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AUTHOR: Colin Kohl

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Kenneth Mendoza
THESIS COMMITTEE CHAIR

Martha Stoddard Holmes
THESIS COMMITTEE MEMBER

Mark Wallace
THESIS COMMITTEE MEMBER
Language, Actuality, Genre:

Writing and Language in a Hybrid World

by

Colin Kohl
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Introduction

Acts of history are of little importance outside of the ways in which they impact the present and future. Often times, graduate thesis projects and dissertations focus on a literary event or author by dissecting and reevaluating meaning in a purely historical context. However, the ways in which particular events or writers affected their own time are concretized and finished. I offer an argument for newness in writing and authorship that emphasizes vitality in meaning through a consciousness of increasing multiculturalism and hybridity. My argument is towards vitality, richness, and potential in the future of literature and writing. My argument for the experiential nature of language, and between and against genre coalesce towards consciousness of life in text and author as effecting real change and awareness of our present social world. The classification of this work seeks a new lens for blending elements of analytics, philosophy, fictocriticism, poetry, and fiction. As an example for my theoretical considerations, I offer an excerpt from a larger work of my fiction in the latter half of this project.

This thesis project is an attempt to merge art and criticism to extend myself as an artist and a scholar. The fiction that constitutes the latter half of the project simultaneously reflects and pushes the theory that precedes it. I engage the affects of Bakhtin’s theories of language and then
contextualize those considerations in my fiction as praxis. I provide the reader with a protagonist who, by falling away from language in her isolation, denies social theories of cognition, language, and communication. Debates of linguistics, language, and philosophy often hinge upon a prerequisite of normality in socialization. What happens to theories of language and communication if one starts to disrupt the social fabric of their foundation? This project is a postmodern event to defamiliarize and question assumptions, rather than to contribute to stacks of old knowledge.
The Hybrid’s Trajectory

Conventional genre divisions fail to embody the diverse experience and expression of present day cultures, authors, and texts. Adhering to strict divisions between poetry and prose, criticism and literature, and oral and written serve a western philosophical nostalgia that belongs to the victors of humanity’s long battles for power. The present literary conversation presents contemporary writers with a wonderful opportunity to “write back” at historical ideologies that have sought to restrain and silence them. The modern transcriptions of discourse within oral cultures gives the world access to systems of meaning and representation traditionally excluded from academic notions of “proper authorship”. The cultural collision of our modern state complicates, and adds necessary dimensions to M.M. Bakhtin’s notions of dialogism and heteroglossia.

This conversation is always two-fold and binary. Firstly, discussing the nature of language and literature has a socio-political importance as we hopefully engage in discourse to facilitate communication and define society in terms of justice and equality. Secondly, we delve into the conceptual and have discussions of theory to arrive at wisdom. In the realm of theory, we conceptualize, apply, and reconsider. Then we always have the obligation to step back and ask, “Who is being privileged or hurt by this condition?” Theoretical
discussions are not innocent. They can never be completely removed from the social; the binaries are dialectic. Theory needs application, and the result then yearns back to the abstract, allowing room for free thought. And yet, the discussion does not have to be so thoroughly relegated to power relations. Adherence to genre delineation leads to stagnation and predictability in the process of the modern day artist.

Western philosophy has infiltrated the fiber of our academic psyche on a foundational level. Our subconscious perceives through the structure of a victor’s language and our adherence to logic and reason can deflect our attempts to make literary meaning outside traditional notions of genre and linearity. A language that would seek to disguise itself as any other, a mere system of signs and signifiers, is actually a system of representation permeated with unyielding social perspective. The language is western, not just English, and the word “genre” is born of that language. This situation is a grand agreement that underlies our speech, our ideologies, and our arguments. To contribute to a greater world consciousness outside of dominant culture, I present the reader with a protagonist who does not participate in the western philosophical agreement. She is absent from social experience during the early critical years of character development and indoctrination to our reality construct. She is a physically racial hybrid, and a perfect exile. Her eventual relationship to
our social agreements is acculturative, and her existence challenges the reader to reconsider the universal and the subjective.

The beginning of the 21st century ushers in an era benefited and problematized by issues of technology, ideology, and class structure. The United States stands as a physical and ideological stage for cultural and racial hybridity and amalgamation, and cultural empathy offers humanity a path for survival. “The promise of the twenty-first century is the promise of the changing colors of the American people. Demography is redefining who is an American. The time has come for us to embrace our varied selves” (Takaki 439). Ideological compromise characterizes cultural hybridity on multiple levels. Marriages that exist between peoples of different cultural ideologies require empathy similar to negotiations between national governments and corporations.

Traditional Western notions of literary respectability demand strict adherence to genre divisions. Fiction, non-fiction, poetry, criticism, and memoir all have criteria for classification and evaluation, yet historical socio-political power structures are inextricable from these literary classifications. Traditionally, blending or subverting genre indicated a failure to achieve greatness in one genre type. In a literary context, the redefinition of cultural identity that Ronald Takaki illuminates requires a reformulation of modern genre ideologies. Only very recently have there been efforts made to give legitimacy to other forms of writing. Western
genre classifications in the traditional sense offer their own valuable rhetorical insight, and the classical chain of literature offers incredible contributions to humanity. The problem is that the enforcement of genre ideology and division in our social world imposes cultural hierarchies. Illuminating theoretical developments, with connotations both positive and negative, mirror historical power structures. Western philosophy, conventions of writing, and genres, descend to us from the victors of the past: the Greek and Roman Empires. The epic, the epistle, poetry, drama, the confession, and the novel, descend to us from Greek, Roman, and European lines. However, distinctions between genre types and conceptions of logic and reason are not objective and universal.
Enter Bakhtin

Theories of genre do not exist in isolation. Similar to how M.M. Bakhtin argues that the social dialogic nature of language stands in contrast to “unity” in a single dominant (European) language, genre distinctions today represent a static system of language on a macro scale: a system that is not applicable to the hybrid (and therefore multi-voiced, multi-languaged) demographic that writers such as Ronald Takaki document. Genre distinctions represent historical ideologies thoroughly entrenched in a long story of power told in a western tongue. A scholastic insistence on this status reinforces a coagulated image of racial and cultural divisions. We have a duty, especially in our multicultural American present to pick and irritate this surface, and vociferate that all blood still runs red. The essence of what makes us all human outweighs the social and cultural differences that divide us.

Bakhtin foreshadows our present-day dynamic in “Discourse in the Novel”:

A whole series of phenomena have therefore remained almost entirely beyond the realm of consideration: these include the specific phenomena that are present in discourse and that are determined by its dialogic orientation, first, amid others’ utterance inside a single language (the primordial dialogism of discourse), amid other “social
languages’ within a single national language and finally amid different national languages within the same culture, that is, the same socio-ideological conceptual horizon. (274) His third point indicates the direction of our concern. His commentary concerning dialogue between speech types brings us to the doorstep of multiculturalism. Bakhtin situates the utterance within a war between the dominant dialect or form of language and all (be they beneath, outside, or in parody of) others that stratify against that concept of unity. Traditional stylistics is not prepared to negotiate with heteroglossia, and Bakhtin’s notions of dialogism arrive earlier than cultural studies’ representative discourse in our multicultural world. To gain a theoretical perspective of our present state, we should apply dialogism within and between dialects of different national language(s) and their hybrid forms. The praxis of this original notion of dialogism, and in particular, the present social condition of national languages within the same culture, does not acknowledge the difficulties of cultural collision. In the United States, the unification of languages under “one culture” is a conversation of power. Recent “English Only” legislation in the U.S. has re-ignited the country’s momentum toward cultural exclusion and assimilation to western ideology. Under this pressure, the sustenance of one’s native language outside of English becomes a struggle for identity against cultural repression. “Different national languages within one culture” becomes
complicated within this problem of dominant cultural hierarchy. Educational implementation of “English Only” pushes minority languages into marginalization. Despite political attempts to enforce this kind of legislation in the U.S., our social existence is continuously expanding with regards to diverse cultures’ languages and dialects.

Taking the baton from Bakhtin offers an optimistic perspective in the development of a greater global consciousness. “Such a combining of languages and styles into a higher unity is unknown to traditional stylistics; it has no method for approaching the distinctive social dialogue among languages that is present in the novel” (Bakhtin 263). Bakhtin makes the argument for art in the novel as the organization of various social speech types within the whole, but our present cultural dynamic provides the necessary context in which to apply Bakhtin’s multi-layered dialogism. In greater cities of the U.S., world languages flourish and hybridize. Dialects such as “Spanglish” represent both cultural collision and inclusion as hybrid populations and social circles coalesce and expand. The growing amalgamation of English with other languages is a condition of our present society and our future in the United States. This process will continue and I am optimistic that academic discourse will eventually authenticate the existence of these hybrid dialects through publication. Academic authentication of different dialects and languages
combined with hybridity on the nuclear family level constitute our hope for Bakhtin’s “socio-ideological conceptual horizon”.

Bakhtin’s essays also bring up a very important aspect of tradition and literary hierarchy. Bakhtin thoroughly defends his notions of the novel as the only new and evolving genre in his essay “Epic and Novel: Toward a Methodology for the Study of the Novel”:

In certain eras—the Greek classical period, the Golden Age of Roman literature, the neoclassical period—all genres in ‘high’ literature (that is, the literature of ruling groups) harmoniously reinforce each other to a significant extent; the whole of literature conceived as a totality of genres, becomes an organic unity of the highest order. But it is the characteristic of the novel that it never enters into this whole, it does not participate in any harmony of the genres. (4)

This harmony of the genres within “high” literature brings with it a thorough system of ideologies that identifies and excludes “lower” forms of literature, and creates rules that define and divide each. These rules formed in the historical context of power that Bakhtin references are thoroughly embedded into our modern notions of scholarship. Bakhtin’s argument for the novel reveals how traditional genre divisions safeguard their structures when he discusses the nature of the Epic:
Thanks to this epic distance, which excludes any possibility of activity and change, the epic world achieves a radical degree of completedness not only in its content but in its meaning and its values as well. The epic world is constructed in the zone of an absolute distanced image, beyond the sphere of possible contact with the developing, incomplete and therefore re-thinking and reevaluating present. (17)

The inaccessibility of these texts amounts to a sense of academic unyielding. Their importance is inextricable from Western notions of “high literature”. As Bakhtin explains, we cannot converse semantically with or about them because they are closed off and distanced from contemporary discourse. “In the high genres all authority and privilege, all lofty significance and grandeur, abandon the zone of familiar contact for the distanced plane”(20). This distance etches the authority of traditional western language deep into our institutions. Bakhtin is to be commended for linking theory and praxis at this juncture. To think in terms of “re-thinking and reevaluating the present” is innovative considering that he wrote the work in 1934, and his work reinforces the importance of applying social and language theory to effect real social change. I borrow Bahktin’s argument here between the epic and the novel
in order to apply it towards contemporary study in all of literature and writing.

The proliferation of these old hierarchies is evident in universities across the U.S. The individual (student) subject is not granted veritable authorship (in a broad sense). An education in literature is valued considerably higher than an education in writing as composition classes represent the lower tier of university instruction in Literature/English departments across the nation. A graduate degree in literature is considered superior to one in composition. An argument for composition studies in the University that privileges student voice is one that also challenges traditional hierarchies. I propose that student voice and authorship can enrich a current moment in literature, not a stasis in literary understanding, and not as a noble attempt to achieve the goals of a valorized past, but as a constant evolution of unique experience and understanding. An artist who is also a scholar consistently mingles personal expression with learning. His/her art is cluttered with the accumulation of knowledge through study. After years of toiling in this manner, s/he breaks through to mastery in expression combined with diversity in social consciousness. S/he can express (in our case, through writing) honestly like a child, but with a functional medley of influence and skills to produce refined, masterful, and socially innovative and provocative work.
Genre in the Hybrid Present

To rigidly insist on specifics in definition and aesthetic of one genre, mode, or aim of a piece of literature is also to deny it the qualities of the others. There are traditional ideas surrounding a piece of critical work, such as an essay in literary theory, which deny it the emotion and semantic range of poetry. Similarly, conventional ideas of poetry would deny poetic language any critical legitimacy. Qualities that characterize poetry such as writing back against hegemonic structures, music, emotion, the attempt to stir an audience, actually do exist within other genres and types of writing. It is this condition of lingual hybridity that comprises the consciousness of our texts today. The narrative of N. Scott Momaday reflects this hybrid condition of writing in *House Made of Dawn*:

He knew even then that it was only the wind, but it was a stranger sound than any he had ever known. And at the same time he saw the hole in the rock where the wind dipped, struck, and rose. It was larger than a rabbit hole and partly concealed by the chokecherry which grew beside it. The moan of the wind grew loud, and it filled him with dread. For the rest of his life it would be for him the particular sound of anguish. (12)

The work could be defined as realist fiction, yet the use of language is characteristic of poetry. The personification of the wind, the metaphors
that cross mediums, and the handling of the image are distinctly poetic.

Also, Momaday is juxtaposing his protagonist Abel’s inability to communicate with his extraordinary environmental awareness and sensorial cognition. Momaday’s skillful and simultaneous use of these devices subverts the boundaries of poetry and prose, and the oral and the written.

Momaday brings up a very important problem and challenge with regards to the borders between white and Native American cultures. Literary representation from the perspective of the descendants of this white/native cultural hybridity does not fit neatly into any western literary genre. Momaday reveals the necessitation of expository writing to represent the rich and complex relationship between people and their natural environment. Simultaneously, the texture of that living relationship is poetic in structure and tone. One great difference between Native American and Western European cultures is the relationship between people and the earth. Native American cultures regard the earth as a living being, and the relationship of a person to the earth as a living and vital event. To assign hybrid cultural writing the characteristic of “personification” is, in a sense, a cultural imposition if the speaker regards the wind as alive and whispering with real consciousness. This living relationship between humanity and nature challenges western definitions of realism, metaphor, imagery, and personification.
Wisdom tends to peer out from the borders of things. That which is defined is already flushed out, known, and old. Nationalism, genres, political bodies, social units, and all categorizations of people set restraints to our growth. This applies to national/cultural dissent as well as ideas of aesthetic in literature. Once we agree upon the definition of perfection in prose, then we deny a portion of our potential and our future. As magnificent as are the writers and poets such as Dostoyevsky, Faulkner, Flaubert, and Whitman, Poe, and Dickinson, assessing future literary work based on aesthetic derived from their contributions is an unfortunate imposition. The models they provide fall away from us, not inaccessible like the epic, but imperfect once pulled away from their role in literary history. We cannot do what they have done for literature because they already did it. As present day scholars, we can absorb what we value from them, and then use that influence to help push writing into a benefited future. The hybrid is here as a beacon. In my optimistic view, we shall all eventually be a mixture of all races. We are simultaneously literary and linguistic, meticulously precise in intention and ambiguous in interpretation, and most of all, we have in our hybridity, the ability and will to perceive and become other. What can we learn from the one who intimately knows different cultures simultaneously? Humanity’s future unfolds from these considerations.
Traversing the relationships between the oral and the written is an act of cultural empathy. In the United States, we are seeing new literature legitimized through the publication of authors of Ethnopoetics. These oral literary developments coincide fruitfully with developments in Postmodernism. Postmodernism dismantles Modernism’s cohesive whole, making room for discontinuous prose and fictocriticism. In The Writing Experiment, Hazel Smith alludes to how postmodernism, almost unintentionally, creates space in cultural semantic empathy and rescinds epistemological and alethiological doctrine:

…how bending and blending genres may have desirable and provocative cultural consequences. It can be a way to explore, formally as well as thematically, nonconformist modes of behavior and alternate identities. When we subvert genre we splice what we regard as whole; mix things that don’t match; and turn hierarchies upside. This process may give us new ways to think about sexual or racial identity, power or disability. (192)

The experimentation that Hazel Smith emphasizes serves to penetrate social borders of all kinds. Her text also reinforces the important links between the abstract and experimental acts of genre blending with the practical effects of social engagement.
The Word: Music, The Individual, and the Transference of Meaning

The process of mythography bridges our discussion of genre and interpretation from the present back to the beginning of the development of writing conventions. Dennis Tedlock offers a succinct summation of human history to preface a conversation of oral versus written literature in *The Spoken Word and the Work of Interpretation*:

What we have done so far, if we have punctuated our visible text according to the rising and falling contours of oratical periods and shaped its lines and stanzas according to the stops and starts of dramatic timing, is to begin to free ourselves from the inertia, from the established trajectory, of the whole dictation era, an era that stretches (in the West) all the way back to the making of Homeric texts. (6)

The ancient western shift from verbal rhetoric to our era of written discourse paid a sacrifice in music. The inertia that Tedlock refers to originated from speech as “writing in performance”. The academic space that authors like Tedlock fight for, calls for critical inquiries of music and genre. The argument here is that writing extends past the written page. If we define writing as the imprint of thought upon a record that endures over time, the passing of oral discourse throughout generations of peoples should not be discounted. The mind becomes the medium through which the writing is preserved. Dominant western discourse is traditionally
music-less, while cultures with oral traditions have systems of oral writing that share integral relationships with music. The recounting of a story or a lesson cannot be transmitted without musical inflections, tones, rhythms, and accents.

Before the creation of recording equipment, the only ways to preserve the musical qualities of discourse were through oral traditions and musical notation. Tedlock tells us of the musical problems that arise when transferring meaning from the oral to the written, “But if the audible text is to be made available for close critical inspection and direct comparison with written literature, it must be brought to a standstill”(5). Tedlock implies that the music must stop in the transcription process. The only western conversations of “music in writing” are relegated to poetry and rhythm (typically the counting of syllables and accents). Poetry is one genre, one part of the vastness of all writing, and rhythm is but one-half of the process of music. Conversations of melody in literature are quite rare. How can our western world, which is in a sense musically trapped by dictation, understand the relationships of music and meaning making?

Centuries of written discourse passed down in the western tradition without musical notation, music-less-ness as unperformed discourse, sits on shelves in thousands of libraries. This conversation suggests the need for inter-disciplinary flexibility in scholarship. Scholarship within music can assist not only studies in Ethnopoetics, whose analysis of performance
are integral to its meaning, but within written discourse cultures that undervalue the role of subsumed music within the word.

The music within literature is an inexact yet dialectical component of the word. The act of writing is a musical endeavor, and the inner voice of the speaker in the act of writing is a fleeting composition. The mind speaks and listens to itself compose language with actual pitch, inflection, rhythm, timbre, tone, tempo, and accent. The system of musical notation can capture a great deal of these musical components, but even written music cannot truly capture the details of its real performance. The elements of music within the performed word carry nuance of meaning extending beyond the dictionary definition of the word or the commonly understood form of a phrase. The music in literature also affects emotion and levels of intensity. Two people reading the same sentence assume succinct differences of feeling outside the overt and given meaning of words. Calmness, haste, urgency, intensity, joy, patience, anxiety, sadness, honesty, appreciation, disdain, sarcasm, are all examples of feeling that, through performance, supplement the common definitions of our written words.

Performance is the actualization of the word through inner thought and annunciation, and music in literature affects meaning through this engagement. The music of literature reverts language to potentiality when the writing sits unread on the page. Kenneth Mendoza describes
the consequences of the written word in *Talking Books: Ethnopoetics, Translation, Text.* “The perception of an uttered word, thought of expression changes character, is diluted, and perhaps even perishes, once written documentation occurs. The event of the utterance, the intrinsic importance of the sounding of a ‘word,’ is lost when it is confined to the page”(3). The sounding of the word is a decision concerning all elements of its musical composition. The word, confined to the page, loses its life because its musicality reverts to potentiality. The word ceases to live until a listener and/or a speaker engages and performs it once again.

Traditionally, poetry is the only genre granted critical conversations of musicality. However, the musical obligation of all literature read aloud or to oneself, pierces genre distinctions in consideration of the living utterance. The effects of musical storage that dictation achieves involve a sense of hermeneutic trust.¹ The literate world must hope that the reader can capture the musical decisions of the writer. This problem may illuminate the repetitive or insistent nature of some long-winded works of literary theory. Literary theorists have too great of a command of vocabulary to be considered redundant, yet their creative insistence of conceptual repetition with diverse vocabulary

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¹ George Steiner, in chapter 5 of *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation,* discusses the trust on the part of the translator that understanding is possible in the act of translation.
reduces musical ambiguity and misinterpretation between writer and reader.

Participation serves as a great divide between oral and written expression:

Persons from literate cultures can only estimate the capacity and impact of sounded words that constitute a life’s act…For the oral man, oral expression brings activity and participation, this based on the belief that words possess power. Words for the oral man are not abstract objects associated with print, but things possessing significance as they utilize power of their sounding to direct life’s activities (Mendoza 20).

The power of the stored meaning in the written word cannot hope to achieve the affect of the oral experience in the manner in which Mendoza describes. Dictation then becomes an act of sadness as the writer hopes to communicate to a reader that will be, not only outside any present community to compel and stir, but a reader that is always receding from the writer’s frame of reference. Inscription carries a parallel sadness as well. Perhaps the writer never did hope to perform the word as a powerful communal event. Therefore, reading old literature becomes an act of risk taking and experimentation. The culture of its creation is increasingly elusive, and for this reason, perfect continuity of intention in
meaning is untenable. Similar to attempting to play music in which there is no audio recording, certain risks must be taken to bring music back to life. Music is not music unless it is being played. What exists on the page is merely a set of directions on what and how to play. Similarly, words and language are not such until they are performed and engaged, living only in the act of writing or reading. What exists on the page is not alive, nor is it dead. The writing has transposed to a state of dormancy, until we risk reading it, making enumerable decisions regarding performance and interpretation in the process.

Music lends itself to us as a beacon of genre hybridization. The manner in which the word lives in oral literature exceeds the capacity of our dictionaries to circumscribe it:

Any written thought or word expressed may be qualified and defined by dictionaries, encyclopedias, and texts – they are artifacts…Oral literature relies on a potential for creation quite different from that revealed in written texts. Words expressed during the occasion of oral performance, for oral people, have a living significance. They are expressions of a lived occasion and have immediate impact and, as such, words are a life’s act – an event. (Mendoza 20)

This aspect of language, of the living word, carrying power external of its definition in the moment of its performance, is what the dictation era
ignores. Western cultures of written discourse place too much emphasis on the durability of their words, and too much faith in temporal hermeneutic retrieval. The word and language in written discourse are also events reverted, living actions in waiting, ignored and undervalued rather than non-existent. This reasoning suggests a traditional willingness to separate oral and written discourse more so than a preeminent difference between the two. The written word begins as a thought; it does not spontaneously spring to life upon the page. The word begins in silent annunciation: with tone, music, feeling, power, connotation, and context. The word then, leans already toward the boundaries of its established meaning by the individual and the function of its usage.

Traditional genre distinctions, classification, and debates are beneficial to the study of writing. They help to realize and actualize reasons, purposes, and functions of writing. However, the aesthetics of genre theory tends to stray away from socio-political power relationships by remaining in the abstract. The relationships I want to illuminate surround the praxis of theory, as applied theory inevitably collides with issues of power and veiled language entitlement. Scientific studies of language require controlled conditions that extricate themselves from social implications. Social application should serve as the dialectic praxis of any literary theory to 1. Illuminate the theory by testing it outside of the vacuum of its creation for its own sake, and 2. To fulfill social-epistemic
obligations with a consciousness that a new and evolving literature effects change in actual human activity.

Our present moment speaks of incompleteness in identity for a vast number of people and writers (and therefore characters) who do not quite fit squarely into one notion of culture, a path to, or a place for, belonging. The condition carries an assortment of names: marginalization, exclusion, traitor, rebel, and hybrid. A great deal of this situation is the direct result of cultural/racial/national hybridity. This experience is often a tumultuous negotiation of oppositional authoritative value systems. The condition of living outside a definitive acceptable identity can bring forth a cold resilience, and contemporary authors’ characters in modern texts reinforce this tone of existence. Abel within N. Scott Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn*, Moon Orchid within Maxine Hong Kingston’s *Woman Warrior*, the minor character named Du in Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine* (along with Jasmine herself), Tayo within Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony*, Henry from Chang-Rae Lee’s *Native Speaker*, and Cleofilas in Sandra Cisneros’s *Woman Hollering Creek*, all share this similar lament as their stories of harsh acceptance of exclusion peer up at us from their pages. The empty page listens to the voices of the marginalized, offering a stable platform from which to write themselves into existence and validity. Now is not a moment to meet the expectations of “high literature”, but a moment to negotiate the catacombs of meaning. Present day writers can
deliver the essence of their existence and processes, and lay their
battlegrounds and their reconciliations within our reach.

It is this condition of our inevitable hybrid present and future, a
conflict (and hopefully some peaceful resonance as well) that carries
within each, a unique story underneath the author’s words. For me, the
high art of writing and reading obliges the desire to share and receive
each story as each writer gives away pieces of his/her experience with
both intention and ignorance. The story unfolds regardless of form, and
in its hour, negates genre. The reader attunes to the various frequencies of
its telling, relinquishing any ownership of “the word” and “the image”,
letting a new story reside towards each. What Leslie Marmon Silko in
Ceremony writes pertaining to one character can be applied to all of
language, “The reason for choosing each word had to be explained with a
story about why it must be said this certain way…the story behind each
word must be told so there could be no mistake in the meaning of what
had been said”(Silko 32-33). How are we to have room for anyone else’s
story behind each word if we so desperately cling to our own? We each
have our own stories behind each idea, each poetic device, and behind
years of combinations of our perceived and written discourse. For if any
new way for arriving at meaning can exist, we must free ourselves from
the context of cultural and formal literary expectation. We must
relinquish old ways of arriving at meaning to allow for new ways. In
short, we must unlearn to a certain extent, our accumulation of thought and experience, and relinquish sensorial image memories. This task is nearly impossible, but merely acknowledging its viability will bring flexibility and raise an eye towards newness and presence.

A task set before the present writer/scholar consists of a relinquishment of the rules within each genre after a thorough consideration and knowledge of each rule and function(s) of any one particular genre. A writer who merely writes is a writer but not a scholar. A writer who studies the world’s writing, past and present, is a scholar and can learn to write well within the structures of different styles and genres. After many years of practicing, such a writer can express in a higher art within and between genre and style. Globalization, cultural hybridity, and technology push modern day writers to develop in this direction.

A continued discussion of music and literature, seamless and interminable, stands resolute as a source of defamiliarization. Written and oral literature, as well as prose and poetry, breathe tactile representation that stands as a constant nuisance to interpretive disambiguation. The sonic texture of the combinations of words always pulls meaning away from the signs. The exercise of repetition can illuminate this phenomenon. If one repeats the same word enough times, eventually only music remains. To carry that realization out of that exercise defamiliarizes all
language as the meaning in the music of the repeated word interferes with
the meaning of the sign. The new relationships between words in this
kind of musically defamiliarized language express their power as
individual sensation. We are not readily aware of how to agree upon the
music of and between languages. Therefore, analysis of these dynamics
appears cursory because western literary studies are not overtly musical.
Besides rhythm in poetry, music in literature is traditionally ignored or
undervalued.

Language is a social phenomenon:

The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a
particular historical moment in a socially specific
environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of
living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological
consciousness around the given object of an utterance, it
cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue.

(Bakhtin 277)

Through social practice, we can all come to a functional consensus of basic
meaning (or else there would be total miscommunication and conflict).
There is a trust that the signifier successfully represents the object it
signifies, and as a prerequisite to communication, is perfect in the abstract.
However, each individual’s experience carries a semantic memory
association to each word and word combination. Every person has a
journey of understanding to each and every word and concept. Through memory and experience, the individual writes his/her own story behind and towards language. For example, one person might have a dominant memory of a baseball that triggers an association to the color red, a gust of cold breeze, the smell of leather, pain, nostalgia, loyalty, solace, the loss of a loved one, or success. Bakhtin’s notions of internal dialogism further complicate this baggage of association. Bakhtin touches on this notion in his argument for the novel:

Words and language began to have a different feel to them, objectively they ceased to be what they had once been…each given language—even if its linguistic composition (phonetics, vocabulary, morphology, etc.) were to remain absolutely unchanged— is, as it were, reborn, becoming qualitatively a different thing for the consciousness that creates in it. In this actively polyglot world, completely new relationships are established between language and its object (that is, the real world)— and this is fraught with enormous consequences for all the already completed genres that had been formed during eras of closed and deaf monoglossia. In contrast to other major genres, the novel emerged and

2. Bakhtin emphasizes the two different and subjective belief systems of the speaker and the listener over the relationship between word and object. The speaker attempts to construct meaning in an alien conceptual system.
internal polyglossia was at the peak of its activity; this is its native element. The novel could therefore assume leadership in the process of developing and renewing literature in its linguistic and stylistic dimension. (12)

Bakhtin’s argument is that the novel opens the door for modern literature because the other genres (in particular the Epic) are inaccessible and infinitely distanced from contemporary discourse and experience. Bakhtin suggests that the individual’s social experience creates uniqueness of meaning even within one’s common or national language. One path to a global consciousness is relinquishing the certainty of knowledge, unbraiding the hardened contexts of understanding, and making room for another’s endless library of association. With patience, as readers we can enter the mind of another through their text, and achieve agility in perspective. We cannot help but be who we are. However, if we know that as our inherent or primordial flaw, we can know where we begin to change our perception and shift our perspective at a deep psychic level.

Bakhtin also makes us aware of an internal dialogism within the word that engages the relinquishing of one’s own context to arrive at different meaning. Bakhtin’s term “active understanding” calls for the speaker to construct meaning in an alien’s semantic territory, to anticipate a reader’s response to the speaker’s original meaning, to achieve “an
orientation toward a specific conceptual horizon, toward the specific world of the listener” (282). The discussion of language becomes that of agreement rather than truth towards the object and representation:

Here it is not the object that serves as the arena for the encounter, but rather the subjective belief system of the listener…this orientation toward the listener and the related internal dialogism of the word may simply overshadow the object. (Bakhtin 283)

This act of anticipating the reader’s action is a *speaker’s empathy*, a strategy towards diversity in understanding, and admittance towards the fundamental importance of experience and subjectivity in the individual. Bakhtin implies a phenomenal ability in the writer to successfully infuse his/her work with different voices and alien “conceptual horizons”, not just between two voices, but many voices that characterize Bakhtin’s original argument of heteroglossia in the novel. In this sense, the speaker is the listener, who needs and anticipates reader response, and executes an “anticipation of the answering word”. The speaker listens, and the listener speaks.

M.M. Bakhtin offers the novel as the means to move forward in literature, and in a certain sense, it has. He defines the novel characterized by its multi-linguaged consciousness (dialogism), the ability to radically and temporally shift the literary image, and open a zone for maximal
contact with the present. We need to create an open environment for reexamining the ideas of what manifests genre to accurately give those who have been excluded from “high literature” recognition, reception, and space to exude their own meaning, with their own tools and constructions from which to morph, add, or subtract to academia and literature.

The context of translation illuminates the idea of providing a space for another’s story behind language. When one language lacks a word to grasp and represent an idea in another language, the former’s actor must listen and allow the feeling to resonate, linger, and become close. In *Black Elk Speaks* by John G. Neihardt, there must be a trust, that we (English speakers as I am now writing) have a better than fair chance at grasping Black Elk’s meaning. There is a trust that Neihardt is capable of rendering it, and that his original meaning itself is not ontologically autonomous, that exegeses is possible. We must trust that a shared existence as human is enough to give a foreign listener access to the conditions that underscore the experience of the teller. The reader must read, reread, and remain alert and flexible to elasticity of meaning within each translated word, hoping to capture the story Black Elk shares with us. In reading a translated work, the reader must not stop and bind at an apparent paradox, inversion, or incongruence in chronology or plot. We can become flexible by applying this manner of reading to works written in
our own primary language. We must never consider ourselves masters of language, even in our first language. We can make room for another’s story behind language by reading our own native language like a translator.

The process of “making room for another’s meaning” is also a dangerous one because of balance. We must take care not to lose ourselves in the process. A complete release of semantic authority can cause a founder of our own structure of understanding, which is inextricably linked to the social and the ideological. What Steiner intends for a consequence of translation, I borrow for assistance in empathy in meaning both within and between languages:

The a-prioristic movement of trust puts us off balance...We come home laden, thus again off-balance, having caused dis-equilibrium throughout the system by taking away from ‘the other’ and by adding, though possibly with ambiguous consequence, to our own. The system is now off-tilt. (Steiner 316)

The process of understanding here is a difficult one because making enough room in ourselves to hear the story behind “an other’s language” requires a massive release of one’s native understanding.

Many of the conversations in the structure, function, and nature of language aim for a concept of perfection. There is an implicit faith in an
attainable way to explain and qualify language, to define accurately all its
dimensions: the word, image, function, category, sound, relationships,
and a faith in organization and agreement to facilitate perfect
communication. Within this notion of perfection in language, there is a
presupposition that behind these theories of language, there is the
possibility of perfect communication and understanding. I believe that
this is either impossible or highly improbably. The individual’s journey to
language, his/her language acquisition experience has a vital impact on
the individual’s development that strengthens uniqueness in cognition.
Language does not comprise autonomous elements that would allow for
such precision, nor do any two individual’s journeys parallel each other in
a manner that would allow this kind of perfection.

By delivering an emphasis on a dialogue between autonomous
speech types, Bakhtin provides a theoretical space necessary for an ever-
existing other-way of approaching language. One of the most important
points within conversations of language concerns dialogism because
conversation is the cause and persisting reason for the existence of
language. The lone person has no need for words. Language evolves as a
response to a human need for vocal communication, and therefore should
be studied within the context of dialogue. Almost paradoxically, no two
people can grasp language exactly the same way. We then see a situation
of multiple individual languages within a named national or regional
language. But as a social argument, language should also be studied in its actualization, rather than purely in the abstract or isolated from application. This is what makes reader response theory interesting. These theories look at the literal conversations between speaker and listener as author and reader, and work through the specifics of their relationships. In this context, the preeminent quality of language is “agreement itself”, between speaker and listener, as opposed to actual understanding or truth within that agreement.

Words and phrases in every language carry far more potential for meaning than their respective dictionaries and instruction dictate. The first reason for this disparity in meaning lies with the difficulty of language to truly represent objects, concepts, and thought. The second is the difficulty within language to truly represent perspective. How close can one language come to successfully explaining the differences or similarities by which two people view the same world? The answer to this question is why we must give to others space for their own meaning as a path towards agility in our perspective and empathy towards theirs. In my own creative work, I present characters that dramatically deny each other space in meaning. I introduce characters from different walks of life, who in their unique ways, impose their versions of language and meaning upon one another. Through these characters, I seek to represent language as an imposition born of ignorance and/or arrogance. My intention is to
compel the reader to reconsider their definition and spectrum of empathy and expand its application to the nuances of speech and writing.

Let us transpose this perspective into concepts of genre. Clear definitions and adherence to genre types reinforces a specter of authority in language. The debates of “what truly constitutes a novel, a poem, a drama, a work of fiction, a memoir, etc.” deprive present day writers the legitimacy of experience. I highlight the experiential element within postmodernism’s defiance of genre boundaries. Linda Hutcheon quotes Theodore Ziolkowski’s “Toward a Post-Modern Aesthetics?” in A Poetics of Postmodernism about the state of genres in contemporary work:

“New arts are so closely related that we cannot hide complacently behind the arbitrary walls of self-contained disciplines: poetics inevitably gives way to general aesthetics, considerations of the novel move easily to the film, while the new poetry often has more in common with contemporary music and art than with the poetry of the past”. The years since have only verified and intensified this perception. The borders between literary genres have become fluid. (9)

To make this argument of genre is to give authority to contemporary voices, and to give authority to another’s experience. This experience can reflect the voices of culture, race, and gender, and all otherness that have
been excluded from the conventional literary canon. This experience can also reflect the voices of the excluded, the marginalized, the exiled, the liminal, the estranged, both within the realm of hybridity (in all its forms) and without. My protagonist is an extreme example of these qualifications. She is a racial hybrid that lacks acceptance into any and every imaginable social category. Being secluded from all human interaction during critical development years has rendered her nearly incapable of perceiving the world the way a “normally” socialized person would. What kind of internal conversations does a person without language carry on? What about concepts such as hope and security in such a mind? I present myself with a paradox. Language is inherently social and dialogic, and authoritative and experiential, and yet, I want to approach this from the outside. My protagonist challenges theories of language and communication by falling away from language. She later returns to verbal language and to us in innocent defiance, effortlessly, with unintended audacity.

The following section in this thesis project is a sample of a longer novel project that I am writing. This sample functions here as praxis for my thoughts concerning genre, multiculturalism, dialogism, and my argument towards the individual’s experiential journey towards language.
Why Does Feel As Love

The heavens were clear and close that night
Exiled from her land for denying her father’s chosen suitor
She ascends the mightiest of peaks to the light wings woven
On the precipice she closes her eyes to panning the silhouette of her kin’s embrace
latches each appendage from behind and relieves each anchoring restraint
In timing of momentum and breeze, hurling her commitment to flight
a cloudless tempest urges her closer to the star within her reach
melding of time abides, shines finally brightest in her
hand, he sears and blinds
binds to her grasp, igniting limb and wing.
The village cried beneath the deadly union
flesh, serene cinder, furious ash
Plumes of incendiary destinate
They saw her immolation adorned with tranquility
and learned how to rescind a god
No one knows exactly when Feal was sent to live in the city, but the entire neighborhood fluttered from the stir of gossip that weaved through eddies in the breeze. Tireless did the rumors brush about the walls and allies of the rundown shops in October that year. The pieces of the story vary from which side of the street you hear it told, but, they say that Ms. Wheachton, her ward, left one of the locks undone when she went to work that day. Whatever the circumstance, Feal managed to escape and slip out of the apartment, loose into the city streets. They say the story begins there, but, there is more to it than all of that. No one asks much about her parents, and the reasons they did what they did. Isn’t there always though, a reason, something hidden, that precedes?… a deeper level of explanation and circumstance that invites understanding and open palms. Forgiveness for a fleeting outline of a child within this bent and present shadow, whose trust lay, punctured through like a sun weathered wicker basket. A nostalgic memory of her beautiful curls flows weightless, frozen in a photo taken on a windy summer evening. Yet, condemnation yields not to understanding, and vengeance reins bind regret in buried memories, lashing and seething, present and surfaced.

Human.
January 14th, 2017

“Randall was only 8 at the time, but he says he was the first to see her. She was still on all fours then. He says she crawled down the steps and sniffed the handrails and some empty candy bar wrappers in front of the porch. Then, he says she ducked down and was real scared from all the different noises. He hid behind a bush while Feal rubbed her hands against the tan stucco walls that go down the stairs across the street. She sniffed and touched everything on the ground, looking up every few seconds for any dangers. She was licking at some chewed gum under the brick above the handrail when the first car drove by. Randall said it was a big van, and that Feal squealed and whimpered as it got nearer. When it drove in front of the house, she screeched and howled, clutching at the wall, trying to hide herself in the corner between the wall and the stairs. Then she panted, cried, and she was all sweaty, and she hissed and screeched at the other cars in the street. Cause she thought they were all alive, and she didn’t like that at all. She was also hurt from banging her elbow against the wall when the van went by. Then Randall said she tripped down the stairs and into the trashcans, and crawled around the sidewalk like a doggie, and whipped her head around looking for a safe place to hide. Then he said she took off super fast but still crawling towards the park once she saw the trees.
Ms. Wheachton had to call the police and explain what had happened, and no one saw or heard from Feal for four days. The police put out a neighborhood alert, and arrested Ms. Wheachton and interrogated her as to how and why a feral nine-year-old girl was crawling through the city hissing at neighborhood dogs and stealing food from trashcans. Then the police got the call they were waiting for when Mary Franklin dialed 911, panicking because a wild animal-girl killed her cat and ran off into the fields with it dangling from her mouth, the blood dripping off her chin and everything. Mary said the girl was filthy with torn up clothes and matted hair. She told the police that she was watering her patio plants when Feal jumped on her cat from the roof, and she bit the cat’s neck and just wouldn’t let go even through all the scratching. When she tried to save her cat, Feal hissed at her and showed her teeth like a wolf, so Mary wouldn’t try to steal the kill for her own. That’s all hearsay of course."

All four kids had completely stopped eating, and the younger ones didn’t quite get it. James was holding the same bite of pancake, nearly disintegrated from syrup irrigation.

“What’s hearsay Grandma?” asked Lili. She was the youngest.

They couldn’t eat now after finally hearing their grandma’s version of the most famous story of their neighborhood and the greatest myth told among all the kids at school. There were so many stories about the crazy
wild woman that now they didn’t know what to believe. What they did know, was that everyone was scared to go in certain areas of town, even though James said he saw her and said she was nice.

“What happened to Feal den? She does, she, still lives here? Did she have to go to jail?”

“Well Lili, no. You see, it wasn’t really her fault. Feal was only a few years older than you when this happened. It really wouldn’t be fair to send her to jail if she was that young, right?”

“No I don’t think so. But she should get in big trouble. Killing the cats is bad,” replied Lili. Her face barely cleared the tabletop. She had to reach up to get to her plate.

“But Grandma? Why was Feal wild like that? Why was she crazy?” asked Josh, who remained silent until now.

“Well, sweety, that’s complicated. The real reason, the first reason I think is, ummm. Well, she was like that because her parents never really wanted her.”

“But why didn’t they want her Grandma? That’s mean. Is it because he looks funny?”

“It’s ‘she’ sweety. She’s a girl. He is for boys.”

“ohhh k, she. Is it she looks funny Grandma?”
“That’s part of it mi amor. But don’t say it like that. She looks different, not funny, ok? Alright alright, that’s enough for today. Eat your food, it’s getting really cold now.”

“But Grandma, why was…”

“hushhush and eat. We’re gonna be late for school.”

“awww pffft.”

Jordan leaned on his elbow and picked at his eggs, but didn’t eat much. He couldn’t stop retelling himself all the different versions of this story.

May 4th 1976

Farah sighed and hesitated, looking over at her husband with her elbows on the counter and her feet tucked on the high bar of the stool. She knew he would be pissed if she tried to talk during Wimbledon, so she waited for a gap in the match.

“Honey, the school called again. Her teacher called again. She says that Feal keeps looking at the books when it’s time for lunch to be over. They said we might want to consider putting her in a special type of school. It’s like..”

“I don’t give a shit what they said. That little bastard is your child. Not mine! Keep her the hell out of sight and send her to any goddamn school that will take her… and the farther away the better.”
Henry jumped up and slammed the door to the hallway, slammed the door to the master bedroom, and blasted the tv in the room which doubled in volume once the commercials came on. Farah started to fall apart but gripped it off with a rigid tension from her ear and jaw down through her back, tightening the outside garden hose spigot that keeps leaking no matter how hard you crank it. She hopelessly tried to hold her hand still enough to read the comics. If only she would have known, she thought. She would have gotten the abortion. She would have gotten it over with and Henry would have never known.

*Light it, smoke it from ash to shingles, imperceptible head shakes, sweat, lower back, no cartilage just teeth on teeth, prescription synapse valve arthritic embrace - need.*

A few weeks before she met Henry, Farah was partying pretty hard every weekend with the rest of the girls from the bank. She had a right to. After eight years of being with her only high school boyfriend, she was excited to see what the world had to offer. They would all go dancing and drinking and sometimes hook up with one of the cute guys in the club. That was all until she met Henry of course; everything changed once law school started. He sat next to her in her 11:30am class, and she fell for him after the first thirty seconds of talking to him. He was funny with catlike yellow eyes that were always looking for something. She loved how motivated and well groomed he was. And a Christian, very important.
After five weeks of being together, Farah found out they were pregnant. A girl. She never felt any nausea or anything during those few weeks before she met Henry. She was sure it was his. Henry tore apart the hospital room when Feal was born: tables, curtains, equipment, the intercom. The cops, the interrogation, the scene, all of it a blur. He had to accept and explain to his parents how his fiancé just gave birth to a half white, one quarter Cuban, one quarter Salvadoran, baby girl.

Henry spent the next four days in jail. He wouldn’t call anyone to bail him out; he couldn’t bring himself to explain what had happened. Farah spent the next week in the hospital recovering from non-birth related wounds and replaying elliptical screams of “whore” and “filth” in dreams tarped with anguished drips of morphine. She had lacerations about her neck, shoulders, and face; all of which hurt infinitely less than her heart. When Henry finally got out, he left all his belongings in the apartment, everything behind, and moved back to Illinois with his parents.

When Farah and Feal were released from the hospital, she wrote a letter to him explaining what had happened. That she was with a man before she met him, that she swore to herself that Feal was his, and that her heart still belonged to him. She didn’t have any parents to go home to. When he finally knocked on the door with the letter dangling in his grasp, she grabbed his hand and led him out of the cold. He rubbed her
brow and kissed her forehead. He said that he forgave her, that he would do his best to raise the child as his own, and that they could be a family. But when he held the baby girl, the eyes that were not her mother’s, the nose that sat far too low on her face to be normal, how one eye was lower than the other, peering out from pigment that was far too dark, he couldn’t do it. Anger filled his heart, and his innocence spilled out of his dreams in hysteria; streams of bane through clenched marrow. Before finally getting his wish, he would hurt Feal with neglect and malnourishment. The sight of eyes that would never be his, a reminder of his pride’s damnation, set him from gaiety to malevolence. From hope to despair. From despair to callous hatred and deep red blame.

Three years.

The whirl of the blender slipped out of the house unmuffled through the small kitchen window, filtered only by the rustling trees in the yard, before mingling with the midmorning traffic. Carl readied himself to its familiar clamor the same way he has for the past seventeen years. Should he leave it behind soon? He found a good job. He had the degree. His mother was in no hurry to see him go. In fact, she buttressed her illusions of security on the patterns of his growth and success. All day she looked forward to hearing how his new job at the hospital was going, eagerly waiting to aid and direct him with any small problem he had that
day and check if he followed her advice from yesterday. Carl didn’t mind much. He didn’t really think of it as nagging, perhaps because he was accustomed to changing direction rather than getting stuck in a confrontation. He couldn’t quite see the extent to which he had been pushed to where he was now: his mother’s close monitoring of his Advanced Placement classes in high school, the nepotism that factored into his college acceptance, the way he filled out his job applications. He wasn’t concerned by how much his current state was the result of fulfilling what was expected of him. It was him that was driving to work in a car that he bought. It was him that showed up everyday on time and was getting big assignments. “There we go,” he said to himself in the mirror. Combing to perfect symmetry, he blushed thinking of how Sally teased him about his ties. Three months on the job, and he still wore one everyday, slick and pressed against a freshly shaved neck that could wait a week for its five o’clock shadow.

July 16th, 1978
Savage

Hope that never existed could never be lost. Would ring throughout and within, Territory. Does Feel inherit love as duty? Word fades into the shadows of the ‘wind rubs leaves’. Between snaps of attention for broken twigs, smelling for upwind, listening downwind alertness, she turns her ears enough to stop windsound. Pointing to all eaches of leaves in the trees reveals the translucent breeze under the new moon. Iris pitched grey. Attritious bodily stalemate with infection, and Feel runs again for pack hunts in the night. Bites negotiate fractal order in blood. Fangs sully their dominance to submission to acceptance of the seemingly heirless, so Feel climbs for the pack. Retrieval for gifting, and waits for her turn to feed. Crescent clears the rim as the pack bears down in semi circle formation, downwind, funneling their prey into the canyon. Feel shivers from once called frost, an outward trajectory, eyedash a glitch in social atrophy, dares not whimper from desire, of underleaf and pack warmth, until the carnage is secured; life again torn, from bone soothing pangs, relief for now then dream.

October 7th, 1:14pm

“Doctor, the feral is whining again. Shall I give the 30cc’s before I go home?”
“No no, she’s fine, she has to learn that she’s not going to get anything she wants from whimpering. Leave her be. Her stitches are nearly healed; she’ll be fine for tonight.”

“Ahh ok. So what do think we should do about her though? I mean..., about trying to socialize her and stuff, so that she can go back into society? Do you think she ever can?”

Doctor Manning glanced briefly at her over the top of his reading glasses before returning to his paperwork. “Well, I don’t really think she stands much of a chance out in the world. The best we can do is massive amounts of therapy, education, and sedation for her bad days. I mean, three years alone in the wild? It’s incredible that she’s even alive, and from my diagnosis, she’s suffering from acute stress disorder and she shows signs of Schizophrenia and Trichotillomania. And that’s if I even look at her as human. There’s not a drug in this world that can fix all of that. First, we have to teach her to speak and read and write, all the basics. I’m going to arrange extensive library study time for her with Carl. Tomorrow we’ll get him started with her before I leave for vacation.”

“Alright Doctor. Poor girl, I feel so bad for her. Even though she tried to bite me and everything. It’s just not her fault. Poor thing, I hope we can help her.”

“Well don’t hope too much. Most children in history that ever got lost in the wild ended up dying pretty quick. Raised by what do you
think? Wolves, mountain lions? Shit. Most of what was human in her died in that forest. It’s hard to accept, but what we have in our charge is a beast, and a violent one. Remember that, I’ll see you tomorrow. Oh yeah, and her parents don’t even want her back. We found them, and they denied that they ever had a daughter. Imagine her quality of life before the forest. Have a good night Sally.”

Sally remained on her spot as he shuffled his papers into his case and walked down the stairs while struggling to check his phone. As Doctor Manning was starting his car, Sally snuck back towards Feal’s room just to listen to her sounds. She leaned her head over just enough to peek into the room through the small door window. Feal was leaning deep over her chair with quick breaths, yet deep and heavy. It looked like she took in twice as much oxygen as a normal person. Sally could see the curvature of her spine high arched, as though she had never stood upright. The bridge of her curved vertebrae brushed cyclically against her hospital gown, rising and falling with rapid succession, her back heaving from the expansive contractions.

“How could her parents not even want to see her?” she thought.

“How could this happen to anyone?”

_The fluorescent lights ceased to be enough to open the tunnel of the threat, the encroaching gaze. Arcing green spots in her vision. Arches her head back s-curve against the downward spine. smells feel hears it at the door. Echoes crack_
through hall as smashes the inner layer of the double-walled glass, shatter inner pane, tearing against the prison barrier to rage against the sanitation and the wielder of the needle.

February 3rd, 2003

“Your wine, sir.”

“Thank you Gerald,” replied Richard.

“Your order will be ready soon, sir.” The waiter turned elegantly on his heel while sweeping a cloth over his level forearm and glided back to the back of the establishment. His head remained completely steady as he went, not a trace of bobbing at all, as though someone was wheeling him across the floor, his lower torso concealed behind the rows of Dracaenas adorning the tropical fish tanks.

“Oh Richard, the food here is positively exquisite. Best steaks in the city I’d venture.” Mary gleamed at him, pleased at the tone of her own voice.

“They’re ok. A lot of restaurants can seem good enough, compared to what’s around, but this is really a couple tiers below fine. I mean, after our convention, we went to Mugaritz in San Sebastian last month. Now that was proper dining. Mary, we’ll have to get you over there at the soonest occasion.”
“Oh yes Richard, that would be absolutely lovely!”

Gerald returned. “Your steak, medium rare sir. Would you care for care for another glass of wine, madam?”

Richard replied with his mouth full, “Yes,” ‘chewing’, “she’ll have another glass of the Sori Bricco, thank you Gerald.”

Neck strains contract visible engorged veins, tearing into the flesh, incising at the carcass as life gushes between teeth and gum. Grunts of satiation, ripping fibrous tendon and sinew from ossein skeletal remains; crimson splatter against bleached silk refinement.

“Mmmm, pretty good today though. What’s wrong Mary? Aren’t you going to eat?”

“Mmhm, yeah.”

“So then, what’s wrong?”

“I just…well, I don’t want to bother with it now, but, have you told her about us yet?”

Richard carelessly wiped half of his mouth and guzzled at his wine while still swallowing his bite. “Damnit Mary, I told you, we’re gonna get a divorce soon. Why should I tell her about you now? How would that really help anything?”

“It would help me. It would help me, for you to tell her you’re in love with me, so we can begin our lives together without worrying.”
“Look, I’m on the brink of one of the biggest projects of my life. Once I get this McKinley deal done, I’m set. I’ll be the obvious choice for vice-president. I can’t afford to deal with any distractions right now. We’ll get everything settled up next month. You want us to have what is rightfully ours right? The houses and the cars and the pools and the trips? Once I make VP we’ll have it all, ok?”

Mary nodded against the throbbing in her lower back.

“Ok, then, its settled, now go on, eat eat.”
“Hello Feal. How are we doing today?”

“Too-dayy.”

“Yes, how are we doing today? How do you feel today?”


“Oh, oops, Ok. Umm, Are you doing ok today? You still look a bit tense. Did you read the books I left out for you? Or listen to the music? I left you some Vivaldi in the player.”

Her eyes never leave his, except for a quick glance at the various objects in the room to which he points. Words hover and sit; do not reveal. His pursed lips reveal, intonation reveals, eyes reveal. She searches, not for fear anymore, not after a week. His message stirs about the pockets of air between his chair and her carpet space. Syllables mingle with the 60-cycle hum of the fluorescent bulbs, constant intermittent freedom in Doppler reception; locomotion and traffic cascade through the only five inch window allotted to reading room B on the second floor.

“Why Feel?” asks Feal.

“Why what?” Carl responds. “Do you mean how? Are you asking me how I am doing? Well, partially I am doing great, thank you. I shot two under par today, haha. I’d say I’m doing pretty damn good haha
yeah.” Participles slip the particles between the floorboards. “It’s not polite to stare Feal.”

“Feel, toooo, why?”

“Jesus, this is gonna be a rough week. Well, Feal, this pretty much sucks. I should be researching my projects, but the doctor has me here with you to teach you shit you’re probably never gonna learn, or maybe in ten years. That’s what’s up. It’s like talking to my goddamn dog.”

“sucksup.”

“Yep, it sucks.” Inherited righteousness between utterance. Musicless-ness. The silence reveals to inference as Carl nestles his confidence between sheets of diagnosis reports. He doesn’t worry about the doctor’s stance in his mind. Subtle smug with a clipboard, to look down at Feal from equal elevation. He thinks of mom’s approval glistening through the mirrored black of his polished shoe. He thinks then of his father standing behind her, stern and cold. The mirrored black of his father’s perfectly combed hair, set above a stern countenance that judged him between every pass through the hallway to and from the kitchen. Carl almost forgets he is sitting in that room with Feal as that same memory crept up once again,

He’s pathetic like his grandfather, weak. Look how he searches for a place always to rest and hide. A good ass whipping is what he needs. The world is going to shit on him no matter how hard he runs from it. Might as well face up to
it now. I was getting my face kicked in at his age and what did I do?, and did I run? Hell no I didn’t. You coddle him far too much Elizabeth, I have to make up for your lack of discipline, raising my only son to act like a woman.

“He loved you Carl, he just showed it differently,” his mother would say. Carl sets back into the present and glances up towards Feal, he could feel secure with his path now. Respected? Probably not as much as he wanted, but he has the job, he has his plan and his investments. Carl crosses his leg, very doctor-like, a prescript necessitation for necessary prescriptions.

“Godem dugg ooooo dugg”

“Yep, bye bye Feal, see you tomorrow.”

Carl locks her in again. He decides that he doesn’t like her, but not yet outright to himself. She is offensive or arrogant, but he can’t quite say how. “Was it how she stared? Was it her lack of fear? No, that wasn’t it. Manners? No, that part wasn’t her fault yet”. He trots down the side door and jumps in his car, smiles at his hallowed clubs in the rearview mirror, and assures himself that his discomfort will subside. He is free and clear now, and he only has to work with her for another two weeks. There is no chance that she will effortlessly challenge him for years to come. He calms himself with a little bit of Bach in the background. He gleams with thoughts of his own maturity as the first drops weigh down the passing muffled leaves. His old high school buddies are still listening
to stoner rock and hip-hop. With the windows closed and the air set to recirculate, he can assure mother that his success and status are inevitable. Wild eyes would not wait for him in the night, would not carve his dreams hollow, and bear him patched pale green to binding solitary interrogations.

“Goddamnit, it was sunny at the hospital.”

February 1st, 2017

From an attraction to the specifics, of the particular gust of wind, an angle of the shadow perhaps, that would intermittently cover his legs if he chose it, to the rescinding of his decision of destination. Yes, he just got out of school where he had a rough day when a top-heavy bully left him a schedule of possible consequences if he found out that Jordan had stolen his locker lock.

“I’m gonna fuck you up if I find out it was you, ok?”

“Ok pues.” Jordan thought why he said it. What was he supposed to say? Was it better to say nothing? Or, stand up for himself and get pummeled in the empty locker room? Shame and anxious relief as the bell rang in the main tower.

The sparrows celebrated for him his ability to push these imminent dangers to the periphery of 20 minutes on either side of the situation. As he walked down the sidewalk, his calves gently disturbed the needle grass
overgrowth that bridged the field and the row of tires aligning the street. He was a sensitive soul; he actually listened to the earth’s cues. He halted his pivoting right heel, which stopped the descending melody of the snapping pebbles bouncing off the passing traffic. However, he wouldn’t tell anyone how to imagine hearing the sight of the sensation.

Not when he decided that the first path was the right choice, nor when he thought of how he could stay calm if she called. Talking to Railey in class was one thing, but after school or on the phone, there was no environmental familiarity to break the reforming ice. Not when he thought he saw something in the trees when he rounded to corner to the middle school he would be going to next year. Always it began about half way home. His head felt like a cup filling up with hot dark water from the ears. He tried to desperately make it home before it was too late, but another half mile was too far. He had to find a hidden safe place quick. Angry that he could never make it, this shrub would have to do.

Crunching leaves fell away in the distance; roots softened under his temple. The sacred floods the scared and dark waters cinched. Jordan opened his eyes to familiar grass and calm atop his flannel sweatshirt folded like a pillow, again.

*Maternal dissolution in cycles of the Two greatness. Finally, umbilical yearning departs its primary form. Its ok, you can laugh.* Feal lets it go.

hulking jerk heaving mid section; she relaxes her ears which eases the
pressure in her jaw and where her neck and back muscles interlace. A blooming; laughs emanate beyond survival. Summer months bring cool nights bring haste to calm. Feal rushes from the lake to return to a new friend who delights in her return. Feal draws from the lake. She doesn’t feel the pain of her lesion this evening.

_Awake alive struggle._

11:30am

Jordan looked up at the clock, 17 more minutes. They had to go three classes before they got lunch and then two more before school was out. This was science class, right before lunch. They were working in groups about mitochondria or something, and Jordan suddenly realized who was in his group. “Railey, hey Railey, hey, your dad said he saw Feal before, right?”

“Well, yeah, of course, everyone knows that, silly,” she replied.

“What did he see about her then?”

“I’ve already told you. She was wild. She ran like she was crawling, and she killed stuff until they caught her.”

“But that was a long time ago right? So she has to be really old now right?”
“Yeah, I guess so. Billy’s mom said she’s like 47 now or something. But no one has seen her for a long time too. I don’t think she’s here anymore. She’s probably died, I mean, dead, or moved away.”

“Yeah hmmm,” he hesitated. “Can you keep a secret?”

“Of course dummy. Why? What do you know?”

“Ok, shhhh. I think, well I think I saw her the other day.”

“You did?! Where?”

“Shhhh! Yeah, I think I saw her next to the trees in the old park next the back way to my house. But she looked young, I mean, not like a kid, she was big, but, she looked weird, like she always walks on tippy toes or something.”

“Wait, like what? It could’ve been anyone. How do you…”

“Jordan, Railey! Do you two want to spend your lunch in here with me, or do you want to start checking under your desks for that missing workbook?”

They cut off the conversation for their own self-preservation, but kept whispering when Mrs. Plunkett turned back around. “Tell me after class”, Railey whispered. He mouthed a silent “ok” before they could get in more trouble. He glanced back to his left to see the clock again, but got distracted by Matt behind him poking him in the back.

“Haha, talker,” Matt taunted.
March 7th, 2017

Mary awoke with the same dream again. The wrinkles in her eyes didn’t matter now. Her matted hair didn’t even look like hers anymore. She went back to the table and relit her half lit cigarette. She let her eyes unfocus and look through the burned spot on the table where the cigarette had been, at something maybe four feet underground she guessed. Was there anything else she should write in this letter to Daisy? It was the only letter worth writing as she started to write to others until she realized she didn’t have anything to really tell them. She set the pen down and walked again into the kitchen, looked at the products under the sink, and then opened the fridge for no good reason beyond habit. She thought about everyone. Daisy was probably the only one who thought much about her. Dan called maybe once a year out of obligation, and they would have a curt, surface level conversation. Yeah, Daisy was really the only one.

“Mom, you should move down here with us. You could be closer with the kids. We could make your room out of the entertainment room,” Daisy would plead. Mary didn’t know why exactly she never did go to Miami.

12:14pm

Railey stepped in line with Jordan to buy some overpriced pizza that tasted like the box it came in. “Ok, so what happened?” she asked.
“Oh, nothing much. I was just walking home, and I got a funny feeling like I was being followed. Then I looked up at the trees in the old park, and there was a woman there, but she disappeared behind the trees.”

“What do you mean disappeared? You mean she jumped behind the trees?”

“No not really, she stepped behind the trees, but super fast. It was scary but she didn’t scare me.”

“Wait, what? That doesn’t make any sense.”

“Yep it’s weird. It’s like she wanted me to see her. I think she smiled at the same time. She moved super fast but it’s like she wasn’t in a hurry, you know? I mean, who else could it have been?”

“Wow, this is exciting! Is there anything else?” she asked. Jordan bit his lip and drummed on his thighs, but didn’t respond.

“What? tell me! tellmetellmetellme,” Railey pleaded. It was their turn to order.

“Hi Ms. Peach, can we get two pieces, thank you” asked Railey without the inflection of a question. They sat down together on the two-foot concrete wall that ran adjacent to the back of the drama theatre in the shade and away from the main lunch tables. Everyone else was avoiding the burning hot tables at the moment as well.

“Ok, ok, but, its embarrassing.”
“It’s ok, I won’t tell anyone. What happened?”

“Well, you know how sometimes I need to sit down because I see dark ’n I get all dizzy?”

“Yes, of course, its because you don’t eat anything all day silly.”

“No no, I don’t think so. Anyway, that happened on the way home too. But this time, I woke up in my backyard. But I don’t know how I got there. I don’t remember at all. Don’t tell anyone! I hate it.”

“So how did you get home then?”

“I think she carried me, but I’m not sure. I woke up sleeping on my jacket, but it was folded funny, like different than I can do it.” They sat together in silence as the bustling of the early students coalesced into a subtle roar of a mellow crowd. The kids all made moo-ing and bahh-ing sounds as they waited in the lines that tapered from four to two to receive their nachos and pizza. Jordan rubbed the heel of one shoe against the frayed end of shoelace protruding from a shattering aglet. They let the conversation end there. However, Jordan could tell that she never stopped thinking about it; she was always like that with every problem. He felt slightly better about it now that she was in on the whole thing.

The configuration of Mary’s neighborhood made the house difficult to access from the main streets. You had to drive up a long winding road leading from the valley up into the hills, past the elementary school at the
only major 4 way stop, stay right at the tight v-split in the road, then get past the guard and the gate separating the hills from the long canyon floor. The gate was an outright economic divide. Everything on the inside was extraordinarily luxurious; everything on the outside was working class at best. A half-mile away, houses lay, patched with makeshift roofing and old cars that hadn’t run in years cluttering dusty dirt driveways. Life inside the gate was like a residential version of Seattle; even the alleys were scrubbed clean. The grass was manicured twice a week; the gates to the tennis courts were switching from electronic cards to forefinger print scanning systems, and the only non-white resident played professional football for the Carolina Panthers.

The driveway leading up to Mary’s house was treacherous. It was so steep and sharp in parts that it was nearly impossible to back down, and you could hear the tires slip and screech on its corners. Manual transmissions were the worst. You had to get momentum, and even then, 2nd gear would lug out on the corners, and 1st gear wouldn’t let you get up enough speed to make it to the top. And if you stopped half way to the top, forget it. Mary lost count of how many times they had to call the towing place. “Jesus Christ lady, again? Alright, we got a guy in the area. It’ll be about 45 minutes.” The house looked down on the canyon floor where the main road traversed its curvature. There was one neighbor directly below, and another about a hundred yards to the west. Mary
could hear the boys of that house constantly blasting some war video
game, echoing rapid-fire virtual annihilation miles across the open valley.
Once, she could still hear it at least a mile away when she rolled down her
window at the traffic light where the railroad tracks intersected the main
road.

Feal searches the corners of the reading room. Obfuscate mine honor
quest and for blend hide frightened opaque in nights. Nights always nights
elevates nights enervates moons for shrouding. Inside out pushes up for making
steps and chains for slipping. Living and for chains climb and steady. Inert
innovate for brushing and pet. Feel scared for falling. /()))))))))))’’, feint
“,”{)))))))))))) #???? J;,‘’?!,,, \/\\///\\////*(,(,.?..........................(fall
go)

Mary paced back again from the garage to the kitchen, from the
kitchen to the empty room with the mirrors that used to be Richard’s
office. She left her cigarette burning on the counter, forgot it was there,
then lit another en route back to the garage. Restless with this “rubbish”
as she called it, but now even more agitated finding herself again with the
mirrors in the study.

Feal could see the tips of trees through the small reading room
window. Where roles thobbin moon looking into the then lig move moon groove
love call numbers infiltrate call indepths. Incredibility index rabbit revolution far
comets are the resolve tonality in the comets.
How long had it been since Mary had smiled at herself in the mirror? Again she paced a bit faster than before. When was the last time she talked to Dan? She remembered talking to him a few Christmases ago, but there was a time more recent, right? The feel of him at eighteen months old, tucked into the crease of her bend elbow with endlessly searching light blue eyes flashed briefly through her mind. She ashed the cigarette on the kitchen tile floor as she looked out across the street at the massive trees across the street. That hawk nest was still there, precarious yet durable way up there.

Feal licked the blood from the tips of her forefinger. The room was impenetrable. No drive able for straight delineators cres cres cres cres crescent accent accident for fresh inv involve ininin insolent pushing against left left and bend.

Mary’s house was up on the hill far above the street, and still she had to look up to glimpse the tops where the nest lay. Pulling the extinguished butt of the cigarette to her tobacco resin-stained lips she looked at the hawk circling her nest and thought of that wild animal girl that had killed her cat all those years ago. She pressed a fake smirk at the odds of it. “How the hell did that bullshit even happen anyways? Jesus Christ.” She didn’t really consider much about how she never forgave the girl.

***
Dear Daisy,

I want you to know that I am not crazy. I know that with all of me and I want you to know that I always love you. Thank you for always being so kindhearted to me even when I was mean during those rough years. I will always have you and your brother in my heart, and you two are not part of why I’m doing this.

As you read this, I just want you to call the police and let them deal with all of it. **Above all, don’t go in the garage.** I set it up so that you should be the first one here. I have some money set up for you in a policy and also in an account. These other papers should show you how to get to it. I know what I am doing. I don’t want to be here anymore. I gave myself completely to the wrong men, and since five years ago something in me changed, like a broken switch. I can’t get my old self back and hope has completely gone. I know you said I could live with you, and believe me I am so grateful you would try to help make me better, but there is no better, not for me. I don’t want to dull the light of my wonderful grandchildren by being there. That’s why I’ve been away, it’s not you. I’ve thought about the best way to go I can’t do this dramatically or violently, it’s just not in me. Still though, I am going through with this. I have thought about options, for a long time. Daisy, please don’t go in the garage. I’m not there anymore.
Love always,

Mom

April 4th, 1979

/flashlight
/jacket
/blankie
/Snuggles
/toothbrush
/crayons
/colorbook
/knife
need the knife but why? ooo… who said it was important for survival so
yes bring. …only thing left is money…its warm at night and so good…once they
are asleep.

She left the pack by the hole in the fence so she wouldn’t have to
sneak out without it. She looked out outside but she couldn’t see the pack
even with the bright moon. She left her shoes outside so her socks could
slide quietly through the house for this last part. Her head felt so hot, and
her body burst with energy in the dark and quiet of the kitchen. They
slept with the tv on so that wouldn’t be a problem. The only real problem
was getting the car keys because he left his wallet in the car. They always
hung the keys on the inside of their room so she would have to get in
there; they had to be asleep for that part.

She sat in the hallway around the corner from the room so she
could hear if they were moving around, but also so she could run away if
they came out. They were quiet, but then they would talk a little bit, and
then she could hear some snoring. She crawled closer, but then recoiled
when he coughed and shifted in his sleep. She waited quietly for a few
minutes before trying it again. Then she slowly opened the bedroom door
just enough to peer through the crack. They were both turned away from
her. She reached up to the key hook, glancing nervously back and forth
from the bed to the key. Once she closed the door again, the rest was easy.
Charged with shaking fear, and happiness, the sweat surged down her back and she set to work with a nervous quickness.

She slipped out the garage side door so that the neighbor’s dog wouldn’t hear, and tiptoed out to the truck and slowly unlocked the passenger door. She took the cash and the credit card, and his license. She stood silently in the half-moon, victorious, but she paused and looked around at the bushes, at the trashcans. After standing and wondering for a minute or two, she smiled and walked into the street, bent down next to the curb, and threw the car keys and his license through the cracks of the storm drain. She tiptoed again back around the side of the house, across the pale soft grass, and found her bag in the far bushes of the backyard. She opened the pack and slipped on her shoes before crawling through the hole in the decaying old wood fence. She didn’t worry about the crunching of the rocks under her feet now, next to the railroad tracks. Looking back up at their window, Feal could see the intermittent flashes of the TV reflecting on the window. Their light was still off.
Reflections

My own fiction highlights problems of language that stem from inherent problems in empathy and communication. Historically, humanity’s animalistic pack mentality predetermines notions of culture and acceptance. A person is always simultaneously inside, outside, or between many circles of culture. The degrees of acceptance always hinge upon physicality, behavior, and language and communication. In this perspective, language is always in the service of inclusion and exclusion. One’s use of language collimates with the direction of one of those two social categories. The single most important element of human progression is our capacity for empathy. It is only empathy and sympathy that has, and will save us from the violence and devastation of warfare. My own fiction is an appeal to empathy in language. The right to one’s own arrival at language is what Feal deserves and is denied. That is one of the reasons why I try to capture the realistic pauses and rhythms of human speech in the dialogue. My fiction is an attempt at representation of multi-voiced human expression.

I present the reader with a fleeting protagonist. In the story, she is unintentionally influential and elusive. She reveals a different truth in everyone. She is a perfect other, always near our conversation, like birth, death and transformation. The story is purposefully unsettling, as it will
not resolve as a perfect whole. I try to write with elements of both cohesion and discontinuity. Feal also represents language’s limits of representing human sensation. Feal’s lack of language leaves her with no filter between her mind and sensation. I task my self with representing her ever-changing condition with defamiliarized language.

One of the great problems of writing is to accurately assume voices in society that are not one’s own. To present accurate dynamics in my characters and provide acceptable heteroglossia, I have to assume the voice of that which I am not. The narrative voice is dynamic, at times omniscient, at times limited, and sometimes a combination of both. Having a narrator that knows just a bit more than the character illuminates the scene but also retains or withholds varying degrees of ambiguity and opens opportunities for reader interpretation. The degree of narrative positioning can be controlled through voicing. Language “above” that of the character suggests omniscience, while language similar to the character suggests closeness and limitation in narrative point of view. Often times, I situate the narrator between the character and the reader. Anticipating the reader to be someone possessing a relatively wide English vocabulary, the narrator blends that anticipated skill with the situations and language of the present character. I attempt to create different narrative voices to hint to the reader to consider the
narrator as a dynamic presence, at times sympathetic to the character, and at times antagonistic.

The mind of a person kept from language cannot be represented with language. Feal is my challenge to dialogism in the novel. This narrator cannot situate himself within the system of another’s alien language with any criteria for success. The speaker to listener conversation in this case is narrator to character. Feal provides a severing presence in the narrator’s need for dialogic response. This leaves the narrator incomplete and yearning in a manner that denies the piece dialogic and (given aforementioned musical considerations in writing) melodic resolution.
Works Cited


