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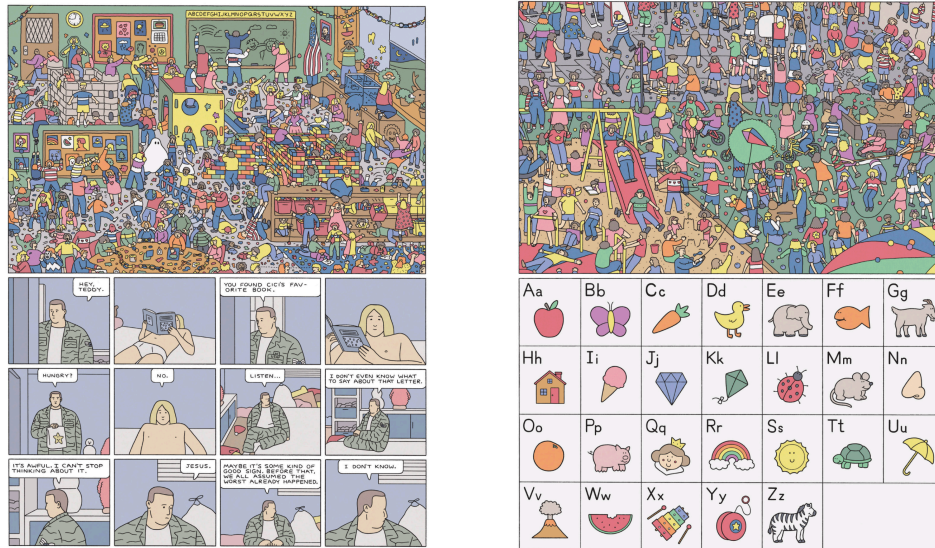
The Cognition of Color Seen Through the Grieving Soul

When facing the loss of a loved one, we mourn in a collective colorless sea of black, yet we rarely question how this common tradition originated. Would color be insensitive? Is our loss of color emblematic of the loss of life? All of these questions come into conversation with Nick Drnaso's *Sabrina* and Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*. Although these texts focus on various world themes such as sexuality, gender, mental health, political discourse, and violence through media, both texts weave these themes through two characters' grieving processes. *Sabrina* depicts the early stages of grief and the progression of slowly returning to normalcy bookmarked through the saturation development within a children's book. Whereas *Fun Home* showcases how even with the passing of time, your grief stays with you forever through the undertones of a melancholy blue within her text. With both author's using their respective color palettes and brightness levels to weave together greiving, both stories demonstrate Scott McCloud's theory of color, which he believes "express a dominant mood," and "[transform] the world [into] a playground of shapes and space," (McCloud 191, 192). By engaging in McCloud's playground and exploring both stories' figures in coordination to *Sabrina's* different varying luminances and *Fun Home's* concentrated color palette, readers can better understand how the cognition of color can be a tool in illustrating the complexity of continuing to grieve as life moves forward.

Drnaso's use of bright colors in Cici's children's book reflects Teddy's emotional journey as his frenetic energy resulting from an inability to process his grief and the intense outside

world gradually settles—symbolizing his healing and return to normalcy. Teddy's grieving process begins with a distorted perception of reality, which we see through choices in color and the depiction of the children's figures. Drnaso's wide-ranged color palette explodes on the page, which takes a verbatim approach to McCloud's "childhood reality of the playground" (McCloud 189).

Page 56's visual overload of bright colors and boat-load of roundly shaped, tiny people demonstrate how Teddy's warped cognition transfigures through the page of Cici's book. Throughout the text, Drnaso sticks to various pastel colors to highlight the quiet nature and emptiness these characters feel within their lives and emotions; as a result, a highly saturated, large panel immediately catches the viewer's eye. The incorporation of pinks, oranges, yellows, greens, and purples all contribute to a "happy" atmosphere that dominates the classroom and differs widely from the storyline itself (Drnaso 56). Although on a surface-level the nostalgic page appears to be solace from the intensity of Teddy's own trauma, some of the figures' actions show how Teddy's subconscious distorts what really takes place on the page. With children either drawing in the center, reading on the ground in the upper right, creating a human pyramid on the bottom left, tackling one another piggy-back style on the bottom left, or yanking their bodies on the bottom right, we realize that a few of these activities have violent undertones (Drnaso 56). Upon a deeper interpretation of the panels, viewers are left with an odd dichotomy of happy colors and disturbing children's activities, highlighting Teddy's inability to escape his vicious mind despite perceiving an innocent form of media. Readers feel a tinge of hopelessness for Teddy; however, when we eventually return to Cici's book toward the end of the novel, all the violent undertones are eliminated and the saturation is far brighter—a positive sign that Teddy will be able to move forward in his life.



On page 149, the calendar page bookmarks better days ahead for Teddy through the differences in luminance and children's activities. When both pages are paired side-by-side, there are noticeable differences in saturation with page 149's colors having a higher vibrancy (Drnasos 56, 149). Moreover, the change in location shows us a more luscious shade of green for grass than the previous page's green walls—potentially implying the well-known phrase that “the grass is always greener on the other side” of the novel (Drnasos 149). There are no children rough-housing, which not only makes his perception clearer but also confirms to the reader that his cognition likely was distorted when viewing the earlier page (Drnasos 149). We see additional little details such as the calendar covering the whole page and Teddy being fully-clothed while reading the book, which further differentiate both pages from one another (Drnasos 149). Immediately following this page, Teddy walks around the house and notices his surroundings—like the fact that the cat is missing on page 162—demonstrating a readiness to slowly overcome his debilitating grief (Drnasos 162). After reading the calendar, Teddy's pastel colored brain fog begins to disappear and readers watch Teddy begin to make a life for himself in Colorado. Although Drnasos's color palette and brightness demonstrates the gradual process of

healing, Bechdel's steady incorporation of color across the page and within her figures highlight how despite the passing of time, your grief always stays with you.

Bechdel's integration of a lightish-turquoise blue within her black and white panels symbolizes the anguish Alison will always live with grieving the loss of her father and demonstrates the translation of flooding emotions that stem from grief into artistic form. Although Bechdel's color wheel is far more minimal than Drnaso's, she still utilizes tones and shading within the specific colors, which McCloud views as "add[ing] depth" (McCloud 191). By exploring pages 150 and 232, readers see how McCloud's playground still comes to life in a different manner through an intentional, refined color palette.

By exploring the role of turquoise and black within the drawing coupled with Alison's description of the sunset on page 150, readers better understand grief's ability to strip color from a world once full of varying hues. Here the young Alison describes and illustrates a dream she had of she and her father as shadowed figures watching the sunset. Alison describes how there were "Infinite gradations of color in a finite sunset— from salmon to canary to midnight blue" (Bechdel 150). Interestingly enough, despite painting a beautiful portrait of colors through her language, Bechdel still utilizes her signature blue, but she shades in a darker tone of turquoise that ombrés out until we reach our figures. The semi-dark hue makes the reader think deeper, as the tone somewhat emulates the darkness of night and the dark reality of Alison's grief. Moreover, the removal of all other described colors in the drawing represents the removal of her father after his passing. Alison's reality has become the faded sunset as she permanently resides in the midnight blue: reminiscing on the days where the sky was a little lighter and far brighter. Alison has likely had thousands of dreams from her childhood, yet to remember the most

colorful one highlights the lack of color she now sees in a world without her father.



150

Furthermore, both individuals' black-shadowed structures give a ghost-like feel to their figures and mimic the emptiness that results from losing someone. The black silhouette appears frequently within the story oftentimes watching the action from the sidelines; however, we as readers do not know if every silhouette is real or if some continue to be distorted visions of Alison's subconscious as a means of coping. Two different examples are on page 176 with Alison being the shadow that looks out the window, and on page 203 with the unknown shadowed figure standing next to Alison as she discovers her sexuality in the library (Bechdel 176, 203). More specifically, the shadowed figure on 203 could be Alison's reminder that she now always has someone metaphysically watching over her as she retells life's big and small moments, making McCloud's idea of the playground come into fruition through color, shape, and the reader's cognition (Bechdel 203). The moment helps readers understand how grief can paralyze your perception of not only color but also how society operates around you, being unable to escape the empty feeling resulting from a lost loved one.

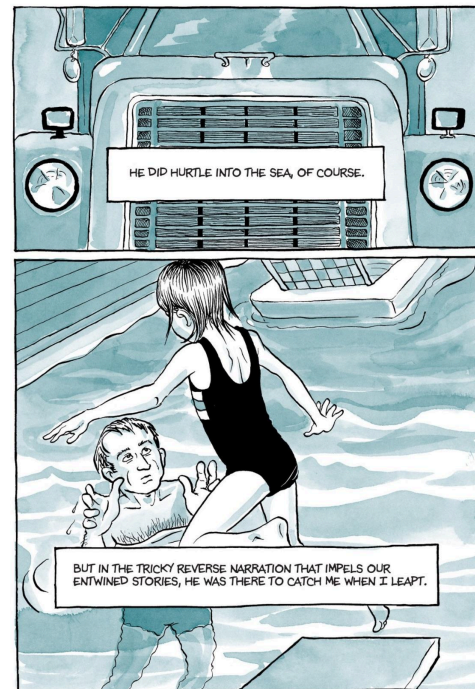


203



176

Bechdel takes blue one step further on the very last page of the novel to demonstrate blue as a deeper metaphor for how grief can flood your logic and emotions at any given moment. On page 232, there are two split panels: one of which depicting the truck that hit Alison's father and the other is young Alison jumping into the arms of her father. Here the page is completely washed out in blue to coincide with the flood of emotions she feels as she ties her and her father's stories together one last time: "He did hurdle into the sea, of course. But in the tricky reverse narration that impels our entwined stories, he was there to catch me when I left" (Bechdel 232). Not only does Bechdel's blue coincide with her overwhelming grief but she also drives home the metaphor of "the sea" (Bechdel 232). Although Alison's father was always there to catch her as she jumped into the body of water that is her young-adulthood and sexuality, she is now left in the blue pool alone after her father got washed away at sea (Bechdel 232). The moment provides us clarity on why Bechdel sticks to blue—the color symbolizes the pool where she will forever remain trapped in, forced to feel the emptiness of her father as she jumps into the deep end alone. Despite coming into her adulthood, the blue seeping within every page of Alison's story is our constant reminder that her grief will always linger.



232

The differences between how *Sabrina and Fun Home* construct color and figure within their texts highlight different stages of grief as time progresses. Both stories beautifully depict the intricacy behind grieving—you are forced to move forward without the one you love. No matter how much time has passed or how many memories you have continued to make, your grief can stop you in your tracks at any moment, transforming a world you worked hard to recreate in bright color back to black and white. Although people consistently check in on those mourning within the beginning stage and wear black by their sides, we tend to forget that the pain never fully goes away. They will eventually return to their obligations, and they might finally begin to see a saturated world; however, their loss will continue to linger by their sides like Alison's ghost for the rest of their lives—a sensation you never know until you are forced to re-shade your world after facing loss dead in its colorless eyes.

Works Cited

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Bechdel, Alison. 2006. *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Drnaso, Nick. 2018. *Sabrina*. Montreal: Drawn & Quarterly.