METAPHYSICAL

AN INDEX OF ALPHABET

Forrest Crayford
Rachel Brian
Rachael Germany
Jayden Kimbro
Aditi Shekhar

Dr. Sturm
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Dutch version of *alphabet*

INTRODUCTION

Does anything truly exist? This was the question we had the pleasure of asking ourselves while searching for the metaphysical. Metaphysics is a division of philosophy that focuses on the origins of things, and our understanding of the balance between what is real and what isn't. When taken hand in hand with *alphabet*, a book-length poem by Inger Christensen that raises a glass to both the beauty in the world and the destruction of it through human conflict, the metaphysical becomes the reality of the poem.

While forming an index of the metaphysical phrases found in *alphabet*, we had to first question everything. What exists? What *can* we question? We immediately considered terms that involved abstract concepts of existence, myth, religion, and perception. This prompted conversations of what is color, and how can we know how others see "blue". At what point do we associate a word with myths instead of religion?

The more comfortable we got with the concept of the metaphysical, the more we began to question everything, and the struggle became not finding words to include but limiting what we included. To reference *alphabet*, "anyone at all is a hostage / somewhere in the jungle of consciousness." Anything that caused us to pause, caused a tilt of the head, was considered. Poison is real, but what about poisonous intentions? You can poison a body, but what is poisoning a mind? Every word can be questioned and debated by the literal definition and Christensen's intent.

This also opened up the question of the literary. If the metaphysical extends to what we question and what isn't truly real, then what about figurative language? Taking into account that this is a poem, figurative language roams frequently across the page. Deliberation led to settling for the basic figurative language of similes and metaphors.

In the end, we needed to limit to the clearly metaphysical, if such a thing exists, and composed the index of words that could not be clearly defined through a definite shared experience. Ironically enough, we could finally understand the poem once we searched for what we couldn't understand.
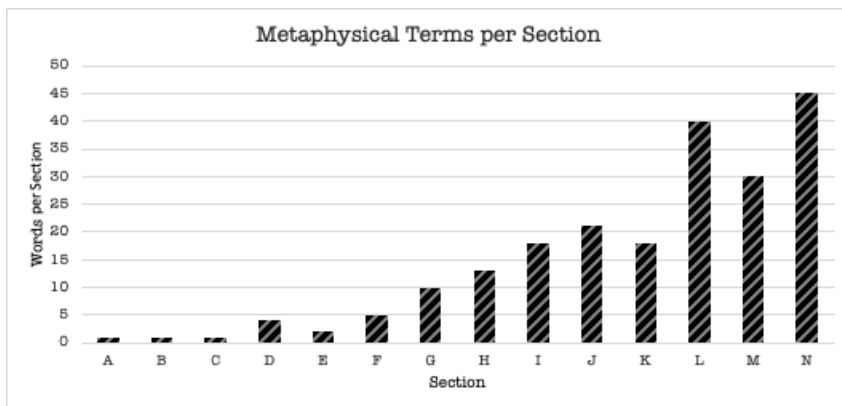
This graph illustrates the exponential growth of the metaphysical terms throughout Inger Christensen's *alphabet.*

READING REFLECTION

The first read through was for understanding the context and narrative. The second reading differed in that context and narrative didn't seem to matter. This new and improved read through separated us from the tone of the poem. We couldn't focus on tone when we were trying to focus on figuring out what the metaphysical is. Instead of struggling to understand how nature and chemicals relate together, we needed to understand how they could exist and not exist. It was as if we had drifted away, above the poem, and were staring at it with a bird's eye view, trying to see a bigger picture when we couldn't understand what we were looking at. The farther back we got, the blurry it seemed until suddenly everything shifted into place. All of sudden we had pulled back so far that we could everything. Every word had two meanings, literal and literary. Everything could be questioned. Just as the poem evolved from simple phrases to complex memories, our understanding shifted from seeing the literal wasteland of nuclear influence to watching the underlining message develop. When we realized that we could include similes and metaphors as well, another layer opened up. As the poem progresses, the frequency of figurative language increases. This mirrors how as the poem progresses, the complexity of the topic and the greater questioning we were able to pull increases. While initially we were overwhelmed, after obtaining the larger picture, then refocusing ourselves to see the individual once again, we were able to appreciate the uncertainty of alphabet.

Polish version of *alphabet*

Photo Courtesy of danishculture.com

Metaphysical: An Index of *alphabet*

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Image of Hades
Courtesy of Wikipedia

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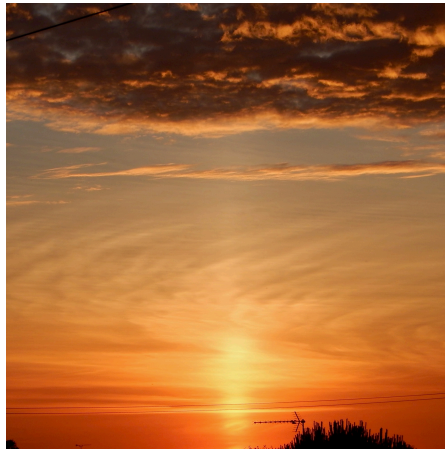
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Image of Wonder
Courtesy of Earth-Sky

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