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## The Second Language: An argument for the superlative authenticity of poetry through the complex personal relationships it develops with its audiences by way of truth in metaphor

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The Second Language:

An argument for the superlative authenticity of poetry  
through the complex personal relationships it develops  
with its audiences by way of truth in metaphor

Senior Project submitted to  
The Division of Languages & Literature and  
The Division of Social Studies  
of Bard College

by

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Annandale-On-Hudson, New York

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This was supposed to be two projects. Then I didn't think there'd be any project at all, but lo and behold, here's one. And I'm damn proud of it. So thank you.

It is difficult  
to get the news from poems  
yet men die miserably every day  
for lack  
of what is found there.

*-William Carlos Williams,  
"Asphodel, That Greeny Flower"*

"We are not free to choose the language of  
the workplace or family we are born into,  
though we are free, within limits,  
to rebel against it."

*-Charles Bernstein  
"Writing and Method"*

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**“THE SECOND LANGUAGE”:** An argument for the superlative authenticity of poetry through the complex personal relationships it develops with its audiences by way of truth in metaphor

**ABSTRACT:** In this paper, I will argue that poetry allows for a kind of expression that is not found within other uses of language. This is because the poetic form is able to better lend itself to larger notions of not only truth, but also authenticity, which it achieves through the building of complex emotional engagements between a work of poetry and its audience. When discussing the authenticity of poetry, one’s personal connection to the work by way of metaphor is more truthful than the so-called literal truth one comes to when one reads something exactly as it is written—meaning that one is not searching for an interpretation beyond the words contained within a sentence. This is because metaphor lends the poetic form a contextual backbone that allows for not only the successful communication of ideas, but also the development of these aforementioned complex relationships and feelings related to and elicited by the works. Through close readings of texts by Friedrich Nietzsche, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Stanley Cavell, and Elisabeth Camp, we see it is the content of a metaphor contained within the form of poetry that allows for the most authentic vehicle of communication and expression; not literal reading rooted in fact. These distinctions can be divided into two separate languages, where the first language encompasses basic acquisition of words and phrases and the second language centers on meaning-making, which is characteristic of the poetic form.

## CHAPTER 1: AN INTRODUCTION TO POETRY

Contrary to the idea that words possess truthfulness or falsehood in and of themselves, the assignation of truth-value in language relies entirely on linguistic constructivism, which inspires these perceptions and understandings of truth through the teaching of agreed-upon language conventions. The illusory truth discussed in Friedrich Nietzsche's "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense" is a truth associated with the initial acquisition of language. This kind of language relies on one's ability to draw connections between images and concepts (for example, seeing a cat, being able to name it "cat," and subsequently differentiating it from other animals), but this grasp of language is a necessary prerequisite one must fulfill in order to explore language further and in a way that is informed by meaning. Illusory truth is one's first language of literality and fact, but not of meaning making or artistic value. Poetics, the second language, is where personal experience begins to shape and influence one's understanding of language. Thus, poetry is an authentic and truthful form of communication, as opposed to the illusion of truth one understands through the first language. In order to be successful in its mission, a poem must be able to engage the reader in a personal emotional relationship predicated upon experience and does this by way of metaphor, which can be used as a vehicle for effective communication that shapes not only one's sense of self, but also how the self engages with its surrounding world.

Providing a working definition of poetry is crucial in discussing the ways in which it utilizes metaphor in order to be the most authentically truthful form of language and no poet serves this purpose better than Ntozake Shange. Shange is an American poet from Trenton, New Jersey, who grew up in St. Louis and pursued a B.A. and Masters at Columbia University and UCLA respectively. Shange's time at Barnard was defined not only by her academic studies and her burgeoning interest in black literature (many of her poems are influenced by the jazz music

she listened to growing up), but also by a failed marriage and a general struggle with her own mental health. Over the course of her undergraduate career, she attempted suicide four times, struggling with her depression, bipolar disorder, and substance abuse in addition to trying to understand her racial identity and the ways in which womanhood—specifically black womanhood—limited her own societal opportunities. Much of Shange’s writing deals with these types of universal issues, specifically as they pertain to black women in relationships with black men, though the bodily experiences she chronicles (abortion, assault, and abuse, to name a few) fit into a larger theme of womanhood that many can identify with.

The following is an excerpt from a larger piece by Shange entitled “i talk to myself,” which was originally published in *Ms. Magazine* in December 1977 and later included in Shange’s third book of poetry, *Nappy Edges*, which was published in 1978:

**What Do You Believe A Poem Shd Do?**

quite simply a  
poem shd fill you  
up with something/  
cd make you swoon,  
stop in yr tracks,  
change yr mind,  
or make it up.  
a poem shd happen  
to you like cold  
water or a kiss.

Shange’s definition of the purpose of the poem is a perfect example of the power one can derive through metaphor while also utilizing abbreviations, which, in their own way, are also a type of metaphor. Because of this, the devices Shange employs are included in the second language of poetics and successfully fulfill the criteria necessary to be considered authentically truthful.



When Shange says that a poem should fill you up with “something,” what she means is that the poem should awaken an emotional response within the reader. This feeling doesn’t necessarily need to be named to be valid, but leads to swooning, stopping in one’s tracks, or changing/making up one’s mind. The feeling inspired by the poem must affect one quite deeply, such that it translates to action and by setting forth these criteria for poetry in her own work, Shange is writing a piece that she believes fulfill the standards for poetry that she explicates in “What Do You Believe A Poem Shd Do.” The idea that a poem should “happen” to you further concretizes Shange’s point: the poem should inspire something powerful and emotional in a way that feels almost sneaky and disarming, as many emotions tend to be.

Additionally, utilizing colloquial language, such as “shld” instead of “should” or “yr” instead of “your” are metaphors in and of themselves because they exist in place of more conventional spellings of the same word. While we read the meaning of the word “should” when we read “shld,” we as readers are also presented with language that parallels the thought and/or speech of the writer. Knowing that Shange’s poetic projects seek to mimic the dialects of black women, we can derive a more emotional connection to the words, which can be written in a way that is either quite familiar to us or quite different from the way we read, write, or speak. We are able to imprint our personal experiences or lack thereof—in which the reader recognizes that there are some authorial experiences they do not have access to—in the letters existing and missing from Shange’s translation while also allowing the language to be situated within the larger historical and cultural context of black linguistics.

Before attempting to explicate the characteristic facets of metaphor found in poetry, which are truth and authenticity, or even categorize these designations as either the first language or the second—which I will do later—it is important to understand not only exactly what a

metaphor is, but also how literal language does something of a different kind that does not approach the level of meaning-making metaphor allows for within a work of poetry. The philosopher Elisabeth Camp dives headfirst into the kinds of truths metaphor is able to express in her essay entitled “Metaphor and that Certain ‘Je Ne Sais Quoi,’” in which she starts off by explaining the polarizing opinions philosophers tend to hold when it comes to metaphor. While some assert that anything metaphor can communicate, literal language can communicate as well, others believe that it is impossible for literal language to communicate the same ideas as metaphor. While I am more of the second camp (pun intended), Camp’s paper is an attempt to negotiate between these two extremes, as her definition of metaphor employs literal language as a necessary component of understanding.

Camp writes, “...analytic philosophers...tend to assume that *if* metaphors express any genuine content at all, then that content can in principle be paraphrased into literal terms” (*Metaphor*, 1) and defines the paraphrase as follows: “Everyone can agree that a paraphrase “says the same thing another way”...” (*Metaphor*, 2). For example, in my own work entitled “Pith”<sup>1</sup>, we can find the line “...his father’s/ an utterance-busting lease.” This excerpt paints the image of a man’s father as being someone who polices his son’s language, but only for a particular amount of time, as is customary with a lease. In this way, the analytic philosophers are right that the metaphor can be expressed in literal terms, but Camp argues, “...metaphors can sometimes provide us with our only cognitive access to certain properties” (*Metaphor*, 1) and that is “Because metaphorical utterances...express such complex contents in so few words, they are highly efficient vehicles for communication” (*Metaphor*, 3). The language of the metaphor allows the reader to imagine a time when their own utterances were busted; when they were put down by a member of their family; when all they could do was think about the impending

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<sup>1</sup> See *Appendix [1]*.

deadline that would allow them reprieve from the discomfort of their situation. In this way, the metaphor allows the reader to imprint their own personal experiences onto the line of the poem, rather than just accept the facts of a literal situation which may not necessarily apply to them. Subsequently, metaphors allow us access to personal truths that literal language does not come close to approaching.

This is because metaphor allows us to express truths without just saying them. It provides us with what Camp calls a kind of “cognitive efficiency” (*Metaphor*, 3). The notion of metaphor I am working from is an extended idea of metaphor that looks at the spatial awareness of a work, important context provided by a metaphor’s situation within other language, etc. Camp states, “...metaphorical communication exploits a general fact about our engagement with the world: we typically experience multiple properties instantiated together” (*Metaphor*, 3), so it is only fair to pay close attention not just to the metaphors themselves, but pay homage to what they do—meaning, allow for the fusion of multiple properties, experiences, or ideas—by also recognizing their situations within the larger confines of a work.

Building off the idea of recognizing metaphor within larger contexts, it is important to discuss literary tradition when we discuss the larger genre of poetry. T.S. Eliot writes in “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” “No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set me, for contrast and comparison, among the dead” (*Tradition*, I). By this, Eliot means that recognizing the historical context of the writers whose works came before is necessary in understanding where one’s own work is situated within these traditions. One’s work only holds value when it can be connected to other works and in this way, metaphor is crucial in allowing poetic works to connect not only to other works, but to the

readers and their own personal experiences. In the words of Audre Lorde, “[Poetry] is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought.”

Poetry, through its utilization of metaphor, connects us to the world around us through language, but it’s more than just a means of communication. It’s a survival mechanism.

There is something quite large at stake in the way poetry allows us to understand truths through the work we put into a work. When we read poetry, we go into it knowing that there is something of importance being said beyond just the words on the page. If we wanted to read something straightforward and literal, perhaps we’d read an essay on bees. If we wanted to know something beyond just the bee and rather, the many forms a bee can take to communicate a larger idea, we’d read Lorde’s poem, “The Bees,” which provides an account of young schoolboys agitating a beehive and subsequently getting stung. The poem closes as follows:

Curious and apart  
four little girls look on in fascination  
learning a secret lesson  
trying to understand their own destruction.  
One girl cries out  
“Hey, the bees weren’t making any trouble!”  
and she steps across the feebly buzzing ruins  
to peer up at the empty, grated nook  
“We could have studied honey-making!”

In this poem, Lorde is not merely discussing bees, but also providing important commentary on internalized gender performance and societal limitations due to gender. The bees can be likened to the little girls in the work, as beings that weren’t “making any trouble,” but are still subjected to the unnecessary aggression and violence of the boys in the poem. “Learning a secret lesson” further demonstrates this parallel between the girls and the bees, as the lesson they learned from what they witnessed wasn’t merely about not bothering bees, but about the destruction against bodies that men so often propagate. Lorde famously said, “For women, then, poetry is not a luxury,” thus showing that poetry is a necessary form of language for marginalized groups to grapple with and communicate their own experiences of identity-based discrimination. Anybody with a struggle who needs to speak their truth to a larger audience can utilize metaphors much in the way Lorde has done with the bees: as a means of providing context for their own struggles and in a form which allows others to relate heavily to those same struggles. Literal language cannot do this in the same way. If the bees weren’t acting as a lens with which the girls were able to view acts of aggression, the poem could potentially alienate the men who ascertain that they are not all like this and lead to further violence against vulnerable bodies. Instead of criminalizing the actions of the individual, Lorde is able to provide important social commentary about the way groups of different identities interact with and affect one another in a way that is digestible to a diverse range of audiences.

From this, we can parse out literal language and metaphor as belonging to two distinct categories of language that we dub the first language and the second language. It is important to note that one must have an adequate grasp of the first language before one is able to delve into the world of the second. This is because—as Camp’s writings show—in order to understand the complexities of metaphor, one must first understand the basics of the literal paraphrase, but it is metaphor that provides the authentic truth of the second language, as opposed to the illusory truth of the first, which is rooted in the literal.

This question of the important distinction between the metaphorical and the literal first arose for me after reading Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *The Blue Book*, where Wittgenstein opens the text by posing the question, “What is the meaning of a word” (*Blue Book*, 1)? In his attempt to answer this question, Wittgenstein begins to distinguish between the ways people utilize language, from assignation of words to images or objects—a very basic and primitive usage of language—to the more complicated questions surrounding language, such as “...do we *interpret* the words before we obey the order” (*Blue Book*, 5)? These two distinct ways of understanding language (the process of understanding vs. the understanding itself) follow one another chronologically, as the mental process one uses to draw a connection between a phrase and an image is a building block towards the more complicated process of meaning-making. Wittgenstein summarizes the process of meaning-making by stating, “We are tempted to think that the action of language consists of two parts; an inorganic part, the handling of signs, and an organic part, which we may call understanding these signs, meaning them, interpreting them, thinking” (*Blue Book*, 3). In this way, Wittgenstein makes the first part of language the language of the inorganic “handling of signs” and the second part of language the organic process of imparting meaning onto what we’ve come to understand. While Wittgenstein is speaking of the

parts of the language rather than two separate languages (as in first part and second part, not first language and second language), I argue that these distinctions are irrelevant because they all fall under the umbrella of the first language. When Wittgenstein speaks of the learning of words' meanings, he means the everyday definitions of words dictated by agreed-upon language conventions and not the meaning we derive from the second language, which comes from the imparting of personal experience onto poems.

This idea of language being divided into two distinct categories is further built upon in Stanley Cavell's text, *The Claim of Reason*, which includes passages that are a direct response to Wittgenstein's proposed vision of language. Like Wittgenstein, Cavell also claims that language acquisition can be divided into a) an initial acquisition of words and phrases used to distinguish between objects, events, ideas, etc., and b) a further development of the original language (its second iteration, so to speak), which, put simply, is poetry: the language of meaning-making.

Moving more specifically into the processes by which the first and second languages take shape, Cavell states in "Excursus on Wittgenstein's Vision of Language, "An object or an activity or event onto or into which a concept is projected, must *invite* or *allow* that projection" (*Reason*, 183). Here, Cavell is claiming that the action of assigning meaning to objects is an inherently metaphorical process quite similar to the previously mentioned translation process Nietzsche introduces in "Truth and Lies." That process is the following: *nerve stimulus* → *image* → *word as sound* → *concept*, and does not produce meaning making.

For both of these philosophers, this basic act of "projection"—of giving a sign to an object—is an integral part of the first language; the basic building block of meaning-making. Even though the mental process itself is metaphorical in the way it conjures an image in someone's mind when a word is spoken, it is not the kind of metaphor one articulates when

assigning value or deriving personal experience from the hearing of a word or phrase. In thinking of the way we subjectively understand objects through language, questions are also raised about the objectivity of language. Wouldn't this first language only exist if we had universal definitions of what something is or isn't? In this way, we begin to think not only about the designations of language into one category or another, but what it means to be truthful with language for the self and for the masses. This question also brings up an idea of authenticity for the individual themselves and for their situation within a larger group and history. How can we operate "authentically" within the constructions of language we set for ourselves and also within the constructions of language that are set for us by the other?

Ultimately, poetry is the form of language that makes the most use of our ability to derive meaning from words. If we accept Camp's idea that metaphor allows us to express certain kinds of truths that literal language does not have access to, we must then question where we are most likely to find these metaphors. The answer is poetry, which allows us to access a special kind of authentic truth rooted in personal experience as opposed to the illusory truth we receive from literal language. It is also important to note that personal experience here doesn't mean the everyday, like brushing one's teeth or reading a boring essay, but rather an experience that cuts deep into one's personhood, like an intense relationship or a life-altering event. In this way, we see that something much greater is at stake. By providing the circumstances necessary within a poem to successfully elicit one of these memories in a reader, poetry has the power to change their life and allow them to access an authentic truth and not just an illusory one. In beginning to understand what is truly at stake when we think of the concepts of "illusory truth" and "authentic truth" in relation to their places within what we have dubbed the first and second languages, we must understand the important distinctions between the "illusory" and the "authentic."



## CHAPTER 2: AUTHENTICITY AND TRUTH-VALUE IN POETRY

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy defines authenticity as follows: “The term ‘authentic’ is used either in the strong sense of being “of undisputed origin or authorship”, or in the weaker senses of being “faithful to an original” or a “reliable, accurate representation”” (*Authenticity*, Intro). These three definitions of authenticity each argue that a different core aspect—uniqueness, faithfulness, and accuracy—is characteristic of what it means to be truly authentic, but I argue that it is possible to write poems that adhere to each of these definitions without losing their truth. In order to do this, they must all utilize metaphor.

When one says that something authentic is “of undisputed origin or authorship,” one is saying that the thing in question must be easily related back to its author. For example, my poetry tends to be very pronoun-laden and filled with visceral metaphors that provide the reader with the circumstances needed to imprint their own meaning onto the work. In my piece entitled “Everest Hymnal,”<sup>2</sup> the fourth stanza exemplifies these aspects of my work:

for the sludging,  
he licks his lips and says  
your name, hard like a wave, sea spent  
it will be the biggest crash you have ever felt  
but also soft and slow, enveloping you  
with fear and all at once, a gulp  
he swallows you quickly through a sour straw

Contained within this one stanza is the repeated usage of the pronouns “he” and “you,” along with multiple metaphors. “The biggest crash you have ever felt” refers back to the image of the wave in the line before, but in the context of saying one’s name, this line cannot be taken literally. Rather, one is saying that the saying of your name by the “he” of the poem is somehow akin to the feeling of a large crash. The generality of the “crash” allows one to imprint meaning onto the work by harkening back to one’s own experience of a crash. Whether that be a car crash,

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<sup>2</sup> See *Appendix [2]*.

the loud sound of cymbals in an orchestra, or the feeling of something falling onto one's head, the metaphor here allows for meaning to be made that goes beyond the literal facts expressed in the poem while also remaining true to my own authorial voice in the work.

This poem also remains characteristic of my own particular writing style because it provides multiple descriptions of a person, but not in the conventional ways people are usually described. After all, what kind of human has “tufted feet?” This image, coupled with the description of this man's legs as being akin to those of a Daddy Long Legs insect, provide the reader an animalistic view of the character in question—especially considering the man is located in the Himalayas, where we are told tales of Yetis more than tales of people. However, even our attempts to locate the character within our own knowledge of myths proves itself to be an impossible task, as Yetis do not have slippery skin.

While the odds of the author falling for a “Don Juan” far from human are unlikely, the poem provides the circumstances necessary for the reader to imagine a hurt so intense, it's dehumanizing. The sensation of being swallowed “quickly through a sour straw” makes us wonder what it would be like if we'd been slurped up with yesterday's chocolate milk and how truly unpleasant a sensation that would be. I intended for the metaphor of being swallowed to force the reader to think back on a time when they felt confined, trapped, or void of autonomy, just like I did in the moment that inspired the writing of this poem.

Additionally, poems can be of “undisputed authorship” in multiple ways by including both language characteristic of the writer and found language that exemplifies the ideology or writing style of another author. For example, the work “I Am Derided”<sup>3</sup> uses language fragments found in the works of Philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (whose borrowed words appear in italics) in conversation with my own original language in order to create a disquieting piece that links

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<sup>3</sup> See *Appendix [3]*

matter-of-fact conclusions of a famous philosopher with the nonsensical proclamations and musings of a deranged poet. “Man is a synthesis of the soulish and the bodily” makes far more sense than the image of a red envelope appearing out of thin air because one is being harangued by a snake in penury and the stark contrast of these writing styles—along with the formatting, which appears as a dialogue between the italicized and non-italicized texts, each aligned with a different margin—creates an almost voyeuristic effect within the poem. One could be bearing witness to a conversation between two parties or an inner dialogue between multiple selves, and the reader is only left to wonder whether it is one of these readings or another beast entirely that accurately reflects the actual authorial intent of the poem. Even so, this uncertainty allows the reader room to think and develop a personal relationship with the work in question.

I have chosen to put Poetry and Philosophy in conversation with one another in these poetic works because it enables us to derive new truths from other works. By working with what I’ve called found language, we allow previously written works to take on new identities and thus, we are able to derive infinite kinds of value from them. Philosophy is also closer than other academic areas of study to Poetry, as many philosophers—whose works I’ve used as the backbone of my own explications—turn to Poetry for answers to pressing questions and see the merit in engaging with Poetry through a philosophical lens. In a way, we are also humanizing Philosophy, which is often perceived as an elitist area of study due to the particular language with which it discusses its ideas. Terms like “Hegelian-Marxist dialectic,” for example, are not often easily accessible to those without formal background in Philosophy. By the same token, plenty of people in Philosophy—myself included—still don’t know what that term or others like it actually mean, but have nonetheless found ourselves able to engage in philosophical works in ways that allowed for the discovery of new truths and ways of understanding the world we live

in. Poetry, too, can appear to be exclusionary in the way it requires people to do work to understand it, but ultimately, the only prerequisite for putting in work is the drive to do so. Anybody with the desire to look for meaning in a poem will surely find it and Philosophy operates much in the same way.

In order to successfully meld Kierkegaard's language with my own, I have created a common theme between the two through a similar general lack of attention paid to conventional stylistics and grammar. There are spaces in between the letters of my words and Kierkegaard's ("envel o pe," "ge nuine," etc.), which creates a stuttering effect, as if the speaker is having difficulty sounding out the words in full or parsing out the syllables to provide emphasis or drama. Even though there is a commonality in the authorial stylistic decisions, the sternness of the italicized text and the manic tone of the non-italicized text make their differences far more apparent than their similarities. We see here a very distinct war between the literal language of Kierkegaard and the metaphorical language of my own work (obviously a diner isn't *literally* serving me skin for my meal), and this oppositional style of the poem gives the reader a chance to pause and think about their own influential moments of opposition in their life.

"October's Spring"<sup>4</sup> does something similar to "I Am Derided," as the poem was written using found and remembered philosophical language and juxtaposes the formality of Philosophy writing with the earnestness of natural imagery to create a stark contrast that forces the reader to ground themselves in the bodily sensations of the text: the feeling of growing older, dying, and ceasing. Against the backdrop of nature—i.e. "the tides"—humans find themselves wholly vulnerable to time and the elements. Though our physical forms die—and as this poem suggests, it is possible our name will eventually die, too—the ocean is immortal. While the language of the poem is literal, it is metaphorical in the sense that it provides the reader the circumstances

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<sup>4</sup> See *Appendix [4]*.

necessary to feel the impending doom of the passage of time. Though we can never arrive at “budding twigs,” the image evokes thoughts of springs past, full of rebirth and renewal. Through these metaphors, we understand that even though the twigs continue to bud, at a certain point, we do not.

Moving on, the second definition of authenticity presented in the Stanford Encyclopedia centers on being “faithful to an original.” In order to do this successfully, it is necessary to consider the role that poetic tradition plays in one’s writing. After all, it is impossible to authentically engage with one’s own works without internalizing previous poetic traditions that naturally inform one’s writing. Even those who do not have formal backgrounds in poetry have still internalized the lyricism of everyday life. Songs can be poems. Blocks of prose can be poems. Ultimately, one cannot write poetic works without somehow being informed by the natural poetry of the world around them.

A poet who exemplifies this notion of authentically engaging with poets past is Lyn Hejinian, as her works possess individual meaning within a larger poetic tradition. In her essay “Resignifying Autobiography,” Juliana Spahr writes on Hejinian’s autobiographical work entitled *My Life*. Spahr writes, “...*My Life* turns reading into an act of choosing among multiplicities. It is reader-centered in that it requires its readers to bring multiple interpretations to the work” (*Autobiography*, Spahr). Subsequently, Hejinian’s work relies heavily on metaphor in order for her readers to be able to imprint their own associations onto her works. A work that is “faithful to the original” found in *My Life* would need to pay major attention to Hejinian’s works while simultaneously understanding the poetic tradition that these works operate within.

To look at examples of this type of authenticity—that is, one which engages in works that came before—let us review two of my own poems entitled “Full Screen of a Body”<sup>5</sup> and “Is There That Which Hates Not Boredom.”<sup>6</sup> Both poems appear as a large block of text on the page, punctuated, but with phrases that seem to bear little to no relation with one another at first glance. There are moments where thoughts are continued in succession, but for the most part, the sentences operate independently within the work as their own substantial claims, while also managing to come together to form a cohesive work with a common theme. Regardless, like Hejinian’s works, these two pieces still manage to create a common thread that weaves the individual sentences of the poems into a larger theme. Each element is allowed to operate on its own, yet somehow, everything comes together cohesively such that the meaning of the poems are not completely lost on the reader.

Additionally, the form itself acts as a sort of metaphor. The lack of space or stanza differentiation in the work does something to the overall effect of the piece. In some ways, the block of text acts in opposition to the way we think or speak, which tends to happen in bursts and occur too quickly to be contained within such a formal format. However, the staccatoed nature of the phrases in succession can make up for this lack of brain room and still manage to emulate a more colloquial style of written work. Indeed, the lack of attention to conventional rules of grammar and style (lack of capitalization, sentence fragments, etc.) makes this piece less likely to be read as an essay one would turn in at school and more as a stream of consciousness.

In “Full Screen of a Tender Body,” the poem is intended to evoke a disturbing feeling of anxiety and it does this through multiple political allusions, unpleasant sensations of smell and taste, and the physical descriptions of things, such as their weight or their color. Additionally,

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<sup>5</sup> See *Appendix [5]*.

<sup>6</sup> See *Appendix [6]*.

there seems to be no real chronology or sense of being grounded, literal imagery and language aside. The excerpt “an aneurysm. a cramp. an endless series of wrong moves. she has the awareness to ask what is at stake, but does not know enough to put it into the right number of sentences” allows us to take in many discouraging moments that build off of one another, but do not lead to a conclusion, merely a sensation.

In this way, the literal language acts as metaphor in and of itself and the piling up of all the literal sentences creates a metaphorical experience. Instead of communicating the facts in a straightforward way so as to avoid confusion, the forward nature of the sentences only leaves the reader with a sensation of dread as opposed to a clear picture of what’s happened in the end. Unlike a successful novel or an essay, two forms which oftentimes rely on literal language to aptly prove their points, the poem makes use of a similar kind of language in a way that leaves the reader feel disquieted and dissatisfied as a result. Additionally, the occasional punctuation of metaphor helps solidify the effect of feeling like something is missing. The quotation “that was the day of drumsticks. today is the day of crying over drumsticks” alludes to a sad memory that makes the author cry, but does not tell us the content of the memory. The drumsticks, a quotidian object, stand in for the memory itself, allowing the reader to imprint their own experience of misery instead of being forced to conform to the boundaries of the author’s ordeal.

Similarly, in “Is There That Which Hates Not Boredom,” the poem makes use of the literal as a way of accessing the figurative in the sense that it uses nonsensical consecutive images to indicate a larger theme of more importance that cannot be contained within these literal images. We see very visceral and imaginable images, such as the “two grains of salt” or the “pearl knife” juxtaposed with more confusing fragments like “breasts operate independently and we should always be on our toes.”

The reader has been trained up until this point to see the literal almost as a set-up—as if there’s a story here being grounded in specific descriptions of an environment—but ultimately, the piece disrupts the reader’s laziness and complacency to search for a formal narrative. The personification of “breasts” as things that have the power to be operative followed by the idiom “on our toes” makes it clear that there is not a singular right way of reading this work, but also that one is not doing oneself any favors if they merely take away from this metaphor an image of someone is constantly standing on tiptoe with breasts that have minds of their own. We see both “Full Screen of a Tender Body” and “Is There That Which Hates Not Boredom” as authentic works in the way they pay homage to Hejirian’s works in *My Life*, or as the Stanford Encyclopedia puts it, stay “faithful to an original.”

Another poem that successfully harkens back to a poetic tradition is “& she said, what has the ampersand ever done for me”<sup>7</sup> which is modeled after the poems of Akilah Oliver found inside “the *she said* dialogues: flesh memory.” In the “About the poems” section of the text, Oliver provides a concrete explanation of the term “flesh memory,” defining it as follows:

“1. a text, a language, a mythology, a truth, a reality, an invented as well as literal translation of everything that we’ve ever experienced or known, whether we know it directly or through some type of genetic memory, osmosis or environment. 2. the body’s truths and realities. 3. the multiplicity of languages and realities that the flesh holds. 4. the language activated in the body’s memory” (*She Said*, 4).

At first glance, Oliver’s inclusion of “literal translation” might seem incongruous with reading her works in order to demonstrate the importance of metaphor, but the reality of Oliver’s poems is that they utilize metaphor to effectively communicate her literal experiences.

In the poem “sickness can be salvation, she said,” Oliver opens the piece with the line “night angels sent me wailing across mine fields./ wake up” (*She Said*, 21). This isn’t to say that a literal angel compelled her to walk (or “wail”) across mine fields, but rather that an

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<sup>7</sup> See *Appendix [7]*.



otherworldly force in charge of her dreams made her believe she was being confronted with a difficult situation in her sleep. Additionally, the utilization of the dream as a means of communicating an idea is a metaphor in and of itself because even if Oliver did actually dream that she was walking across a mine field, she was not literally doing this in real life. The dream was standing in place for a real life anxiety in Oliver's subconscious and manifested itself in a nervous situation while she slept. The aspect of the definition of flesh memory having to do with the truths of the body are of particular interest here because an experience does not need to quite literally occur for the body to conjure it forth and make it truthful. Odds are, Oliver never actually walked across a mine field in her lifetime, but as stated earlier, had been confronted with a difficult situation in her waking state that translated to her sleep by way of the body's memory of the personal experience in question. Perhaps this experience was navigating a delicate conversation or walking home alone at night in fear. Oliver's ambiguity in the usage of the idiom of walking in a mine field, rather than explicitly stating the experience, allows room for the reader to imprint their own experiences of times they felt similarly onto the text.

Nearly all of the titles of Oliver's poems in *She Said* include the phrase "she said"—which gives the reader room to imprint a speaker from their own life—and similar to Hejinian's poems, Oliver's string together sentences and fragments that operate independently while also coming together to form a clear central theme in each poem. However, what makes Oliver's work differ so greatly from Hejinian's is her use of spacing in many of the poems in this collection. Some sentences leave extra space between a punctuation mark and the beginning of the next word. Sometimes, the space between the words themselves is elongated to leave room for the reader to imprint their own experiences or act as a deliberate pause for thoughtfulness and reflection. Some indents are larger than others. My poem entitled "& she said, what has the

ampersand ever done for me” plays off Oliver’s titles while paying attention to the spacing in a way that pays homage to Oliver’s originals. For example, the large chunk of space between “a year ago” and “i had no,” coupled with the enjambment that breaks “i had no” and “previous conception of breath” gives the reader a moment to think about a moment of significance that might’ve happened in their own life a year ago. “i had no” makes the reader imagine the end of the sentence based on their own experiences, such as “i had no puppies” or “i had no asparagus for dinner, mother.” The enjambment of the lines coupled with the empty spaces act as metaphors that allow the reader to develop an authentic engagement with the text.

It is also important to note that Oliver, Shange, and Lorde all engage with similar questions of black womanhood in their poetic works. Oliver writes in *She Said*, “What I am trying to do in these poems is investigate the non-linear synapses between desire, memory, blackness (as both a personal and identity and a non-essentialist historical notion), sexuality and language” (*She Said*, 4). In this way, Oliver is not only engaging with her own sexuality, race, and gender, but also wrestling with larger questions about identity in general; specifically in the way that these aspects of identity can be translated through different kinds of language, metaphor included.

Shange wrestles similarly with incorporating language representative of those affected by the issues she’s chronicling. On her work, Shange stated in a *New York Times* interview from 2013, “Spell-check ruins my work...It fixes all my slang and dialect into standard English. So I’m caught in a tangle of technology that feels very foreign to me. My characters don’t talk necessarily in a normal American way of talking. They talk a little different. So I’m having a struggle with the grammar.” It is this “American way of talking” that makes Shange’s work so unique. She has said about her work that her particular style of writing, “reflect[s] language as I

hear it...The structure is connected to the music beneath the words.” In this way, Shange focuses very intently on using language that is actually indicative of the experiences she’s had as a black woman and, consequently, how the authorial voices she creates in her work can relay those experiences to a larger audience that might not be black or women themselves.

Lorde also grapples with blackness and womanhood in her own poems and in a 1981 interview with Carla M. Hammond, stated, “There's always someone asking you to underline one piece of yourself—whether it's *Black, woman, mother, dyke, teacher*, etc.—because that's the piece that they need to key in to. They want to dismiss everything else. But once you do that, then you've lost because then you become acquired or bought by that particular essence of yourself, and you've denied yourself all of the energy that it takes to keep all those others in jail. Only by learning to live in harmony with your contradictions can you keep it all afloat.” In this statement, Lorde is emphasising the importance of engaging intersectionally when it comes to translating one’s identity to the page. Instead of focusing on just race or just gender, it is important for those who belong to multiple marginalized groups to write in a way that translates that multiplicity successfully and authentically to the audiences of their particular works.

The final definition presented by the Stanford Encyclopedia identifies the authentic as a “reliable, accurate representation.” It is this definition which can easily be considered the most contentious because it raises important questions about what reliability and accuracy really are. From this, we can set up an important dichotomy between the authentic (that which is reliable and accurate) and the illusory (which, if it works in opposition to the authentic, must therefore be that which is *not* reliable and *not* accurate). But do these ideas really work in opposition to one another?

Let us consider this excerpt from Nietzsche’s “On Truth and Lies”:

“What then is truth? A movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished, and which, after long usage, seem to a people to be fixed, canonical, and binding. Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions; they are metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of sensuous force, coins which have lost their embossing and are now considered as metal and no longer coins” (*Truth and Lies*, 84).

In this passage, Nietzsche makes two important assertions: first, that metaphor is a mandatory component of truth itself and second, that all truths are illusory. It would seem, then, that components of truth are irrelevant if truth itself is nothing more than an illusion, but ultimately, this is a vast oversimplification of the concept of truth.

Nietzsche’s second claim holds weight on the grounds that truth is a socially constructed notion that ultimately has no bearing on its own—meaning, truth would not exist without widely accepted conceptions of truthfulness and falsehood—but is only assigned moral value based on the consequences it engenders. On these consequences, Nietzsche states, “What men avoid by excluding the liar is not so much being defrauded as it is being harmed by means of fraud. Thus, even at this stage, what they hate is basically not deception itself, but rather the unpleasant hated consequences of certain sorts of deception” (*Truth and Lies*, 81), furthering the notion that a person who tells a non-truth is ostracized not because of the act of lying itself or the supposed lack of morality that accompanies such an action, but rather the consequences of the action. Ultimately, the act is not detested for its repercussions at the personal level (i.e. what the acts would mean for the liars themselves), but for its larger consequences for a society at large that has already agreed upon a “uniformly valid and binding designation [that] is invented for things, and...establishes the first laws of truth” (*Truth and Lies*, 81).

It is important to make the distinction here between what Nietzsche calls “the liar” and what someone such as Jean-Paul Sartre might call someone acting in “bad faith,” a concept he

describes in depth in his text *Being and Nothingness*. On the issue of bad faith and how it is often confused with the act of lying, Sartre writes:

“Frequently [bad faith] is identified with falsehood. We say indifferently of a person that he shows signs of bad faith or that he lies to himself. We shall willingly grant that bad faith is a lie to oneself, on condition that we distinguish the lie to oneself from lying in general. Lying is a negative attitude, we will agree to that. But this negation does not bear on consciousness itself; it aims only at the transcendent. The essence of the lie implies in fact that the liar actually is in complete possession of the truth which he is hiding. A man does not lie about what he is ignorant of; he does not lie when he spreads an error of which he himself is the dupe; he does not lie when he is mistaken” (*Being and Nothingness*, 48).

In this excerpt, Sartre is careful to make the distinction between a liar—meaning one who is aware of the truth, but still deliberately spreads falsehoods to the world—and one who acts in bad faith, who deludes themselves as well as others, but only because they are not privy to the actual truth of a matter. Again, this is particularly applicable to metaphors because there is always room for one to misunderstand a metaphor, which does not make it “wrong” or “bad” per se, but rather allows it to operate independent of authorial intention. Even so, if one is able to gain a particular set of truths from the misunderstanding of a metaphor, the metaphor is still successful because even though it does not communicate the writer’s set of truths, it communicates truths that are personal to the reader and subsequently allows the reader to form an important and unique connection to the text at hand.

Nietzsche views the moral responsibility of truth-telling much in the same way that Kant views the morality of universal action, which he defines in the categorical imperative he sets forth in *The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*: “act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law” (*Kant’s Moral Philosophy*, Section 5). For Nietzsche, acting truthfully means acting in accordance with the rest of the population by taking into account predetermined societal conventions that benefit humanity at large. Even so, Nietzsche admits that humankind is constantly deceived in existence

because of its intense focus on personal gain. In the same way Kant warns against using people as a means to an end, Nietzsche states in “On Truth and Lies”:

“Deception, flattering, lying, deluding, talking behind the back, putting up a false front, living in borrowed splendor, wearing a mask, hiding behind convention, playing a role for others and for oneself—in short, a continuous fluttering around the *solitary* flame of vanity—is so much the rule and law among men that there is almost nothing which is less comprehensible than how an honest and pure drive for truth could have risen among them. They are deeply immersed in illusions and in dream images; their eyes merely glide over the surface of things and see “forms.” Their senses nowhere lead to truth; on the contrary, they are content to receive stimuli and, as it were, to engage in a groping game on the backs of things. Moreover, man permits himself to be deceived in his dreams every night of his life” (*Truth and Lies*, 80).”

In this passage, Nietzsche asserts that adopting a particular persona, whether for oneself or others, is to engage in a type of dishonesty that has become all too familiar to humankind. This is what makes going against the grain and devoting oneself to the artistic endeavors of the second language all the more noble. When Nietzsche states that truth is illusory, he means that widely accepted conventions of truth are often not truths at all, but false fronts people put on as a way of ingratiating themselves into social norms—or, in other words, a means of immersing themselves in illusions. This usage of language—and of the dishonesty it engenders—falls under the first category of language, which is focused on the “forms” themselves and not on the meaning-making one can do through those forms. To Nietzsche, one who uses language exclusively in this way is not living truthfully or authentically and therefore, only uses metaphorical processes of understanding language in ways that are illusory responses to stimuli instead of grounded in personal experience and feeling.

Nietzsche also states, “The liar is a person who uses the valid designations, the words, in order to make something which is unreal appear to be real” (*Truth and Lies*, 81), which means that one’s ability to lie is rooted in one’s deftness with the first language; a language that utilizes definitions based on widely accepted social conventions. In this way, one could argue that metaphor itself is a lie because it plays to our individual experiences and not the widely accepted social conventions of language. If we both read the same phrase, but interpret it differently, how

can we say that one is more or less truthful than the other? We cannot. We can only say that they are two different and valid interpretations that we come to through our own individual experiences of being, as no two people are exactly the same. Therefore, metaphors are not lies, but rather different kinds of truth that are even more truthful in poetry than in literality because of our ability to apply our own personal experiences to what we're reading.

Nietzsche asserts that this application of words to concepts is a universal process that begins with a nerve stimulus, is then followed by an image and a word as sound, until finally, it is formed in full as a concept. Nietzsche then inquires into the linguistic conventions themselves: "Are they perhaps congruent with things? Is language the adequate expression of all realities" (*Truth and Lies*, 81)? Thus, process aside, we are left with a question of how single words can possibly denote every single living being's experience with said thing?

It is here that Nietzsche's strongest argument against the reality of truth in the first language comes to fruition:

"In particular, let us further consider the formation of concepts. Every word instantly becomes a concept precisely insofar as it is not supposed to serve as a reminder of the unique and entirely individual original experience to which it owes its origin; but rather, a word becomes a concept insofar as it simultaneously has to fit countless more or less similar cases—which means, purely and simply, cases which are never equal and thus altogether unequal. Every concept arises from the equation of unequal things. Just as it is certain that one leaf is never totally the same as another, so it is certain that the concept "leaf" is formed by arbitrarily discarding these individual differences and by forgetting the distinguishing aspects" (*Truth and Lies*, 83).

In this excerpt, Nietzsche is further expanding upon the idea that subjective experience makes humankind's attempt to universalize truth in the first language a truly hopeless venture. According to Nietzsche, it is not possible to come up with a singular notion of what an object, such as a leaf, actually is. When one says "leaf," one may picture a green leaf from a Maple tree in the summer, while another might envision a yellow London Planetree leaf from a New York City street in fall. There is no way to ensure that the word "leaf" conjures up the exact same image in every single mind and subsequently, there is no singular image of a leaf that is more or

less leafy than any other image. Nietzsche further asserts that the subjective experiences one has concerning these objects turns them into mere metaphors, since the image of the thing is merely a faulty translation of the thing. Additionally, the universal experience one has of arriving at a concept through a nerve stimulus is a metaphorical process of translation in and of itself, where a mental image is standing in for a thing similar to the way metaphor seems to “stand in” for literal language.

Even so, it is impossible for subjective notions of leafiness to be exclusively influenced by the individual in the first language. Even if one attempts to live truthfully without imparting meaning unto phrases or objects, one still falls prey to the social conventions—or facts—set forth in linguistic culture. In Cavell’s essay “What A Thing Is (Called),” Cavell writes, “If someone does not have [the facts], that is not because his studies have been neglected, but because he is for some reason incapable of (or has been given up on as a candidate for) maturing into, or initiation into, full membership in the culture” (*Claim of Reason*, 75). To not have a mastery of the initial first language means a lack of awareness within the culture—and subsequently, a lack of awareness of one’s historical situation in language—and an uninformed perception of what a thing is.

In *The Claim of Reason*, Cavell further differentiates between these facts of the first language and the meaning making of the second language using the example of the chair, stating:

“There are technical handbooks which give us the features of various types and periods of furniture (what a Louis XIII dining chair is, how to recognize a Louis XIV chaise, etc.) but none which teach us what a chair is and what sitting on a chair is. None, we might say, which illustrate the essence of the matter. The demonstrative registers that we are to recollect those very general facts of nature or culture which we all, all who can talk and act together, do (must) in fact be using as criteria...” (*Claim of Reason*, 73).

These demonstrative statements that Cavell is referring to have to do with the specific traits of the chair, such as its situation within a larger tradition of chairs and the ways in which it is characteristic of a particular designer of chairs. For example, I know this is an Eames chair



from the Modern design period because it is composed of a certain number of curved plywood pieces set with a leather cushion in such and such a color. This is different from the “form of life,” meaning the widely accepted conventional usage of being a place on which to sit. Again, Cavell is emphasizing that the second language has more to do with our personal connections to an object through action and personal attachment—such as the act of sitting on a chair—more than just an understanding of the specific characteristics of the chair in question.

While we have successfully proven that the first language leaves no room for truth beyond illusion—and subsequently, no room for authenticity—as it merely assigns words to concepts, the criteria needed to be authentic are readily fulfilled in the second language of poetry, which focuses on the development of the first language such that it leaves room for the imprinting of personal experience and feeling. Suddenly, one is no longer “right” or “wrong” when one thinks of a universal leaf different from another’s universal leaf, but through the application of poetry, there is room for all leaves without specific moral criteria that must be fulfilled. In fact, there is room for the leaf to be more than just a leaf, but a metaphor—a linguistic vehicle that is broad enough for others to insert their own personal relationships to the thing within the art form of the poem.

### CHAPTER 3: METAPHORS OF ALL KINDS

The incredible thing about metaphor is that it's not just a linguistic device found in the actual content of a poem, but as we've seen, it can extend to the format of the poem—how the poem looks on the page, the use of italics, bolding, or normal font, the spacing of the poem, etc.—the use of other linguistic devices (like idioms, for example, which are metaphors in the sense that they have to be seen as the sum of their parts rather than their individual components in order to effectively convey intended meaning), and how the language is altered in unconventional ways within the poem through abbreviation, misspellings, and transformative language procedures. Sometimes, the poem can even make use of distinctly literal language as a metaphorical tool to convey its intended meaning.

On the usage of tools such as these to convey larger meanings in poetry, Charles Bernstein writes in his essay "Writing and Method," "The question is always: what is the meaning of this language practice; what values does it propagate; to what degree does it encourage an understanding, a visibility, of its own values or to what degree does it repress that awareness" (*Method*, 224)? In other words, how is this work successful in either encouraging or discouraging an awareness of its meaning and how do the tools it employs either help or harm this overall understanding? More specifically, how does metaphor provide the circumstances one needs to develop a relationship with the work?

The answer is that there is no universal standard for metaphor. Like Nietzsche's conception of the leaf, a word which encompasses completely different conceptions of leafiness depending on who you speak to, there is no "right" or "wrong" way to interpret a metaphor; just different ways. No two people's personal experiences are exactly alike, so it is impossible to say that the meaning one person is imprinting onto what they're reading is better or worse than

someone else's meaning. Going back to the idea of an "utterance-busting lease," one might read this line and think of the idiom "a new lease on life," interpreting this phrase positively—i.e. the lease is so good that it renders us speechless—and another might remember a time when they were rendered speechless by a physical lease on an apartment they shared with a former lover. Metaphors allow us infinite room to explore what something truly means to us, and we are able to develop these important relationships through our own personal experiences, which we imprint onto the text.

For example, the line "Utterance-busting lease" has everything to do with the line above it. The contextualisation is important, as it is a part of what the metaphor means to *me*. When one reads the line in the context of the line above it, which designates the father as being somehow possessive of the utterance-busting lease, one comes to a different interpretation than if one focuses on the enjambment, which separates the idea of the lease from the father. I know that the father is relevant in my personal understanding of the lease, but I also want to leave room for others to imprint their own experiences. This imprinting is enabled by the artistic choice to include the father on an entirely different line than the one describing the lease itself.

When it comes to form as metaphor, there are an infinite number of formats that allow us to imprint our own personal experience onto the work by way of its appearance on the page—like a work presented in a grid, for example, such as my poem entitled "Poetry, Language, Thought."<sup>8</sup> Instead of offering a singular mode of reading, this particular poem lends itself to all interpretations of being seen. While there is no wrong way to enter this poem, the two readings that stand out the most to me are left to right along the lines and left to right along the columns. The first line of the poem when read left to right along the lines, "all things/ of earth,/ reciprocal, made/ belligerent" appears to be quite different at first from the first stanza when read left to

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<sup>8</sup> See *Appendix [8]*

right on the columns: “all things/ by their nature,/ is belonging/ of the Open<sup>9</sup>.” Even so, the meanings do not differ drastically based on the way the piece is read. Both lines reference some kind of universal nature (“of earth” vs. “by their nature”) while broadening the scope even further by grounding the line or stanza in a concrete feeling (belligerence vs. the Open). The reader knows what it is like to be angry and also knows what it is like to feel Open and while these feelings may be more different than they are similar, the subjective experiences of each reader allow for them to formulate a specific feeling about the text that differs from someone else’s visual interpretation of the poem: an indication of the successful implementation of metaphor.

Additionally, a work like “Ocular Crumb”<sup>10</sup> produces a similar disquieting effect with its unconventional spacing and visceral images of the quotidian that provide the reader the platform needed to become personally and emotionally invested in the text. The everyday wholesomeness of “diners’ heaps of buttered pancakes” and the colors of crayons evoke childhood and bring the reader back to simple times. Coupled with the more adult images of kissing someone who tastes like beer or smoking a cigarette almost read as a recollection of memories in no particular chronology, which mimics the way our brains recall past experiences.

The spacing leaves room for the reader to further insert themselves in the text, most notably in the line “she says,” which is given a line of space both above and below and along with “know that”—one of the only moments in the text where a short fragment is given that much weight. Putting them together through that pattern, we form the phrase “she says know

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<sup>9</sup> I’d like to note here that while there is a poetic tradition rooted in “the Open,” it is by pure coincidence that this word is capitalized in my poem and my explication of the text is completely separate from any historical context of “the Open.”

<sup>10</sup> See *Appendix [9]*

that,” implying that there is a piece of advice left unsaid that the reader is meant to either not know, or to figure out through the contextual clues the poem provides.

More than anything, this poem reeks of puerile adoration and love; of the sensation of falling for someone in the moments that seem least important. The longing looks, the book recommendation, and the way hair is forced into submission by water are small moments of beauty in memory that allow the reader to remember their own first loves and the little things of the everyday that bring them back to that simple, beautiful, and wistful feeling.

Transformative procedures that push the author to make their intention known even in the face of forced absurdity are also a way for a work to employ metaphor successfully. One such procedure is the n+7 technique, which was invented by Jean Lescure of Oulipo, a gathering of French writers whose goal was to create written texts that were constrained by different language boundaries. n+7 forces the author to replace each noun (or other part of speech, if the author so desires) with the seventh word down in the dictionary from the intended word. Two works, the aforementioned poem entitled “Pith” and my poem “Solar Tramp Nightmare”<sup>11</sup> use this technique to create works that are nonsensical at first glance, but—like the works of Hejinian—come together to create a work with a central theme. In “Pith,” the way the replacements change the tone of the poem causes us to further investigate what is at stake in the piece. The word “politics” coupled with “bid[ding] farewell to the policeman” illicit images of brutality propagated by the government’s military industrial complex. In this way, the language politicizes the body while continually referring back to an ambiguous “he” whose only definitive characteristics in the poem have to do with his relationship to his family and his upbringing rather than the facets of his personhood that exist independent of other factors. This begs a

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<sup>11</sup> See *Appendix [10]*.

further question: can someone's personality and selfhood ever be truly separated from the influence of their lifestyle, background, and relationships?

Additionally, one of the particularly notable aspects of the n+7 procedural technique is the way it forces metaphor into a work otherwise plagued by literality. When one is required by the confines of the task to replace intended nouns with unintentional nouns, the poem can take on an entirely new shape. Because of this, it is important for the language surrounding the nouns to carry most of the weight of the poem, or one risks a complete loss of the original meaning. An already successful work leaves room for procedures like this because the metaphor is not too much of a disruption from the original authorial intention. We all know that one cannot literally major in a "piece of the pie" at any esteemed institution, so we must conclude that this idiom is standing in place for something larger and more important; something that cannot be contained within a literal and formal designation like "Philosophy" or "Written Arts." Alternatively, if a poem is not doing the work of carrying the meaning to the author's satisfaction, these transformative techniques can be useful in getting the poem to a place of higher meaning. However nonsensical the replacements are, the poem should still be able to connect with its audience and the metaphor should serve as a facilitator of this relationship, not a hindrance.

Referring back to "Solar Tramp Nightmare," the poem seems to be aware of its employment of n+7 without losing its overall meaning. The phrase "dried/ like a mandolin, unfair/ like a purchase" seems to make little sense at first reading, but comes together with thought. Describing a mandolin as "dried" as opposed to focusing on its musicality may seem unusual, but is the wood of a mandolin not dry? Are the sounds made by the instrument not dry in the right context? Is the musical nature of the object totally lost by the descriptor "dry?" I don't think so. A similar thing happens with the second half of the phrase, "unfair like a

purchase.” A purchase might not be thought of as unfair at first, but can purchases not be unfair at all? Shopping for food one does not necessarily want to eat or buying a gift for an acquaintance one doesn’t like seem to be unfair exercises in purchasing. We as readers are also left to imagine these circumstances for ourselves, deriving personal relationships to the text by filling the gaps in our immediate understanding with our own memories.

The replaced nouns stand in for the original nouns without losing the original meaning of the poem, which is to convey the relationship as critical and unhealthy, where the author is still getting “shucked” no matter what they do. The successful usage of metaphor allows the audience to imprint a moment when they, too, might’ve felt themselves being shucked. Additionally, the enjambment and spacing allow for moments of pause and reflection that provide the reader room to draw their own personal conclusions and form a relationship to the text. The pause after “I said” before “and you said” leaves the reader on the edge of their seat, wondering what the reply will be or if there will be a reply at all. In this moment, the reader can imagine a reply rooted in personal experience that’s been spoken to them. The reader uses their own memories to bring further meaning and importance to the work.

In terms of synthesizing the literal and the metaphorical, my poem entitled “Vanilla Testament”<sup>12</sup> is a mix of the literal and the metaphorical that uses visceral images function as stand-ins to describe a difficult event without actually telling the story of the event. The phrase “harmed deliberately, privately” denotes an intentional violation of one’s safety behind closed doors, setting a tone for the piece that continually references an ambiguous happening. Images of cattle on their way to slaughter or the crashing of a ship are both instances of destruction and act as metaphors that mimic the sadness and danger of the circumstance the piece is alluding to. The ambiguity allows for the audience to imprint their personal experiences

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<sup>12</sup> See *Appendix [11]*.

onto the work. The reader may not have been in a shipwreck or a slaughterhouse, but then again, the author probably has not either. The anxiety provoked by these images will be familiar to the reader, who will then be able to derive a personal relationship to the text.

This poem makes us believe we're almost missing something when we reduce the poem to the cattle and the ship. It's not merely about earthly objects, but also about a recurring feeling of dread that we can't quite put our fingers on. We're simultaneously grounded and sickened by the literal because we can't trust it ("hardly anything i have said thus far has been true"), but we can trust the way the poem makes us feel. Even if we cannot name the feeling, we are still feeling it. In this way, the metaphor allows us a space to feel that the literal—which is more confusing and irreconcilable than our own interiors—is unable to fully allow us to access.

Through these works, we see that the metaphorical language found within poetry allows us access to a certain set of authentic truths that literal language—which can only provide us with the illusion of truths—does not have access to.



## APPENDIX OF POEMS:

[1]

### PITH

should you breathe  
up with a break that  
tells you it wants

to get a tattoo of its echo  
and ancestral flexibility  
should you hold him  
accountable if he grew  
up in an armada

if his father's  
an utterance-busting lease  
if he majored in a piece of the pie  
at college at opinion politics

do we chalk peoples' charters  
up to their upbringing  
at what politics  
do we hold them  
responsible for the contradictions  
of their bible

at what politics do we say this is  
not a good weekend to be  
contrast aside or not aside  
it is still not  
a good weekend to be

at what politics  
do we realize that we  
probably don't know any  
better than them  
but like to think we do  
because if we don't think  
we're delving the right

threat then what are we  
doing here anyway

at what politics do  
worries start to bid  
farewell to the policeman?

[2]

**EVEREST HYMNAL**

boy, pallor of icy mountain crags  
legs like daddy long, spindly and crooked  
smell each fine hair along both tufted feet  
feast upon salty swells of broken laugh

don juan of the himalayayas  
you'd never expect such limbs to be so slippery  
but laughter is only sweet when seen through sunlight

now is the time for moons old  
to shine darkly in gentle waning crescents  
tough like steak, flags through their middles  
the slow tenderness of all ether  
is thick like whale skin

for the sludging,  
he licks his lips and says  
your name, hard like a wave, sea spent  
it will be the biggest crash you have ever felt  
but also soft and slow, enveloping you  
with fear and all at once, a gulp  
he swallows you quickly through a sour straw

scream in every language you've ever known  
bang at the esophagus' closed lids, sleeping soundly  
forever to fall upon deaf irises  
eventually—  
the legs continue on their way  
and you remain, stuck in yours

[3]

**I AM DERIDED**<sup>13</sup>

*I am derided*

when opposing facts fill the crescent scale only to the brim  
i will be the one holding the ceiling fan tear i ng at my rings.  
not real gold but close enough lies discarded on solemn  
floor day after day

*I conceived it as my task to create  
difficulties everywhere*

the dine r tries to offer me new skin i say this item is not on  
the menu and everyone around me laughs but i have never known myself  
to have hu mor and i suddenly realize  
it is not me who said that..

*who know how to benefit mankind  
glittering inactivity as an author I  
remember it quite clearly by  
a ge nuine interest in those , who make  
everything easy he is concerned  
about what the requirement might be*

i tear out my hair but not enough for it to be considered  
a medical cond itio n lover boy comes  
to visit for the weekend and we raise our voices  
so they puncture paper thin wheezing until we are too tired to do  
anything except lay there and not fuck

*When at a banquet, where the guests have already  
overeaten, one person is concerned  
about bringing on new courses,  
another about having a vomitive at hand*

i try to write about my works  
plurality inhibits focus these days refuse to exist in stark focus

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<sup>13</sup> Italics denote language borrowed from Søren Kierkegaard.

I begin to pick at the skin around my fingernails i tell people  
the dog did it everyone is just playing  
a giant game of macaroni sunday which is a different game  
i made the game up when i was 6 and it has no rules 7  
has all the rules i hear through some Imaginary grapevine that winds  
itself around unyielding conceptions of throat  
how do you pronounce a sleep sound  
with your mouth covered a red envel o pe appears  
in between your thumb and forefinger for those  
pesky moments – we all have them – for when one is being  
incessantly perturbed by the ionic resistance of the red  
Snake it hisses from thin lips i have run out of money and  
i will eat only chalk this week will you help me ?  
What does all this come to ? i say maybe :

*Man is a synthesis of the soulish and the bodily*

but what, then, is everybody else

[4]

## OCTOBER'S SPRING

seminal waters attempt to show the closest competitions, the lessons of divergence  
i believe in something more — artificial means descend from i  
into two families (or three unknowns) still earlier, widely different, nevertheless true

i will inherit the much, the general prepositions; that is, a sentence  
between the slightly modified, how long before we arrive at budding twigs, are the extinguished  
apparent?

objections crowd the reader. why does he not believe in illustrated diagrams?  
a truly wonderful fact and thus, the smallest whole

shared quality: death long before organs, but not in all cases  
single file, less calamity

the affinities of the world are much of a oneness; the vehicle is more often stepped on  
so explain it to me then: why is not all nature in contempt of court? the court of trees?  
i see no reason here...

causing infinity and imprecision causes many variations  
preserve the season of age, the year as it grows older and pepper the ground with remote past  
tenses

i am an untrodden field of inquiry and i stem from the incorrect analogy of living thieves  
i am incapable of homogenous definition and i admit variation  
well, what's going on is i cease  
to live as such — only the tides can do this.

[5]

### **FULL SCREEN OF A BODY**

the microwave did its best to heat up the stouffer's, but all we could hear was the radio blaring the alternatives. donald trump stands stocky in front of a podium and chirps rapid fire on the internet to other worldly powers, trying desperately to be noticed by chumps in red hats and beer bellies and white women educated and not. from the angle i am sitting, a disc appears to be missing. all i see are blue slats and the face i made the entire month of last november and the face i am making still. courtesy sounds like a stripper. i like your teeth. they are waiting on their tobacco in the mailbox while headline alerts burst onto my locked screen, eclipsing the photo of my dog with too much flash, eyes glowing green the way mine just do in the summer. is it a friend crush or a crush crush, i ask the person on the bench next to me. deep breathing. i feel the weight of a sunbeam on my blackened back. diamonds pale in comparison to olive branches (meaning cylinders). it is weird to see a person not in person. freckles grow constellatory across brown-eyed curling over three ears. he immerses himself in nature, but does not feel better. the static of the tv still rings rapid fire in my ear. i taste year-old cole slaw nestled in between slices of turkey breast and stale bread, the smell of smoke on hands as bites become fewer and farther between. that was the day of drumsticks. today is the day of crying over drumsticks. when someone says hanukkah is not a real holiday, i ask then what is. is real relative. is this truly our president. all roads lead back to squat toupee brain in an oval office whispering codes to himself and hovering with soundless fingers over an imagined giant red button. a charlie horse will do us all in. an aneurysm. a cramp. an endless series of wrong moves. she has the awareness to ask what is at stake, but does not know enough to put it into the right number of sentences. to put it all into poems because it is not pretty enough. color-coordinated doors line the jersey street, but i prefer egyptian cotton because the thread count is higher. the pines tell me it is still not enough.

[6]

## **IS THERE THAT WHICH HATES NOT BOREDOM**

two grains of salt collect where i drop the pearl knife. mother forgot to fill the new glazed bowl with bottle shards, smell of high school's first beer wafting fragrant from stale glass droplets, found outside the local convenience store by the tens. there is only grouping. it pushes outwards against lies. it isn't like i pooled the wine found in my spit. your father fell onto the wicker basket slick with the latest issues, fanned out primary colors against the bleak backdrop of a vacuumed beige carpet. the basket did not move, even with 187 pounds of force (it was after thanksgiving dinner). he was lucky to emerge unscathed, save for a hiccup. a pair has wealth in coins, but not enough to eat because the penny is not worth very much. in my kitchen doorway, only my mother stands tall, greater than the dirty gauze of a forgotten curtain and the crumbs on last bread's parchment. breasts operate independently and we should always be on our toes. because of this, i mind the eventual subtraction of living things, the remembrance of reproach, the megaphones vibrating, but making no sound. my whole city lit up in beams and place seemed the most important thing of all. i stood between blades of grass as they iced over with wind chill and i waited for three full hours before i knew i had been forgotten by time and my nephew. i will only hide when no one is there to seek me, dressed in a bathing costume from the 90s and a straw hat with a creased brim and oil stains. i heard french fries are not french, but i have never been to paris, so i would not know. i tightened my cat's corset and held her chin high, felt her furry breathing through the pads beneath my nails, scratched the polyester ribbon and smelled the cloying sweetness of summer air. you stood on the rooftop across from me barking songs of old and tempting rainfall with the freezer, which you always kept open to facilitate escape. where is my molasses catching. is that foot staying between the lines. an italian greyhound on tv bursts forth from the damask, cackles catching in the moonlight as it rounds the corner of the track and against all odds, leaps the hurdles to land straight into the palm of your hand. you close over it, eyes shut tightly, back against the cold plastic seat. a sigh and the light of day disappears into the uneven heaviness of breath.



[7]

**& SHE SAID, WHAT HAS THE AMPERSAND EVER DONE FOR ME**

willow tree's incandescent obstacle leaves. i remember  
the way hands felt warmer on the grass. in the sunlight.  
dry & chafed & waiting  
to be buffed up. on  
this day        a year ago        i had no  
previous conception of breath. only  
the knowledge of the red hand. of its burning  
cuticles rife with acetone searing        on what  
i imagine a small grill feels like. the vibrations of the iron  
grate leave sticky welts leaking white  
onto the not-so-damaged parts        of the skin.  
i have never been particularly religious        but i  
pray today & hope that        maybe it will    change something.  
there is valiance in the process of underscoring.  
of scansion. of swan song. of different buttons  
all sewn on the same blouse.        asymmetry is  
how i live my life. baruch hashem.  
i feel adonai's fingers  
tracing the parts of my        spine  
when i eat a hillel sandwich of maror        the bitter herbs &  
charoset        the sweet apples with wine    my mom made.  
is it cheating if it eat it. what is it if i eat it. what is this limb.  
there is a phenomenon where the presence  
of said limb is imaginary fantastic.    this is what happens  
when one returns home from a war. this is  
what happens when people die. our prayers  
praise yisrael & i feel        a pang in my stomach  
at perennial displacement.  
ashamed. sweating. relocating within  
the larger context.        please.  
not at the table. so what.  
i careen off the cliff.

[8]

**“POETRY, LANGUAGE, THOUGHT”<sup>14</sup>**

all things by their nature, is belonging of the Open	of earth, teach that to the world	reciprocal, made being it is to characterize	belligerent created the impulse creation
art is the mentioned setting itself	letting happen & the back into	of the essential unconcealedness colors	features just of what is that glow
the clang of should we not in the latter, deception, but	tone is a thing be satisfied,” falling into error? we usually tend	of Greek existence we say, (this painting spoke to be	“Yet why used up, vibrating the worst self in the vicinity)
what is agreement with dominant as they are official of “born”	at work in the what is— formulations are ever inaccessible agencies & “death”;	work: usefulness i seek a not what in themselves concern themselves both destined shapes	i seek prevailing something matters, under consideration, with the relations
the all governing decay that can within the realm not similar	expanse of disaster never be undone of Dignity (& properties)	& blessing & these works splendor,	is a kind of world- belong but those are
it is the same for our own sake,	with reversing we reveal	the sculpture of God nothing	

[9]

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<sup>14</sup> Title of a text by Martin Heidegger.

## OCULAR CRUMB

notice how  
yeast pools  
in the corners of parchment paper the way  
a dog licks its nose

note the absurdity of crayons,  
some illusion of periwinkle  
“that bedpost is a tough one,”

she says

there is a record that  
needs to be reclaimed on a less than  
starry night by vicarious laughter,  
the smell of someone else’s lips  
    like beer, stale

tell yourself you are not a gossip  
that you thought i knew already  
marvel at your own triangular fingerprints in  
the palms of my hands, in the bays

a look  
longingly, the way a heron stares  
i assume you know what i’m talking about;

know that

true plaid is only found  
in diners’ heaping plates of buttered pancakes  
that time we smoked a cigarette in the bath  
the way the water smooths  
the hair      on my knees

will you ever remember to read  
the book i recommended so long  
ago that i have forgotten the title?

still held against you, how

did that kiss taste?

how is it just matter

[10]

**SOLAR TRAMP NIGHTMARE**

Fleet Freezer, our soft doorknob  
mathematician dried  
like a mandolin, unfair  
like a purchase. I, magic; you,

rigid, made your heater  
a function earned of coronation.  
Felt brontosaurus aperture,  
your whisker outcry.  
I won't glacier you anytime

rotten.  
Them pottery pellet.  
Wyoming vacant, I said

and you said, I don't  
caress. You're stingy,  
geyser shuttle.

[11]

## **VANILLA TESTAMENT**

harmed deliberately, privately does not require bringing people to court nonetheless it tells us about matters of assembly of the aims of cattle who fear death when they are being squeezed through chutes, balking at metallic blessings as the greatest of evils—wiser than is considered adequate by the same effect of being god-loved on behalf of fine things of chalked eagerness and misfortune of the ship's impending doom and arrival today go around and give advice, antithetical to common code neglectful in the ways words skirt around approachability and four others— assess against me the structured level of one's purity and another's puberty interchangeable in early dawn bad news, certainly sufficient or in disbelief of interruption, of actual speech, of being made as a form of matter and yet, hardly anything i have said thus far has been true.

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