating and important for this kind of research. Here we have an author, who wrote out his life in an incredibly dense two years, and he wrote expressively about his thoughts, feelings, desires, and on and on. This is a huge selection of writing out in the wild, and as far as we can tell, it is dramatically honest. The question is if the writing did him any good? What clearly started as a sort of midlife crisis, then turned international success, could have been a ruminating mess or a traumatic breakthrough. Which was it?

Let's start with what we know about physical health and work our way towards emotional state and mental health in the second half of this chapter. For these next graphs, you're going to see the percentage results of LIWC (y-axis) for all of the books from Knausgaard available (x-axis). In order to see how his writing fluctuates, you'll also see some averages based on genre. I needed a set of genres as control groups so you could see how his writing compares

to others. This data has been pulled from the latest edition handbook of LIWC, and includes over 37,000 blogs from 2006, over 6,000 expressive writing samples on emotional topics throughout Pennebaker's career, over 850 novels dating from the years 1660 to 2008, over 2.5 million words spoken in conversation, over 34,000 stories from *The New York Times*, and over 23 million words from Twitter. In total it amalgamates over 80,000 writers and over 231 million words. Considering that Knausgaard wrote from 2006 to 2009, it seemed to be the right time frame comparison.

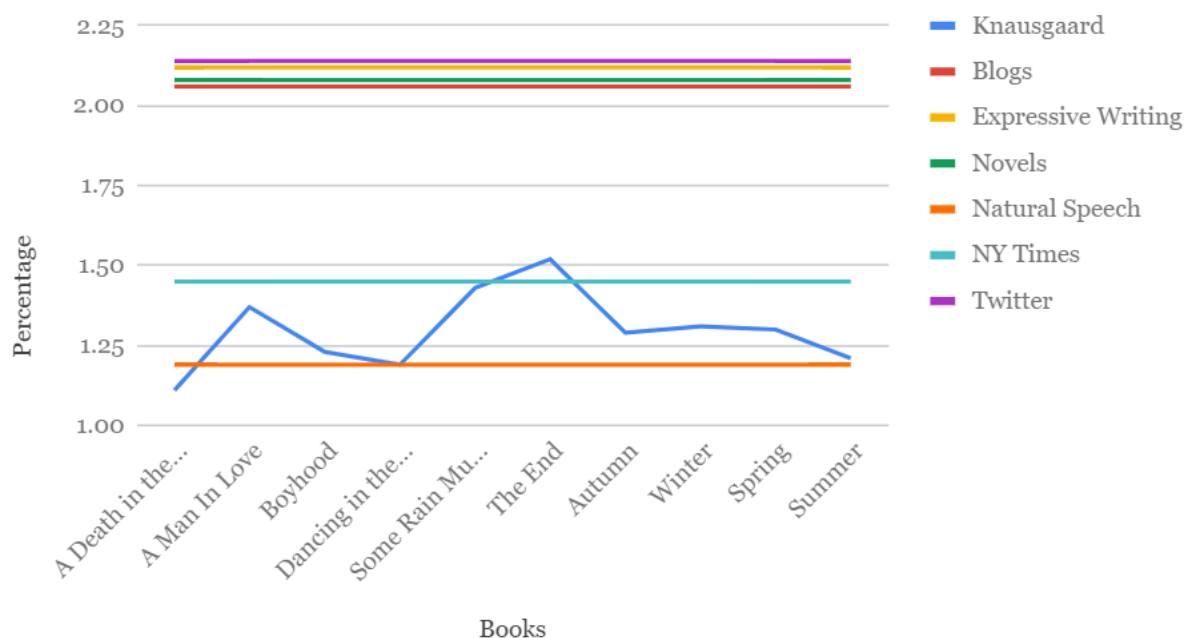
With the preliminaries out of the way, let's get started. First, we know that positive emotions make a big difference. Here's a chart of Knausgaard's use of those words.



The results are not pretty. Knausgaard uses less positive words than all other genres available. Even the *New York Times* has more to offer on positivity, which is impressive given the mantra of news being “If it bleeds it leads.” However, the closest Knausgaard gets to some sort of healthy experience comes from volumes three, five, and six. His lowest uses of emotion comes

from volume four and *Autumn*. *Dancing in the Dark* handles harsh commentary on a coming of age story. The first and second volume of the seasonal quartet, however, are a little trickier, and as you'll see, these volumes will reveal quite a bit on Knausgaard's mental health during that time of writing. But, to conclude, for all we see here, Knausgaard has the positivity of a mossy log.

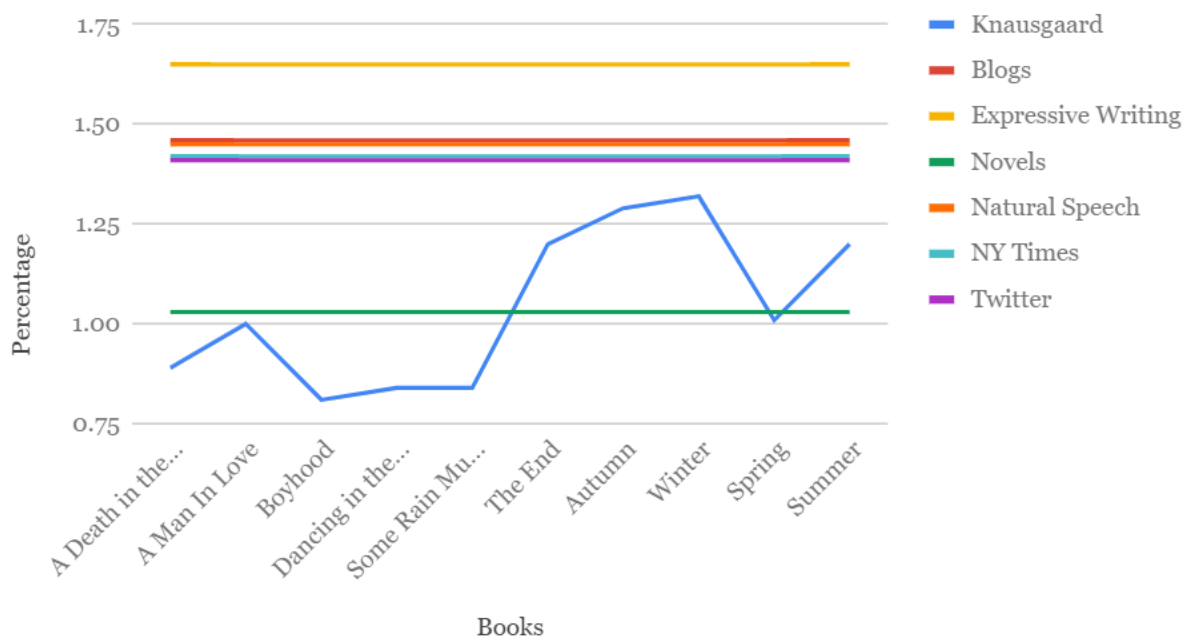
Negative Emotion



Here is the graph for negative emotions. After marveling at the huge changes in natural speech when it comes to positive and negative emotions, we see a similar pattern here: low results compared to the group. However, we see much wider fluctuations, and not necessarily a lockstep synchronization with positive words. A spike occurs in *The End*, with the lowest being the incredibly analytical musings on death in the first volume. But the overall conclusion to draw is the same as the one with positive emotion, which is that Knausgaard writes with so little of it, he seems to ignore the concept of emotion entirely. Or, the events happened so long ago and are of

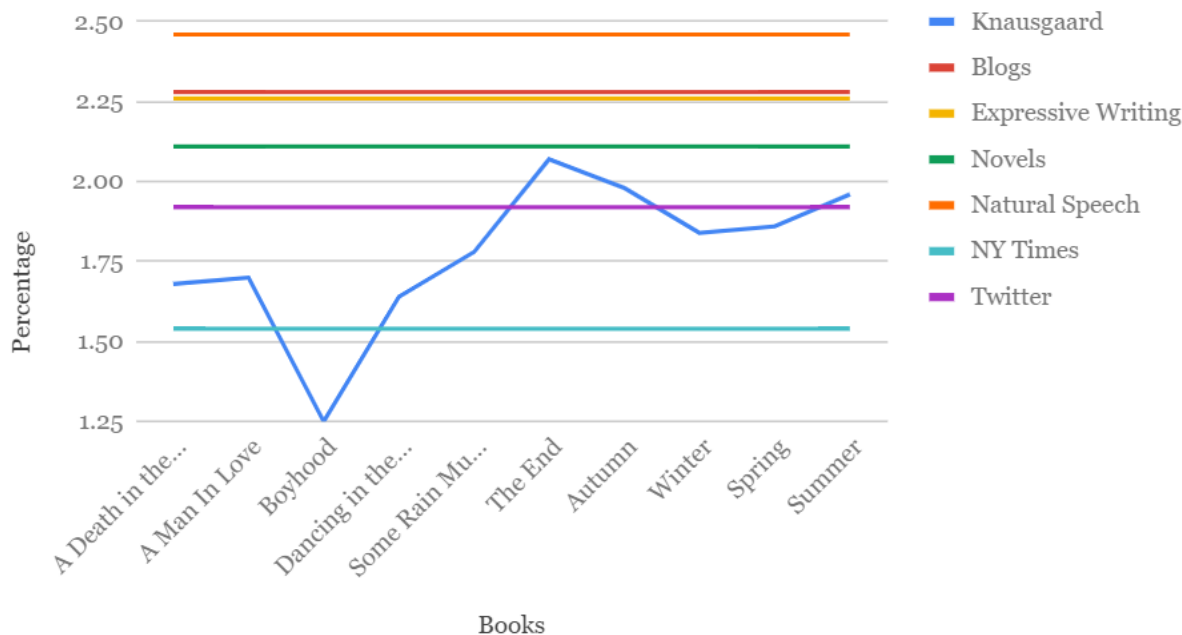
so little consequence that he is unable to recount those moments with emotional clarity as an older man. Or he is *unwilling*, to, choosing instead to write in denial. It seems as though his goal in writing was not to understand his emotions at all, but to know for sure whether he learned or not, we'll have to take a look at his use of causal and insight words.

Causal Words



The next graph features use of causal words. Remember that a raw count isn't the determining factor here, but rather the rise of them as the writing progresses. So the control groups are only here to serve as comparative markers. Here, we see fairly wide fluctuations. A slight rise in the first two volumes gives way to a drop in the middle volumes, followed by a dramatic rise in the final volume of *My Struggle*. We see this rise until a precipitous decline in *Spring*, climbing back up to *Summer*. What's impressive in this and the following insight words is the ability for Knausgaard to pace a series. In *My Struggle* and the Seasonal Quartet both, there are larger fluctuations to keep the reader engaged. The chances for physical health are pretty

Insight Words

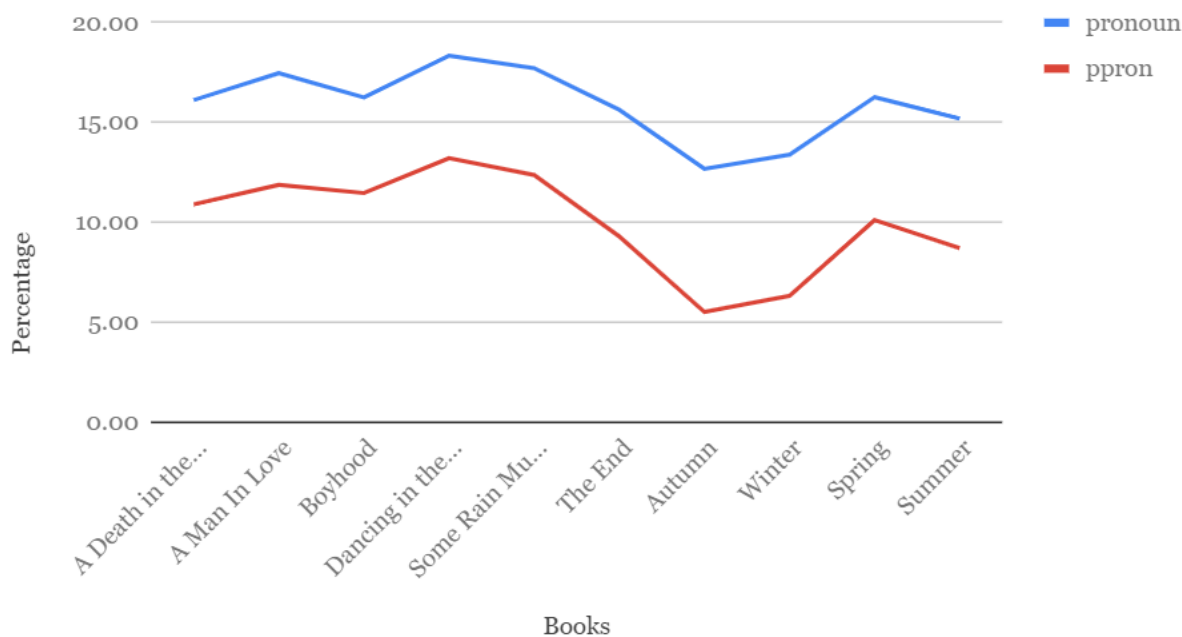


large if both causal words *and* insight words see a precipitous climb with the final volume.

Use of insight words, however, tell a similar story. Remember that these are words that attempt to glean something from the world. Because, seems, found, sense, believe, contemplation, recalls, felt. These are all examples of insight words. The valley that this creates is startling, and it can lead us to some conclusions. First, Knausgaard could be a genius of style, with the knowledge that he is exiting the series giving him the opportunity to make some wrapping up statements in his style. We could argue that this, along with the causal words, are signs of physical benefits from writing, and it certainly lends itself in that direction. What is remarkable is, once again, the rise of insight words in volumes four, five, and six. Insight words point to a *desire* to understand, and perhaps in these moments, the moments of premature ejaculation in volume four, as well as some awkward admissions of fantasies with his students three years younger, he was trying to figure out for himself what he felt. Words like felt, seem, and imagined connote a dance around the moments themselves. With the horror of infidelity and

the chronic use of alcohol, his personal life was in shambles, and what better way to address this character than to have him as the subject for both author *and* reader? Maybe Knausgaard was trying to figure out his younger self just like we were?

Pronoun Use



The next graph implies some ambiguity when it comes to physical benefits of writing however. Earlier we discussed that a healthy writer needed to fluctuate in use between I, me, and my (here listed as “ppron” for personal pronouns) and other pronouns, in order to explore new ways of understanding. Here we see, almost in lockstep, the use of pronouns between each volume, and while those numbers increase and decrease, they do so in parallel lines. I did not include control groups here, because these lines are in relation to each other, rather than a perceived average. We will be returning to personal pronoun use when discussing mental health and emotional state later in this chapter. For now, this gives credence to Jeffrey Eugenides’s review in the *New York Times Book Review*. In it, he stated that we don’t really get to see the other characters of *My Struggle*, only Knausgaard. Here we see it in action. In *My Struggle* Knausgaard is *the* defining

influence. What's ironic is the seasonal quartet. The impetus of writing the quartet was the birth of his fourth child, a daughter, and the books are designed as a kind of long letter to her. That's why *Autumn* sees the largest split, as he writes specifically to her. But as you can see, *Winter* and *Spring* work to close the gap to *My Struggle* levels. For those who have read the seasonal quartet, the first two volumes are oddities, written as more personal project than addressed to any audience, while *Spring* is a kind of masterpiece in the way it amalgamates the meandering adventures of *My Struggle* with the brevity of the quartets. *Summer* haphazardly picks up the pieces of all the different styles.

I say all this, because as we make our way out of physical health experience in writing and towards mental health, you may have noticed the huge differences between the two collected works. Whether these are based on an explicit choice by Knausgaard or a response to the events in his life on paper is not certain. I can say with some confidence, however, that with the power of insight and causal words in the latter half of *My Struggle*, and continuing in the Seasonal Quartet, Knausgaard may be performing a longer work of recovery. Of course, there are those that will say that these *are* stories, told largely from a perspective and edited to maintain a style. I would say that, while *A Death in the Family* is edited into a mainstream memoir format, both Knausgaard and the editor have gone on to say that the remaining volumes were largely untouched, save for basic grammatical issues. What we have here is an author writing expressively for stories largely told in his own head for years and years, and at the age of 40 when he realized he was not happy, he put them on paper.

Mental Health

We've tracked Knausgaard's chances for improvements in physical health. Could we pinpoint how someone is feeling *at the very moment* of writing? If that was the case, for those who have a

longer history of writing, could we describe trends? These physical benefits are perfectly fine and all, but honestly we read and write for the mental challenge it provides. It is a pastime that exists in the head, and for detecting emotion consistently and reliably, using words to do so may be harder than we think. When I'm standing right in front of a person crying, it is obvious to me, but writing has distance, and unless I know the person, how would I really know? I'll tell you that we can know, and we'll be going back to Pennebaker for our time on mental health. Not only can we track the basic emotional states of happiness and sadness, but can we also detect various other emotions such as anger or anxiety, as well as make predictions about depression, and even when a person is about to make a larger decision in their lives.

First, let's figure out the obvious: did Knausgaard get more sad? Based on the trajectory of *My Struggle*, a lot of heartbreak and anguish occur in the latter half of the series, not to mention that his explanatory style takes a nose dive in volume five. At the beginning of the seasonal quartet, all emotion seems off the table, and the reason for that will become clear as we go along. But to detect sadness in writing requires thinking about how people act when they have sadness in the mind. When we admit to ourselves that we are sad, we focus a lot on ourselves, so we use I-words more. We tend to think less about the present (because it is so horrible) and focus more on the future and the past. Happier people do not think or dwell too much on it, but sad people see increases in causal or insight words, which we've described above. Pennebaker and Shannon Stirman used these expectations on the writing of poets, and found the results we've described above, but after the research they detected a weird caveat. In the research, they split up the poets who committed suicide and those that did not. Writers are particularly susceptible to sadness, poets more so. When they analyzed the two groups, they found more uses of sexual language in the suicidal poets group (Stirman). Possibly this has to do with a more hedonistic

mode of writing? Or perhaps sex and death, as Freudian as it is, has very tangible evidence in the act of writing? Knausgaard mentions sexuality often in volumes four and five, where explanatory style hits hardest. Could he have focused on sexuality as an unintentional side effect to sadness?

If a person writes for long enough, we can detect larger trends as well. To test this, Pennebaker took a look at a person who spent quite a bit of time in the public spotlight, and had also been through one traumatic crisis or more. Rudy Giuliani not only spent his time as mayor through the September 11th attacks, but had also admitted on public television to having an affair and had decided to leave his wife. The writing of his press conferences during these times may shed light on how someone's mental state is reflected in their writing. Many of the results are the same as before: Giuliani increased his use of I-words, but uses of large words (six letters or more) dropped as well. (Pennebaker and Lay) Pennebaker cross referenced these with the fictional character of King Lear from the titular play and found a similar result. We react from trauma in two ways. Either we acknowledge it and associate with the people around us in more immediate and warm ways. Or we ignore it.

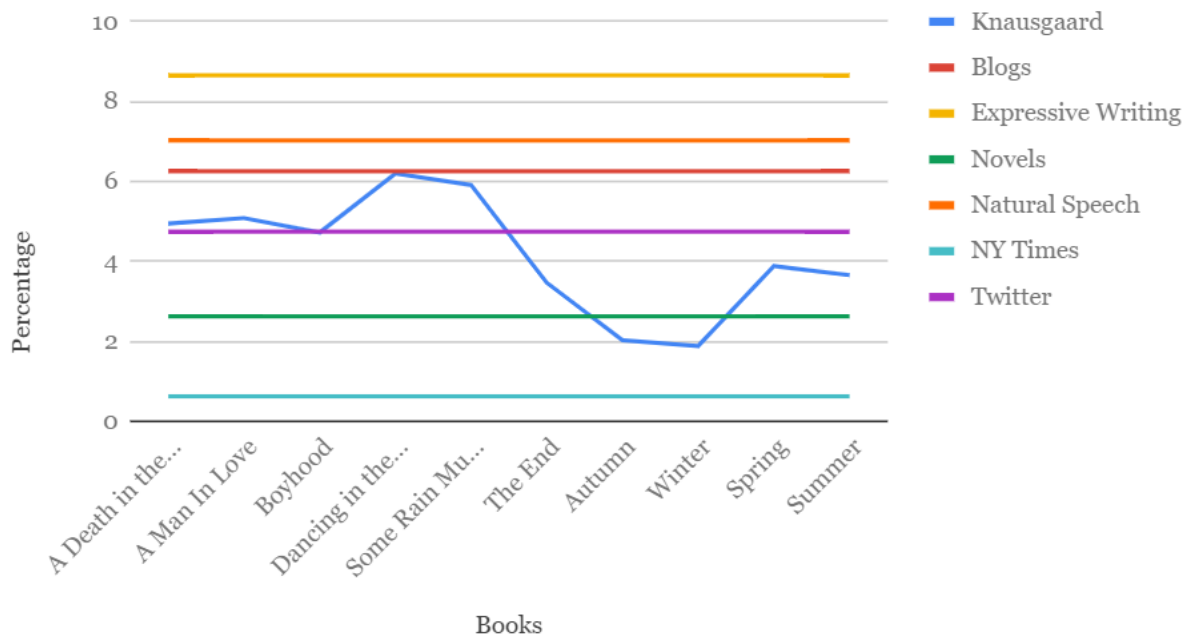
Ignoring trauma or creating distance could be another method for tracking the hard moments in people's lives. If the news we receive is particularly bad, coldly analyzing and distancing ourselves may be a healthy coping mechanism in the short term. Pennebaker and Michael Cohn attempted to track blog posts mere days after the terrorist attacks of September 11th to see if this distancing could be detected in writing. Sure enough, they encountered some interesting findings. Blog posts showed a huge decline in I-words. We words climbed (a kind of "we're all in this together" mode). Positive emotions of course dropped and negative emotions rose. All of this normalized as the days went on. Interestingly, cognitive process words, like insight and causal words, showed declines after a traumatic event for much longer, indicating

less of an ability to work through difficult situations (Cohn et al.).

When critics discuss Knausgaard's work, often they either praise or lament the lack of a general plot. There are certain throughlines, like his experience with chronic alcohol abuse, his frustration towards modern existence, his progression as a writer, his role as a father, etc. But readers who delve into *My Struggle* hopefully see the changes in style, which move from the distant and analytical mode of volume one, with its ruminations on death and the legacy of his father, to the more scene-based and immediate time when Knausgaard is in Bergen in volume five. It's the writing *itself* that is the plot, and the big test now comes when we see how his mental faculties addressed his own life. Once again, Knausgaard is the idyllic choice for research of this kind. The story is about his life, so we already know that the first person perspective will be used. His writing provides both the independent and dependent variable, because fluctuations in the use of I-words will tell us quite a lot about his emotional trajectory throughout the series. Clearly, Knausgaard writes about the past, but are some books more concerned with past and future than with present? We've already seen the movement of insight words and causal words before. Could the increase of insight words indicate a further movement toward depression? We've seen the state of his explanatory style deteriorate from volume three onward. Could we predict further pessimism accurately?

Let's start with what we know is most important, which is the use of I-words.

First Person Singular Use



Here we see a rise in I-words from *Boyhood* on, and then a sharp decline with *The End* and the first two volumes of the Quartet. Writing about objects in the everyday world to his unborn daughter is a different take on the autofictional genre compared to the likes of *My Struggle*. But could this decline also be because of trauma? For those who are unaware, *Autumn* was written around 2015, right when difficulties between Knausgaard and his wife Linda reached a breaking point. Her fourth pregnancy also saw another mental breakdown, and necessitated a call from Child Protective Services, all of which is discussed in *Spring*. Knausgaard had also planned on going on a trip to Brazil with his family for a literary conference. They had planned it for over a year, and he knew the other children were excited, but Linda's mental state caused them to cancel. Shortly afterward, in 2016, Knausgaard separated from Linda. To become separated from the mother of your children must surely be one of those traumatic moments in life that Pennebaker associates with a change in writing style. The sharp decline does represent a change in style, but was this style unwittingly chosen by a man whose trauma had infected his life and

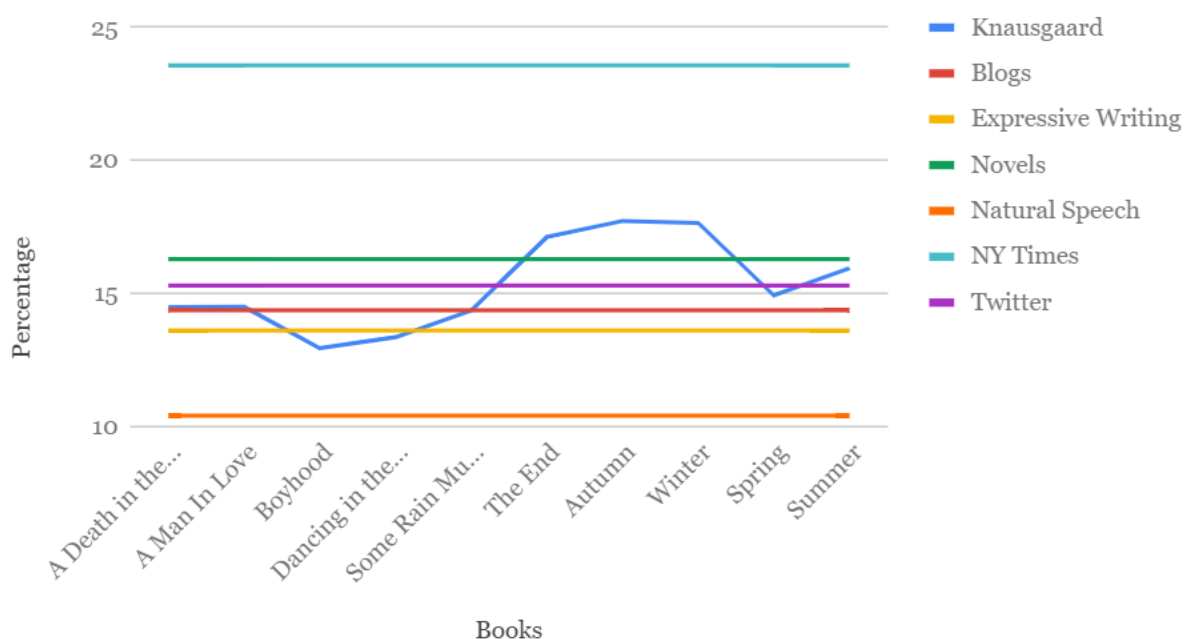
influenced what he wanted to produce? In interviews afterward, particularly with Louisiana Channel, Knausgaard would go on to say that the first two volumes of the seasonal quartet felt untruthful. *Spring* was his desire to “add movement” (Louisiana Channel) and create a plot over a short amount of time. According to a conversation with his editor, *Spring* is also a step towards writing with an ensemble philosophy. Not only does he want to write about his own actions, but he also wants to write about the reactions of his family close by. Whether he achieves this or not is up for you to decide. Based on what we’ve seen so far from the data, *Spring* is simply a return to *My Struggle* levels of writing, which most everyone seems to be okay with. Now living with “the love of his life” in London, his trauma over what occurred with the mental breakdown of his wife and subsequent separation is all at a close.

In the case of *My Struggle* we do see an increase overall in the use of I-words, from around five percent at the beginning to a little above six percent at its highest in *Dancing in the Dark*. This may not seem like substantial evidence, but keep in mind that the drops in the use of I-words from blog users after the 9/11 terrorist attacks was only from 6.2 percent to around 5.3, a one percent difference as well (Cohn et. al). These minor fluctuations in style over the course of two years of heavy writing, over what appears to be a single massive work, actually reveals a more intricately diverse experience for us as readers. Of course, in volumes four and five, we’ve talked about explanatory style, but seeing the climbs in I-words here furthers our conclusion that his ruminations may have continued pessimistic or depressive behavior.

If we take another look at the positive and negative emotions graphs from before, we also see a climb upward in negative emotions in *Some Rain Must Fall* and a slight incline in positive emotions as well. One of the biggest questions we’ll have to ask concerns an author’s deliberate choice in emotion and story. It is obvious to many of us to have a climactic finish close to the

end, but not right at the end. Volume five is the go-to piece to play that role. But is this an intentional fallacy? What if Knausgaard's mental state simply allowed the fifth volume to be the darker and harsher volume it turned out to be? Not only that, but his tone in volume five could have been something more like volume four, which consists of self-deprecating humor over premature ejaculation. The volume *could* have been a jester-like tale of a writer, foolish but witty, exploring the bohemian lifestyle he always wanted and finally got in Bergen. He listened to music and worked at a radio station and played *Wolfenstein* and finally published a novel. But the tone of the work is starkly different when paired with, say, *Boyhood*, which is as sterile as a chief of surgery.

Use of Large Words (Six Letters or More)



Because the rest of the story on Knausgaard's mental health might not be so certain. Remember, Rudy Giuliani's use of large words dropped during his depression. That's not the case with *My Struggle*, and seems to indicate simply the choices of a smart author. In *Boyhood*, where the main characters are children, large words would be the incorrect style for a book that

features boys peeing and pooping off a cliffside and watching it fall. The analytical mode of the seasonal quartet, however, gives further credence to Knausgaard's distancing of trauma following his separation. Otherwise, volumes four and five sees an *increase* in larger words, not a decrease.

Use of "We" Words

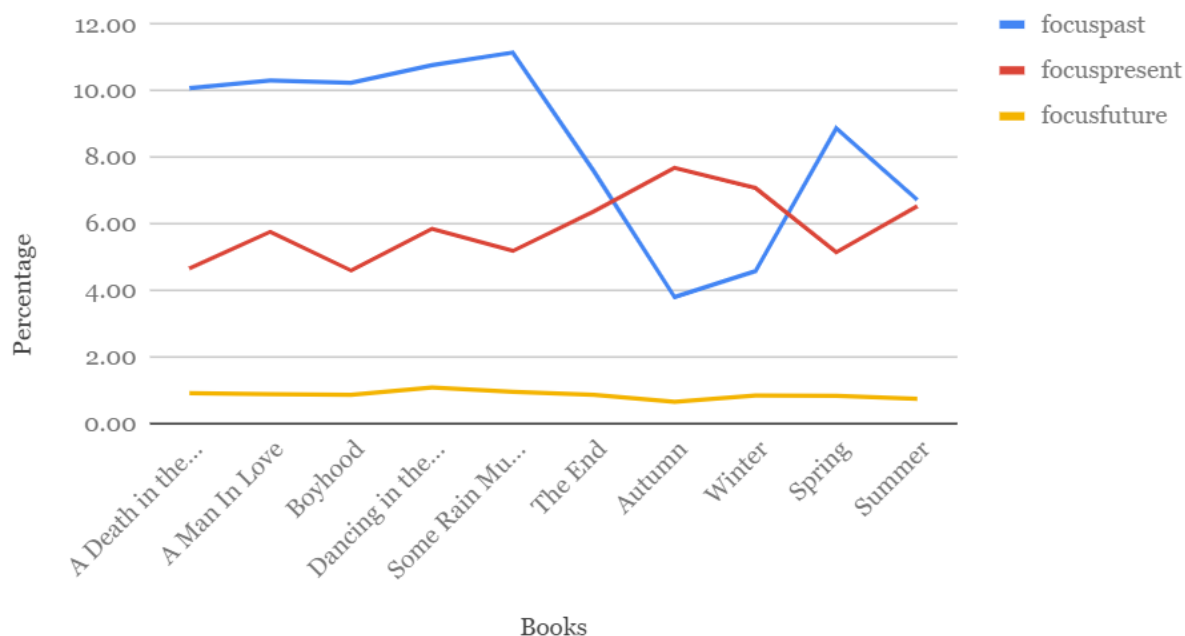


We have similar problems with uses of we words. September 11th caused a coming together of we words, but here we have a spike with the third volume, and then what follows is largely a straight line. (Cohn et al.) Any reader of all the graphs together might say that *Boyhood* is the volume to look at, but what we're learning here is that we have all the evidence of depression, or at least pessimistic thinking, but they are syncopated, to use a music term, they arrive at different, off-beat moments. Using "we" with smaller boys in *Boyhood* also makes sense rhetorically, as the author is commanding a group of children who have yet to form full identities of their own. The drop of we words from volume three to *Dancing in the Dark* is further evidence of a focus on the self rather than others, which would give voice to depression once

again, but is there one more thing we could bring up?

You will remember earlier when discussing depression that those who suffer pessimism about the world they experience in the present tend to think less about it. In fact, they spend more time considering the past and worrying over the future.

Attention Towards Time



Here is a chart that shows verb tense in action. To write about the past is not so surprising, but to see fluctuations is kind of fascinating. The erratic behavior of the present, followed by the massive flip in *Autumn* and *Winter* shows an author who is very much concerned with making large decisions, a kind of “meditations in an emergency” flip that we only get to see in people just after a crisis. In volumes four and five, we see a rise in focusing on the past, and a lowering in the present. This gives us further evidence that, while writing *My Struggle*, the mental effects it had on him in those difficult volumes made its way to the page, and allow us to see the cost it can be to writing out one’s past in a negative, permanent, and internal way.

The conclusions to draw from mental health are less certain than the physical. The beauty

of quantifiable data like the kind we see with Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count is unparalleled. Are there other examples we could have dug into? Of course! Remember the rates of words governing sex and sexuality used by suicidal poets? They increased. Using that on Knausgaard, of course *Dancing in the Dark* showed the highest marks, but the rest looked inconclusive. Will there be more methods of uncovering style in Knausgaard's writing? Most assuredly. But for now, I hope I was able to lend some credit to the results of writing negatively about one's own past.

CONCLUSION

It is incredible for us to see the work that computers are able to do in assisting a scholar in research of this kind. Rather than spend years analyzing the corpus of Knausgaard's work, we are able to build upon a reliable foundation of quantitative measurement and qualitative close reading to produce fascinating (and hopefully convincing) results. For those authors who create longer works, more experimental works, or constantly fluctuate between written texts and screen interviews, digital technologies can unravel the many constituent units that make up the creative process.

In chapter one, we examined the role that explanatory style has on Knausgaard's use of shame, guilt, and anxiety, and we found a majority pessimistic mode in mostly volumes four and five, while also seeing personalization of events and decisions across all six volumes. In chapter two, we examined Knausgaard's writing for signs of mental and physical upheaval. We discovered wide fluctuations in insight words, slight changes in causal words, very little difference in positive and negative emotional words, a rise in first person singular in the later volumes (followed by a precipitous decline), moderate changes in large words, and a rise in focus in the past for *My Struggle*.

The combination of heavily pessimistic explanatory style in volumes four and five, the rise in first-person singular words, as well as the reduction of larger words, would indicate that writing far enough into the dreaded moments of Knausgaard's life revealed itself onto the construction of the story. Many other aspects that we did not investigate explicitly would also indicate that something drastic occurs in volume four specifically, including a sharp reduction in words per sentence, a sharp decline in analytic writing, not to mention the increased percentage

of sexual language. Where this all leads however, will depend on the reader's convictions.

If you believe in the concept of free will and agency, then we can conclude that Knausgaard's decision to write heavily on his time spent as a youth was explicitly done to both round out the first five volumes and come full circle, back to the father's death, as well as end climatically before proceeding to the legacy of *My Struggle* with the bloated final volume.

If, however, you follow the recent lines of inquiry from Daniel Kahneman (*Thinking Fast and Slow*), and the bestselling historical works by Yuval Noah Harari (*Sapiens* and *Homo Deus*), then you would wager that Knausgaard writes about his youth in a negative light because his brain interprets the signals of guilt and anxiety in his explanatory style, or he is responding to the sensations of readership reaction and had little agency in the direction of his work. Could the decision to write in his later volumes simply be a biochemical reaction in his brain? Did the weight and stress of Linda's breakdown, plus the unwanted attention of fans and colleagues, as well as the derision and hatred that his uncle Gunnar expressed in the publication of his first novel, have a lasting impact on the writing of the later novels?

This seems very likely. The latter half of the series is so much more immediate, so much more dedicated to insight and causal expressions of "I feel" and "I believe" that the creative toll culminated in volume four: a dark comedy of Knausgaard desperately trying to lose his virginity at age 19. In book six, he reveals to the reader that, in the latter half of the series, when Linda was on edge with his writing and their marriage, he had to quicken his pace of writing to approximately ten pages a day. That kind of writing must surely be as close as can be, almost connective tissue, to the psychology of a man. But that writing pace also means that the prior knowledge that it takes to form the story goes away, and what is left is the ability for Knausgaard to write with far less preconceived notions than the first two volumes.

Which leads us to another large finding of this thesis: the varying uses of insight and causal words in his work. The valley and slopes on either side of the series points to an author with either (and this follows from the above theories) Knausgaard has an amazing attention span, long enough to plan out a series of novels that explicitly paced his past experiences, and then ruminating on the lessons learned from that experience, or that, like other human beings, we are inclined to create stories based on literary arcs. This has been rigorously proven in fiction, as MIT researchers (Andrew J. Reagan et al.), and others have used semantic analysis (the use of words based on positive and negative values) to track fluctuations in the trajectories of stories. In the case of Knausgaard, the series opens with his father's death, and in the succeeding parts, the son comes to terms with adult living, modern society, and the question of meaning. His role as a young father is supplanted by the third volume where he himself is a child. As a child, Knausgaard has little agency in the world, and it is also the farthest point in his memory, thus creating a moment of awkward distance. Coming of age, he attempts and fails repeatedly to enter what he considers to be adulthood and professional success. He finally earns it, but not without severe costs. Having gained fame, he also analyzes notoriety, but also wants to construct a grand conclusion to his series. Sensing that simply discussing his work by itself does nothing to place it in the grand historical context, he addresses the similar title with that of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, thus solidly placing volume six with enough larger analyses and meanings to provide an ending with resonance. This is exactly what the insight words recount, and this will most likely be what reviewers, critics, and academics of the work as a whole will most likely be referring to when they attempt to describe his success.

When evaluating the importance of shame in the 21st century, it may be beneficial to consider Knausgaard's success in the same way other memoirs are successful, mainly that he

leaves no quarter to himself. The shame he is willing to recount may be a bit too harsh when we realize it has gone on for thousands of pages, but to have a society devoid of shame might be far worse. While we fight our ancient brains with newer technologies, a sound social awareness may keep us from being “the Ernest Hemingway of Twitter” as Donald Trump said (Woodward), and may make us more aware of the immense and growing complexities of living in a world where internet rhetoric and daily existence intermingle all the more. For Knausgaard, he unquestionably regrets the publicizing of his shame and the effect they had on him and his family. But for the future of shame, the gradual dissolution of private and public may have lasting impacts on speaking, writing, and how we form new spaces for our own thoughts.

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