Modern and Contemporary Poetry and Poetics

LANGUAGE AND THE RENEWAL OF SOCIETY IN WALT WHITMAN, LAURA (RIDING) JACKSON, AND CHARLES OLSON

The American Cratylus

Carla Billitteri

Language and the Renewal of Society in Walt Whitman, Laura (Riding) Jackson, and Charles Olson

Modern and Contemporary Poetry and Poetics

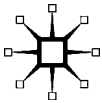
Modern and Contemporary Poetry and Poetics promotes and pursues topics in the burgeoning field of twentieth- and twenty-first-century poetics. Critical and scholarly work on poetry and poetics of interest to the series includes social location in its relationships to subjectivity, to the construction of authorship, to oeuvres, and to careers; poetic reception and dissemination (groups, movements, formations, institutions); the intersection of poetry and theory; questions about language, poetic authority, and the goals of writing; claims in poetics, impacts of social life, and the dynamics of the poetic career as these are staged and debated by poets and inside poems. Topics that are bibliographic, pedagogic, that concern the social field of poetry, and reflect on the history of poetry studies are valued as well. This series focuses both on individual poets and texts and on larger movements, poetic institutions, and questions about poetic authority, social identifications, and aesthetics.

Language and the Renewal of Society in Walt Whitman, Laura (Riding) Jackson, and Charles Olson

The American Cratylus

Carla Billitteri

palgrave
macmillan



LANGUAGE AND THE RENEWAL OF SOCIETY IN WALT WHITMAN, LAURA (RIDING) JACKSON, AND CHARLES OLSON
Copyright © Carla Billitteri, 2009.

All rights reserved.

First published in 2009 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN®
in the United States—a division of St. Martin's Press LLC,
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Where this book is distributed in the UK, Europe and the rest of the world, this is by Palgrave Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries.

ISBN-13: 978–0–230–60836–8
ISBN-10: 0–230–60836–1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Billitteri, Carla.
Language and the renewal of society in Walt Whitman, Laura (Riding) Jackson, and Charles Olson : the American cratylus / by Carla Billitteri.
p. cm.—(Modern and contemporary poetry and poetics)
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 0–230–60836–1
1. American poetry—History and criticism.
2. Poetry—Social aspects—United States. 3. Sociolinguistics—United States. 4. Poetics. 5. Whitman, Walt, 1819-1892—Criticism and interpretation. 6. Jackson, Laura (Riding), 1901-1991—Criticism and interpretation. 7. Olson, Charles, 1910-1970—Criticism and interpretation. I. Title.

PS310.S7B55 2009
811.009'3552—dc22 2008036705

A catalogue record of the book is available from the British Library.

Design by Newgen Imaging Systems (P) Ltd., Chennai, India.

First edition: April 2009

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in the United States of America.

For Robert Creeley, *in memoriam*

There are words voluptuous
as the flesh
in its moisture,
its warmth.

Tangible, they tell
the reassurances,
the comforts,
of being human.

Not to speak them
makes abstract
all desire
and its death at last.

Robert Creeley, "Love"

This page intentionally left blank

Contents

This page intentionally left blank

Figures

This page intentionally left blank

Series Editor's Foreword

In this original, elegant, synoptic study of Whitman, Olson, and (Riding) Jackson, Carla Billitteri has made a critical debut of high importance. This is a work on the dream of a "Cratylic" language—a language joining the exact nature of words with things to broker a transformation of human community. The Cratylic position illuminated by Billitteri allows her to explore linguistic priorities, theories of representation, a sense of political opposition, and the hope for social renewal. Making dazzling use of Plato's *Cratylus*, Billitteri simultaneously analyzes the specific projects, failures, conflicting arguments, and perspectives of three disparate poets while opening a discussion of the social and ethical goals of American poetry.

Rachel Blau DuPlessis,
Professor of English, Temple University;
Author of *Blue Studios: Poetry and Its Cultural Work* (2006)
and *Genders, Races, and Religious Cultures in Modern American Poetry, 1908–1934* (2001)

This page intentionally left blank

Preface

This book takes up the seemingly ineradicable desire for a perfect language of words univocal in meaning, known in Western thought as Cratylism, and its impact on the projects of three of the most intellectually ambitious of American poets, Walt Whitman, Laura (Riding) Jackson,[1] and Charles Olson. I say "ineradicable" because this desire persists in the face of unanswerable critiques (of which Plato's *Cratylus* dialogue is only the first) and in the face of extensive empirical evidence that language is *im*perfect and *poly*vocal in meaning. All three of the poets I discuss were aware of those critiques, and of the empirical evidence amassed against their dream of a perfect language, but clung to Cratylism nonetheless for its utopian potential. That potential is the key element in what I call the American Cratylus, a desire for a perfect society achieved through the perfection of language.

Chapter 1, "The True Forms of Things: Cratylism and American Poetry," provides an introduction to the topic. There I discuss what Cratylism is, and entails: the belief in the possibility of the imminence of meaning in language. I also discuss the link between "linguisticity" (Michael P. Kramer's term for self-consciousness about language) and visionary politics in American poetry after Emerson, establishing a context for the more particular link between Cratylism and society's renewal in Whitman, (Riding) Jackson, and Olson. To clarify the difference between Cratylism and other, similar forms of linguisticity, I distinguish Cratylism's *perfect* language from the *universal* language of C. K. Ogden's BASIC English and Cratylism's *utopian* perfection from the *nostalgic* perfection of Adamic language. The rest of this first chapter offers a detailed reading of Plato's dialogue, identifying the various positions on language it permits. These different positions are not simply antagonistic stances, as one might expect, but points on a continuum allowing the perfect and the actual to coexist in meaningful relation. As my subsequent chapters will show, the coexistence of these discrepant positions can also be found in the works of individual poets.

Chapter 2, "Substantial Words: Walt Whitman and the Power of Names," situates Whitman's language studies in relation to American interest in language from Webster to Emerson, then takes up the discontinuity between Emerson and Whitman, a difference that highlights the latter's Cratylic interest in a language of names. The chapter concludes with a look at Whitman's struggle to theorize and make compelling his name-language as an instrument of democracy. The language studies and visionary politics I examine in this chapter are well documented, and Whitman's quasi-mystical belief in the capacity of language to sustain both human presence and the substance of the natural world is part of his enduring appeal, but building on existing scholarship my own account shows just how well this overall project conforms to the Cratylic model. For Whitman, words should be so exact in meaning that they take on the exact function of nature, to support the growth and prosperity of a people. As he puts it in a posthumously published prose note, "From each word, as from a womb, spring babes that shall grow to giants and beget superber breeds upon the earth" (figure 1).

The political call of Whitman's "substantial words" is answered and developed in new ways by (Riding) Jackson and Olson, but with distinctly different emphases. (Riding) Jackson takes on the call for exact meaning, imagining a society that realizes its potential through perfect communication; Olson takes on the call for substantiated meaning, imagining a society where individual experience is not obliterated in abstraction.

Chapter 3, "The Linguistic Ultimate: Laura (Riding) Jackson and the Language of Truth," sets forth (Riding) Jackson's mature language theory—a Cratylism brought into conformity with Spinoza's rationalism—as the solution to an impasse in her earlier work's view of poetry as both a rectification of ordinary language and a mediate stage in the unveiling of truth. Her famous renunciation of poetry was a direct consequence of her growing belief that ordinary language, properly understood and used, requires no rectification, but is itself the language of truth. This belief, given powerful expression in *The Telling*, is first glimpsed in *The World and Ourselves*, published the same year as *Collected Poems*, but only emerges fully in the posthumously published *Rational Meaning*, the culminating text of (Riding) Jackson's lifelong polemic against the misuse of words. My chapter provides an overview of (Riding) Jackson's career, then examines the emergence of her Cratylism and the concomitant transformation of her social vision. Looking backward and forward from this crucial vantage point, I reappraise her project as a poet before concluding with a detailed reading of *Rational Meaning*.

Chapter 4, "A State Destroys a Noun: Charles Olson and Objectism," locates Olson's social imagination in his critique of Greek *logos* as articulated by Plato and in his upholding of what "Projective Verse" terms "objectism,"

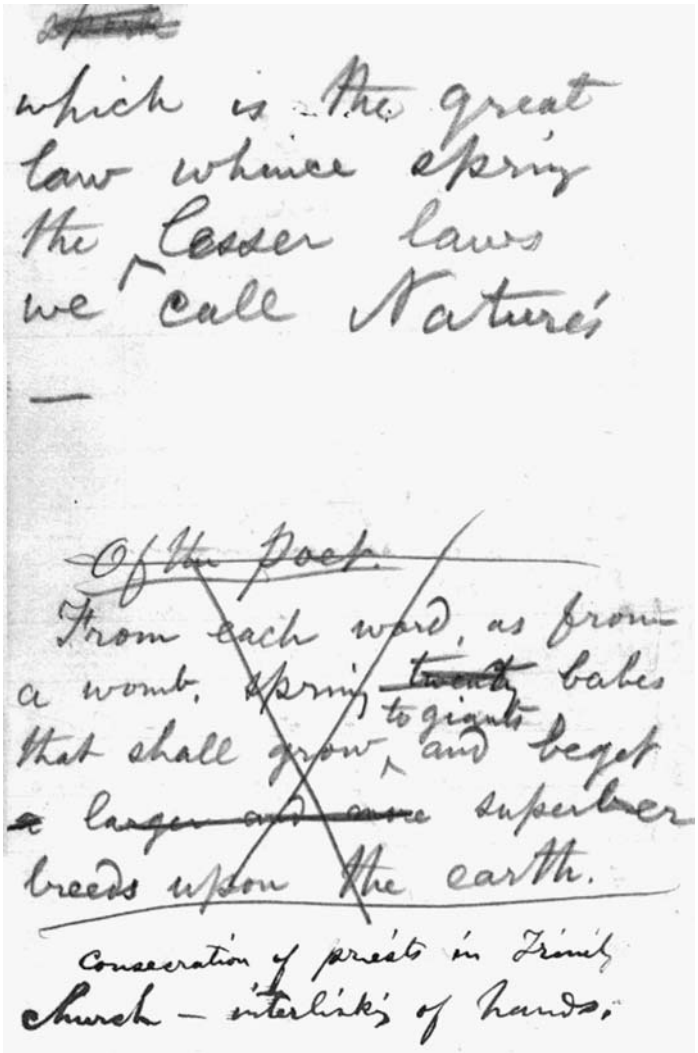


Figure 1 Page from one of Whitman's notebooks in the collection of the Library of Congress (LC #86); for a transcription of the text see NUPM 1:125, based on an alternative manuscript now lost.

an insistence on the concreteness of language and experience. Olson's Cratylism took shape and developed as a solution to the problem of abstraction in linguistic usage, and my chapter looks at several manifestations of that solution, beginning with the emphasis on speech in "Projective Verse"

and continuing through the stone-carved language of the Maya and word-writing of "Logography." The historical Cratylus in Plato's dialogue believed in the fixity of meaning in a natural language and yet held to the Heraclitean view of nature as ever in flux, a paradoxical combination of beliefs that Olson too attempts to link by joining the fixity of glyph-writing with the kinetic power of speech. My chapter concludes by looking at Olson's adoption of the Whitmanian word *kosmos* to indicate the scope of what a Cratylic renewal of society makes available.

My Coda briefly examines the traces of an American Cratylus in the work of the Language poets, focusing on three writers who in their very different ways theorize an exact correlation of language and reality. With Robert Grenier, Whitman's "substantial words" are reimagined as a language whose performance as handwriting attempts to "participate in the invention of nature" ("Realizing Things"). With Bruce Andrews, the utopian poetics of Language writing depends, despite the repudiation of any belief in words as natural phenomena embodying their meanings, on a kind of neo-Cratylism that treats language as a whole as the very stuff of reality. With Lyn Hejinian, instead, description (i.e., mimesis) is reconceived as a metonymy that "conserves perception of the world of objects, conserves their quiddity, their particular precisions" (*Language of Inquiry* 151).

* * *

The research and writing of this book go back several years. Drawing on my earliest training in language, literature, and philosophy at the University of Catania, the present text first took shape as a dissertation at the State University of New York at Buffalo, reaching its final form only after substantial rethinking and revision at the University of Maine. I am happy, then, to finally have this opportunity to thank numerous friends, teachers, and colleagues on both sides of the Atlantic for their essential advice, insights, and assistance. In some cases, I am acknowledging debts that go back twenty years.

My first acknowledgments must go to Charles Bernstein and Robert Creeley. This book would not have progressed beyond its first incomplete notes without Charles Bernstein's faith in my project, and I am deeply grateful for his encouragement throughout the subsequent years. The substantial rethinking necessary to the completion of this project was greatly influenced by my friendship and conversation with Robert Creeley, with whom I had the pleasure to teach two graduate seminars in Maine (on Charles Olson and William Carlos Williams); I dedicate this book to his memory. It was Creeley who made me realize the full import, for poets and readers alike, of that certain stubborn love for words that goes beyond mere use.

To my teachers across time I offer my humble gratitude. In Catania, Gaetano Compagnino, Maria Vittoria D'Amico, and Nino Recupero first showed me the beauty and reward of rigorous scholarship. In Buffalo, Joseph Conte, Rodolphe Gasché, Jill Robbins, and Henry Sussman had a most profound impact on my intellectual life with the example of their dynamic scholarship and powerfully discriminating intelligence. I am also grateful to my colleagues in the English Department of the University of Maine for providing a supporting and collegial environment. In particular, I want to thank Tony Brinkley, Jeff Evans, Burton Hatlen, Naomi Jacobs, Margo Lukens, and Deborah Rogers for reading early portions of this book and providing useful suggestions. Special thanks to Naomi Jacobs for granting release time at a crucial juncture.

The writing of this book has been blessed with the unique generosity of many outstanding colleagues across the country who read the manuscript in its semi-complete state during the summer of 2007: Don Byrd, Michael Davidson, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Craig Dworkin, Stephen Fredman, Robert Grenier, Lyn Hejinian, and Barrett Watten. I have greatly benefited from their sensitive and generous responses, precise criticism, and vigorous encouragement. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Rachel Blau DuPlessis, whose acumen and enthusiasm helped me get this book off my desk and into the world. At Palgrave Macmillan, my editor, Julia Cohen, has been a most reliable and understanding point of reference.

Grateful acknowledgments to Penelope Creeley for permission to quote Robert Creeley's poem "Love," and to Leslie Scalapino and Robert Grenier for permission to reproduce four pages from *What I Believe Transpiration/Transpiring Minnesota*. My thanks are also due to the Archives and Special Collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut Libraries, and in particular Melissa Watterworth, Curator of Library, Natural History and Rare Book Collection, for assistance with archival materials from the Charles Olson Papers. Works by Charles Olson are copyright © The Estate of Charles Olson and © The University of Connecticut Library. Michael Basinski of the Poetry/Rare Books Collection of the University Libraries at SUNY-Buffalo has been very helpful for many years in providing essential materials for this and other projects. I am also grateful to Bonnie B. Coles, senior research examiner at the Library of Congress, Washington, DC. A warm thank you to Sirje Curtis, Mel Johnson, and Barbara Jones at the Fogler Library of the University of Maine: their assiduous labor in locating important texts has been crucial to my research. Thanks also to the impeccable Fogler Library staff for help with the many practicalities of researching: Peter Altman, Sharon Behrends, Diana Green, Peter Lawrence, Jerry Lundt, Jeff Roggenbuck, and Ken Tudor. Special thanks to my student research assistant, Laura Latinski, and to the administrative assistants of the English Department at the University of Maine, Hansie Grignon, Stella Santerre, and Diana Weddell.

Over the years I have enjoyed and learned from my conversations about poetry, language, and politics with Robert Bertholf, Tina Darragh, Kevin Davies, Judith Fetterley, Alan Gilbert, Ernesto Grossman, Carla Harryman, Rosemary Hennessy, Mazie Hough, Karen Mac Cormack, Joy Leighton, Kathleen March, Amy Nestor, Tina Passman, and Dunstan Ward. Friends and family members have kept me afloat and nourished me with their affection: Aria Amirbahman, Stefani Bardin, Armando Billitteri, Laura Billitteri, Pina Torrisi Billitteri, Richard Brucher, Patricia Burns, Daniela Callari, Penelope Creeley, Laura Cowan, Farahad Dastoor, Liz DePoy, Carmelo Ferlito, Bobbie Garber, Henry Friedlander, Stephen Gilson, Alex and Julie Grab, Jean MacRae, Salvina and Giovanni Orecchio, and Anna-Maria Pitrone. I must acknowledge here in particular my debts to Eugene Garber, who first invited me to the United States and has been a mentor ever since. Salvo Marano, my classmate and accomplice in Catania, now an esteemed colleague, has been a source of intellectual delight for more than twenty years. Giovanni Miraglia and Tino Cutugno, beloved friends, shared their passion for poetry and philosophy when I was still a teenager; our conversations continue to this day.

I have been especially fortunate in the past fifteen years to be able to share my ideas with Benjamin Friedlander, whose fiery intellectual companionship and spectacular editorial intelligence have made this writing, even when most maddening and strenuous, a labor of pleasure. My last and lasting thanks are for him: without his help, unwavering good sense, practical assistance, and sustaining gift of love this book would not have been completed.

Abbreviations

See "Works Cited" for full bibliographic information on the individual titles.

Walt Whitman

DBN	*Daybooks and Notebooks*. 3 vols.
LG	*Leaves of Grass. Comprehensive Reader's Edition*. The text and pagination match the Norton Critical Edition prepared by the same editors, Harold W. Blodgett and Sculley Bradley, but not the revised Norton prepared by Michael Moon.
LGVar.	*Leaves of Grass: A Textual Variorum of the Printed Poems*. 3 vols.
NUPM	*Notebooks and Unpublished Prose Manuscripts*. 6 vols.
NYD	*New York Dissected: A Sheaf of Recently Discovered Newspaper Articles by the Author of* Leaves of Grass.
PW	*Prose Works 1892*. 2 vols.
WWWC	*With Walt Whitman in Camden*. 9 vols.

Laura (Riding) Jackson

A	*Anarchism Is Not Enough*.
Bio1	"Riding, Laura." *Twentieth Century Authors: A Biographical Dictionary of Modern Literature* (1942).
Bio2	"Jackson, Laura (Riding)." *Twentieth Century Authors, First Supplement: A Biographical Dictionary of Modern Literature* (1955).
Conv	"Laura (Riding) Jackson in Conversation with Elizabeth Friedmann."
Epil	*Epilogue: A Critical Summary*. 3 vols.
FA	*First Awakenings: The Early Poems of Laura Riding*.
FPPL	*The Failure of Poetry, The Promise of Language*.

FUL	*Four Unposted Letters to Catherine*.
Is There	"Is There a World for Literature?—Is There Literature for a World?"
LRJR	*The Laura (Riding) Jackson Reader*.
PLR	*The Poems of Laura Riding*.
PJW	*Poems: A Joking Word*.
RM	*Rational Meaning: A New Foundation for the Definition of Words and Supplementary Essays*.
SMP	*A Survey of Modernist Poetry*.
T	*The Telling*.
Taken	*It Has Taken Long—: From the Writings of Laura (Riding) Jackson*.
UMW	*Under the Mind's Watch: Concerning Issues of Language, Literature, Life of Contemporary Bearing*.
WO	*The World and Ourselves*.

Charles Olson

ALMG	"The Art of the Language of Mayan Glyphs."
DU	"Definitions by Undoing."
COCC	Charles Olson and Cid Corman. *Complete Correspondence, 1950–1964*. 2 vols.
CORC	Charles Olson and Robert Creeley. *The Complete Correspondence*. 10 vols.
CP	*Collected Poems*.
CPr	*Collected Prose.*
Max	*The Maximus Poems*.
Muth	*Muthologos. The Collected Lectures and Interviews*. 2 vols.
OJ	*Olson: The Journal of the Charles Olson Archives*. 10 vols.
Storrs	Unpublished texts (cited by title, or first line where appropriate) from the Charles Olson Papers, Archives and Special Collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut Libraries. Each document is listed under its own title in the bibliography.
SL	*Selected Letters*.
SV	*The Special View of History*.

CHAPTER 1

The True Forms of Things: Cratylism and American Poetry

> *Socrates*: Then, Hermogenes, I should say that this giving of names can be no such light matter as you fancy, or the work of light or chance persons. And Cratylus is right in saying that things have names by nature, and that not every man is an artificer of names, but he only who looks to the name which each thing by nature has, and is able to express the true forms of things in letters and syllables.
>
> *Hermogenes*: I cannot answer you, Socrates, but I find a difficulty in changing my opinion all in a moment, and I think that I should be more readily persuaded, if you would show me just what this is which you term the natural fitness of names.
>
> *Socrates*: My good Hermogenes, I have none to show. Was I not telling you just now—but you have forgotten—that I knew nothing, and was I not proposing to share the inquiry with you?
>
> Plato, *Cratylus*, 390d–391a[1]

This book starts from the assumption that poetics are enabling discourses that support intellectual projects in which poetry as such is not always the horizon. For the three poets I discuss in these pages, Walt Whitman, Laura (Riding) Jackson, and Charles Olson, poetry is a means to an end; that end includes the utopian prospect of a renewal of society. In conceiving of poetics as enabling discourses, I mean, then, to discuss the inaccuracies, faulty reasoning, and fantasies of accomplishment that one finds in such writing in terms of the poetry they help to produce

and the projects they help to support rather than as weaknesses to be identified, problems to be critiqued, or contradictions to be resolved. In varying degrees, all three of my poets consciously turned away from sophisticated theories of language to embrace a dream of a perfect language; they did so for reasons that had everything to do with their deepest commitments as poets and citizens. In each case, workable descriptions of language as it is actually used and as it actually functions were set aside for (or made subservient to) dreams of how language *might* be used and *should* function. Thus, unlike other Whitman scholars, who see ambivalence, conflict, or confusion in Whitman's writing on words, I see the conscious, meticulous construction of an intellectual position that might validate his poetics philologically. Olson, likewise, was engaged in a thorough study of words, absorbing some of the most significant texts available to him by historians of language and scholars of linguistics. Yet he chose, in full knowledge of the contradiction involved in his position, to seek a form of language that would allow its users to overcome their alienation from what he conceived of as a natural state of human experience. (Riding) Jackson too, the most learned of these three poets in matters of language, embraced the dream of a perfect language. Indeed, hers was the most extreme, most uncompromising stance of the three: rejecting and critiquing every contemporary theory of language that came to her attention (pragmatism, semiotics, structuralism, poststructuralism), she called for a language of "rational meaning" where words were not to be taken as symbols or signs, but as linguistic entities consubstantial with their meanings.

Because my focus here is the poetics of these three authors, I will be giving significant attention to their prose writings as well as to their poetry. For all three figures, poems are not simply artifacts to be appreciated, but sites of intellectual and social labor. I take it, then, as a second assumption of this book that for writers of this sort the articulation of a poetics in prose notes, letters, essays, and monographs is not a marginal endeavor, but absolutely central to the task of writing in which the writing of poems participates. This does not mean that poems themselves become marginal, only that reading a poetic project involves a different perspective and different methodology than reading a body of work written in verse. Reading a project rather than a set of works, I emphasize the overall coherence of the author's intentions rather than the coherence of his or her ideas, allowing that those intentions will occasionally change over time. All three writers subjected their projects to intense querying, hence their intentions—or, more precisely, the ways they enacted their intentions—do modulate, sometimes in direct response to an aporetic convergence of ideas. (Riding) Jackson's famous abandonment of poetry is a good example of this. More often, however, the intentions resist

modulation and simply coexist with the aporia, allowing the desire for a perfect language to be expressed or articulated now one way, now another. In Whitman, for example, his belief that language is inherently spiritual coexists with the contradictory belief that meanings inhere in the concreteness of the things words name. Both beliefs hold to the ideal of a perfect language, although only the latter is Cratylic. Sometimes, too, the aporias produces a more jarring contradiction, one that calls into question the project's ultimate coherence. Here we see the poets trying to maintain a utopian poetics in the midst of researches that undermine its theoretical basis. Olson's language studies give ample evidence that he perceived this undermining. Yet beyond the occasional inconsistency of the arguments that result we glimpse the consistency of his desire to persevere.

In emphasizing intention, I do not mean to invoke a criterion for resolving interpretative difficulties—the so-called intentional fallacy of the New Critics—but instead I mean to elaborate a context for understanding why such difficulties matter.[2] Here again I would make a distinction between works and projects: reading a work is a hermeneutic activity; reading a project absorbs that activity into a broader consideration of how and why works take shape. When looked at in terms of project, what poems and other writings "say" is subservient to what they would *accomplish*, and even works that fail in their accomplishment can be revelatory of a project. The point is that in reading these works and attending to what they say as well as to their formal properties and structural characteristics, I keep in mind their relationship to the rest of the author's production. When I read poems in particular, I look at them as components of a discourse and as performances of the project that the discourse would describe. My attention is equalizing: in reading a project I treat poetry (published and unpublished), criticism, fiction, and other prose as equally relevant, at least potentially, and equally deserving of critical attention. In this book, for example, I cite statements about language, poetry, and the renewal of society that appear in the poems of Whitman, (Riding) Jackson, and Olson, treating these poetic utterances as components of a larger articulation accommodating the poets' prose writings as well; I also look at how those larger articulations shape the performances of particular poems in which language, poetry, and the renewal of society are not directly addressed. Failure or the possibility of failure is intrinsic to all three projects, and so each poet's poetics needs to be understood in terms of ambition as well as success in order to be appreciated. For one peculiarity of the projects I discuss is that they support utopian ambitions that do not by definition belong to the present moment and cannot by definition occur in the language the poets have at their disposal. Indeed, the entire arc of these projects extends so far into the future that the present of each author's

writing is always in danger of instantaneous and total devaluation. Only (Riding) Jackson, who abandoned poetry altogether, accepted this danger head on and made a concerted effort to respond to it. In Whitman and Olson we find instead an attempt to dispel the recognition of this danger with bold pronouncements and fantasies of accomplishment—one source of their often-cited hyperbole.[3] Yet it is clear from each poet's writings that he or she understood poetry's limitations in the present state of language.

I characterize the linguistic ideal that provided the basis for my poets' ambitions as "Cratylic." Derived from Plato's *Cratylus*, a dialogue concerned with the correctness of names, the term "Cratylic" indicates an archaic understanding of language as a natural phenomenon, of words as emanating from or belonging to things and so as univocal in their reference. In the dialogue, Plato ridicules Cratylism as a residue of the magical thinking and animist belief prevalent in pre-Socratic philosophy, but this thought formation survived his derision to flourish in Neoplatonic, Romantic, and Transcendentalist philosophies of language, which also draw on the biblical belief that the world was created in an act of perfect naming. In describing my three poets as Cratylists, then, I do not claim that they were influenced by Plato's dialogue directly. Indeed, it is impossible to know for certain if they even read the *Cratylus*, although all three recorded an acquaintance with Plato's thought more generally.[4] I operate instead on the understanding that all three descend from the Transcendentalist legacy and from Emerson in particular, and that all three assimilated the Transcendentalist faith in a fundamental connection between mind and matter, language and reality. The finding of this fundamental connection can and will, they believed, bring forth both a new language and new society, hence each saw his or her intellectual labors as part of a larger mandate, that of creating the conditions for a renewal of democratic ideals, enlightened rationality, and ethical coexistence with other people or with nature as a whole. Although all three poets acquired sophisticated understandings of the way language works, they consciously took up linguistic projects that can be qualified as Cratylic as a way of articulating poetic and political visions of a more perfect society. Even as their studies revealed to them the inapplicability of this Cratylic ideal, they persevered in their utopian programs, attempting in their critical writings to reconcile modern ideas about the evolution of language, signifying relations, and the polyvocality of meaning to older beliefs in a language of natural meanings whose complete and faithful adherence to the things named guarantees a state of unchangeable referentiality.

My discussion of Cratylism draws on Gérard Genette's *Mimologics*, an encyclopedic study of the evolution of this thought formation in philosophy, rhetoric, grammar, linguistics, and literature from Cratylus (a

historical figure and one of Plato's teachers) to St. Augustine, Rousseau, von Humboldt, Valéry, Claudel, and Ponge, among others. I am particularly indebted to Genette's central claim that Cratylism, when found in writers whose understanding of language is in direct conflict with Cratylic ideals, should be understood as a fantastic but enabling discourse, a "certain turn of thought or of imagination which assumes, rightly or wrongly, a relation of reflective analogy (imitation) between 'word' and 'thing' that *motivates*, or justifies, the existence and the choice of the former" (5). I differ from Genette, however, at one crucial point. Throughout *Mimologics*, Genette considers this "turn of thought or of imagination" a "delightful reverie," a dream that expresses "the belief in a natural relation between the signified and the signifier, or what could be properly termed the *semantic illusion*" (5, 259). Only in passing, however, does he consider that this "reverie"—and I agree with that description—has any kind of public dimension or social implication.[5] In the three poets I discuss, Cratylism is not simply a private dream, but an active intellectual orientation coloring each poet's terms of engagement with his or her historical situation, a defining part of his or her effective historicity, to borrow a concept from Hans-Georg Gadamer.[6] For Gadamer, consciousness of one's historical situation—"of being affected by history"—is "primarily consciousness of the hermeneutical situation" (301). One becomes aware of the "efficacy of history . . . at work" in the act of interpretation of one's culture (301). Effective historicity, then, is a hermeneutic practice put in the service of a cultural project. This is precisely what happens with Whitman, (Riding) Jackson, and Olson insofar as all three poets are interpreters of their culture. Cratylism colors their interpretations by heightening their awareness of the unsatisfying conditions of the present as a state of alienation, untruth, and lack of connection between language and reality. More pointedly, in relation to their effective historicity, Cratylism makes each aware of the discrepancy between the potentiality and the actuality of language use with respect to its impact on the life of society. By making language one with things, Cratylism vouches for language's referential truth: the truth of its irreducible concreteness (the concreteness of things). This model of linguistic perfection (which is also, by definition, an epistemic perfection) holds great attraction for the writers I consider, whose poetic projects are characterized not only by an intense level of engagement with language, but also by an intense desire to work out the implications of a perfect language for the functioning of thought, ethics, and politics in society. This is what I consider the utopian mandate of Cratylism, which, as I shall discuss in my subsequent chapters, leads Whitman to embrace his historical moment while prompting (Riding) Jackson and Olson to recoil from theirs.

In addition to their desire for a perfect language, Whitman, (Riding) Jackson, and Olson also share, in different degrees, a nationalist belief that the American experience provides the most favorable possible ground for realizing their Cratylist projects. Whitman is the most nationalist of the three, but this is not surprising since the link between Cratylism and nationalism originates in late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century linguistics and comparative philology, disciplines that in the Romantic era refashioned the Cratylic argument by introducing the word "organic" in their description of language as a natural phenomenon. As Genette writes, a "new conception of naturalness" was contained in this use of the term "organic," one that "no longer [resided] in imitation, similarity, or 'faithful painting,' but in a language's internal dynamism and capacity for autonomous development" (177). Out of this organicism developed the Saussurean account of language as a closed system, an emphatically anti-Cratylist position; but in looking at language as a *national* phenomenon, Romanticism also provided the basis for a Cratylic description of *the nation*, an organic whole in which, potentially, all aspects of society could become the expression of a linguistic ideal. Cratylism, then, began to circulate in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as part of a celebration of the internal dynamism of a nation, the "genius" of a people expressed in its customs and culture as well as in the life of its language, a natural language because the nation that produced it is itself a natural phenomenon. This development of Cratylism within the organicist framework was particularly influential for the American Renaissance and is prominent in the writings of Emerson and Whitman, and traces of it persist in modern American poets influenced by those forebears, including Gertrude Stein, William Carlos Williams, and Ezra Pound.[7] Moreover, insofar as this organic conception of language as existing in dynamic relation to the culture and politics of a people motivates nonnationalist poets with a social vision, we see its traces in Objectivism, the New American Poetry, and Language writing as well.[8] This broad heritage of poets with a social vision who articulate poetics in which society is renewed through acts of a natural or organically conceived language is what I term the American Cratylus. Not all poets participate in this heritage to the same degree, but for the three I discuss the commitment was total.[9]

In addressing the link between Cratylism and social vision, I draw on Michael P. Kramer's study of the American Renaissance, *Imagining Language in America*, which carefully documents how a "concern with the way Americans—*as Americans*—wrote and spoke" permeated the "linguisticity" of classic American literature (xii). "Linguisticity" is Kramer's own coinage, used to describe works produced by writers with a "particularly deliberate and self-conscious" approach to their medium, "works

whose stylistic self-reflexiveness indicates . . . a philosophical . . . concern with language" (x, xii, emphasis elided). Looking at nineteenth-century writers of literary works alongside American scholars of language from the same period—scholars who saw "the growth and development of the English language as inseparable from the essentially literary history of its study"—Kramer sees an "imaginative" merging of "ideas about the nature or the use of language . . . with ideas about America so as to form cultural fictions, creative rendering of the nation—its meaning, its character, and how it works" (xii). Through this merging, linguisticity, which F. O. Matthiessen and subsequent scholars identified and made the defining characteristic of canonical American literature as a whole, acquired, at least in the nineteenth century, a specifically nationalistic coloring.[10] Kramer's work overlaps with mine in his consideration of one figure, Walt Whitman, whose foregrounding of matters of language in America was sustained by his interest in linguistics and philology and was linked at both the thematic and stylistic levels to his devotion to democracy and commitment to an ideal of American exceptionalism. I too look at Whitman's language studies, but I follow what is specifically Cratylic in his thinking and look at how this Cratylic presence is put in the service of Whitman's Americanism, which I would define as his belief in America as a conceptual frame for understanding the modern, the democratic, the post-European, and the multicultural. By defining Whitman's Americanness in this way, I mean to show how a nationalist interest in language slides easily into a linguistic project of renewing society, since, for Whitman, "America" is precisely the name for this renewal. In (Riding) Jackson and Olson, the renewal of society is likewise linked to an ideal America, but it would be misleading to say that this Americanism constitutes their work's horizon. Linguisticity in the two later writers has a strong social dimension marked by—but not limited to—a specific national identity. In adopting Kramer's term "linguisticity" I therefore adhere to his root meaning so as to discuss literary projects that show in their style "a more than ordinary consciousness of how to do things with words" (14).

The principal difference between linguisticity and Cratylism, the reason why the latter—if it could be achieved—would not simply be a subset of the former, is the problematic status of style, since in a natural language, where a perfect connection is found between words and things, variations of style are no longer conceivable. For all three writers, style, however embraced in the present, is foreign to their linguistic ideal. Each believed that a "more than ordinary consciousness" of language can ameliorate the life of society, but the "stylistic self-reflexiveness" of linguisticity is at best a point of mediation between the perceived inadequacies of language use today and the perfect communication a natural language would inaugurate in the future.

Whitman, (Riding) Jackson, and Olson recognized that the actualization of their Cratylism was yet to be achieved, although they believed that there are elements of language that validate in the present the hypothesis of meanings naturally arising from things. Their projects evolved, then, around the idea of singling out the particular linguistic elements that modeled their Cratylism and that could be used, they hoped, to build the perfect language. Nouns provided the focus in each case, but with significant variations of emphasis and analysis. Olson singled out proper nouns; Whitman, characteristically expansive, was attracted by proper and common nouns alike, and even, on occasion, by idiomatic expressions. (Riding) Jackson, distinguishing "true words" from "terms," "names," and "vocables," believed "that noun-form will tend to serve best for the characterization of the logical point of the word" (RM 367, 185). These emphases on and analyses of what one might well call "Cratylic elements" were not meant to eliminate other parts of speech from use; nor were any of these poets' projects meant to hinder the ordinary evolution of language, the changing of meanings and usage over time, in response to changing social conditions. The singling out of specific Cratylic elements was meant to uphold a utopian model of linguistic immutability installed at the very center of an otherwise mutable system. This ideal center was conceived of as a germinal site (in keeping with the organicist understanding of language) for producing linguistic perfection, a prerequisite for truthful utterance and an organic unity of language and society.

The singling out of Cratylic elements described above will remind many readers of the project of BASIC English put forward by the English philosopher C. K. Ogden in the 1930s. Since (Riding) Jackson critiqued Ogden's project—as did two of Olson's major influences, Pound and Williams—a clarification of the differences between BASIC and Cratylism is in order and will help to identify what is particular about the poetic projects that concern me here.

BASIC, an acronym for "British American Scientific International Commercial," was a language of 850 words selected by Ogden from ordinary English and presented to the public under the auspices of his Orthological Institute of Cambridge, United Kingdom. It seems plausible to assume that the name of Ogden's institute was a coded reference to Plato's *Cratylus*, for the entire title of the dialogue reads *Cratylus, or "the Correctness of Names"*—"*orthotēs onomatōn*" in Greek. BASIC, indeed, was motivated, at least in part, by Ogden's desire to establish a standard of correctness for the English language; however, this standard was not natural but manmade, dictated by logic, modified by reason. This too was in keeping with the *Cratylus*, for, as I shall discuss in what follows, Plato's dialogue includes a philosophical

opponent for Cratylus, Hermogenes, and it is he who asks Socrates about the correctness of names. Since Hermogenes, unlike Cratylus, does not believe in the existence of a natural language, it is fair to say that BASIC provides an answer to Hermogenes's inquiry from within a sympathetic (i.e., anti-Cratylic) framework.

In creating BASIC, Ogden's announced aim was the development of a universal language that might remedy the state of Babel prevailing in the modern world, since, according to Ogden, "the absence of a common medium of communication" was "the chief obstacle to international understanding, . . . [and] the chief underlying cause of War" (*System* 18). The project—which involved Ogden for two decades—resulted in several primers, dictionaries, and grammar books, as well as a library of books written in or translated into BASIC.[11] Privileging nouns and adjectives, he arrived at his restricted vocabulary by eliminating verbs, except for eighteen basic language "operators" (*System* 6). One reason for the restriction, as Rodney Koeneke notes, "was to throw speakers back upon a limited vocabulary in which habitual terms and distinctions were not available, thus forcing them to examine the linguistic categories that shape their assumptions about the world," and Ogden's emphasis on questioning assumptions, on a skeptical language practice rather than one in search of the natural or organic, is one difference between his project and those of my three poets (217). Although inspired by the utopian dream of renewing society—in Ogden's case through the dismantling of language barriers—this project was not based on a claim to have discovered a core of perfect words embodying their referents. Ogden was an anti-Cratylic philosopher and took for granted Saussure's assumption that "words . . . 'mean' nothing by themselves"; he believed that words should be treated as arbitrary and conventional signs, a stance he made explicit in *The Meaning of Meaning*, a book co-authored with I. A. Richards and published before the establishment of BASIC (*Meaning* 10). In *The Meaning of Meaning*, Ogden and Richards tersely set aside the primitive belief in "direct meaning relations between words and things," which they describe as "the source of almost all the difficulties which thought encounters" in the study of language (*Meaning* 12). In Chapter 2, "The Power of Words," they review the *Cratylus* dialogue itself, seeing Plato struggling there with "the relics of primitive word-magic" present in earlier Greek thought (*Meaning* 31). "His analysis," they write, "in an age when comparative philology, grammar, and psychology were all unknown, is a remarkable achievement, but he fails to distinguish consistently between symbols and the thought symbolized" (*Meaning* 33). BASIC was not, therefore, an attempt to achieve a Cratylic language of "direct meaning relations between words and things." Rather, as Ogden described it with unconcealed pride, BASIC was "a valuable exercise

in the understanding of word-behavior" and as such "a potent antidote to all forms of Word-magic" (*System* 33). His rationale was both utilitarian and humanitarian. Ogden wanted to pacify world conflicts by facilitating communication, which he hoped to accomplish by reducing the Babel of "1,500 languages . . . spoken . . . by approximately 2,000 million people" (18) to "an international auxiliary language" comprising an "essential minimum [number of words] in which everything of general interest can be talked about" (4).

Conceived of as an international language detached from nationalist interests ("a truly Universal medium," as Ogden emphasized, capitalizing the word universal), BASIC was nonetheless derived from the English language, a choice that Ogden justified by pointing at the number of native speakers. The British Empire and the United States, he explained, had a combined population well above that of China (430 million native speakers), India (160 million), Russia (145 million), Spain (115 million), and Germany (98 million) (*System* 18). Answering the question, "Why English Words?" in his "General Account" of *The System of Basic English*, he argued that "English is now the natural or governmental language of over 650,000,000 people . . . the second language of the Far East," adding that "no other existing language can be simplified to anything like the same extent" (*System* 5). These two qualifications—numbers of speakers and susceptibility to simplification—made English a utilitarian choice, although it was also a choice that struck many as a thinly veiled apology for the British Empire. Indeed, BASIC was critiqued already in the 1930s as a propagandistic venture of the British Government, and even more so during the Second World War, when BASIC was officially taken up by the British Council with "the formation of an inter-departmental committee, involving six ministries" charged with "the development of Basic English" (Gordon 50–51). As Koeneke remarks, this development caused a general "distrust of the motives behind Basic" and "plague[d] the movement's efforts world-wide" (92).[12] Notwithstanding Ogden's idealistic aims, it is hard not to sympathize with this mistrust: Ogden's BASIC had an international and a domestic front; it was a plan to "pacify" the world through a "debabelization" in which all languages would be cast out *except* English, and English itself thinned, cleansing away "the majority of [its] idiomatic overgrowth" (*Debabelization* 29, cited in Ashton 121).[13]

Policing or cleansing language with the intent of "debabelizing" society (or the world) was not at all what these American Cratyluses had in mind. Although each was committed to a revitalization of English, the perfect language they sought was perceived as something potential to any language, and none of the three poets ever conceived a desire to see the Cratylic

result in a *single* language. This was not even a question in Plato's original dialogue, where Greek is the only language given serious consideration (although the importation of foreign names receives glancing attention). After the Renaissance, however, those desiring a language of nature accepted as a given that nature produces different languages, hence the conventional distinction, which Ogden also makes, between natural languages and constructed ones.[14] BASIC was something between the two. It was, in Ogden's words, an "Auxiliary Language": it aimed for the universality of a constructed language but accepted a natural one—English—as its precondition (19). The Cratylism of Whitman, (Riding) Jackson, and Olson was likewise accepting of English as a precondition, but there the aim was perfection, not universalism. Their Cratylism was also accepting of the possibility that other languages might achieve the same perfection.[15] To be sure, there are parallels to be made between Ogden's idealistic imperialism and that of Whitman, or between Ogden's attempt to unify society and that of (Riding) Jackson, but the differences of method and of the linguistic theories behind those methods are significant. Cratylism is epistemological in orientation, a way of reimagining language's signifying relations; BASIC is behavioral and cognitive, a way of standardizing and simplifying syntactic relations. Where Cratylism is radically organic, BASIC approaches language as a computational machine, as demonstrated by Ogden's "Basic Word Wheel," an ingenious device consisting of seven overlapping disks of different dimensions that allows the assembling of entire sentences by rotating the position of the disks according to a number of simple rules. The "Word Wheel," in Ogden's words, "is an apparatus for putting words in the right order automatically" just by following a few logical steps (305). Cleansing, ordering, computing: nothing could be further from the Cratylic call for a perfect unity of words and things, for a state of unchangeable referentiality. BASIC bears only a deceiving similarity to the Cratylic in its privileging of nouns and adjectives over verbs, and in its urgency to stabilize language so as to ameliorate the life of society.

Cratylism should also be distinguished from the Adamic, although these two conceptions of language are often treated as interchangeable, particularly in studies focusing on the American Renaissance.[16] There are, indeed, some important areas of overlap between the two approaches, but they differ profoundly in their temporal orientations. The Adamic is primordial, hence backward looking; it refers to nature before the fall, and to a language adequate to that uncorrupted state. In Cratylism, there is no fall; nature persists notwithstanding corruption, and language can be adequate—indeed, perfect—without having to return to a prelapsarian condition. R. W. B. Lewis, in his classic study *The American Adam,* took note of this

difference even as he accepted its blurring. "I must distinguish between the notion of progress toward perfection and the notion of primitive Adamic perfection," he wrote, adding, "Both ideas were current [in the nineteenth century], but they overlapped and intertwined" (5 n. 5). What allows the two notions to be reconciled is the erasure of history. As Lewis notes, the Adamic man—and the figure is emphatically masculine—is "an individual emancipated from history, happily bereft of ancestry, untouched and undefiled by the usual inheritances of family and race. . . . His moral position [is] prior to experience, and in his very newness he [is] fundamentally innocent. The world and history [lie] all before him. And he [is] the type of creator, the poet par excellence, creating language itself by naming the elements of the scene about him" (5). Subsequent Americanists have criticized this erasure of history as a colonial gesture, and this has led George B. Handley in his recent account of Whitman's "New World poetics" to distinguish between the uppercase Adam of colonial ideology and "a lowercase 'adamic' imagination" able to "attend to both the human and natural domains of history" (2). Quoting Derek Walcott, Handley writes, "This is a postlapsarian Adam, 'a second Adam' whose New World is not the Edenic space of innocence: '[T]he apples of [this] second Eden have the tartness of experience' " (2).[17] Yet the utopian hope of the Adamic, even in its lowercase form, requires a turning away from history. "A return to the elemental task of the poet to name the world in elation is to begin again the process of building a culture of possibility, even if the poet must pretend that it happens *as if* for the first time" (Handley 3). Cratylism's relationship to history is no less equivocal, although not in the "*as if*" form of a virtual nostalgia. A record of mistake for (Riding) Jackson—she calls it "a really wrong muddle" in one early work (FUL 68)—and a source of secret knowledge for Olson (for whom the truest record is myth), history is in Cratylism's utopian dimension best appreciated as potential. As Whitman wrote in "Democratic Vistas," "history is poorly retain'd by what the technists call history, and is not given out from their pages, except the learner has in himself the sense of the well-wrapt, never yet written, perhaps impossible to be written, history" (PW 2:398). Such an approach would nullify history's power of constraint, defining it (as Olson did in *The Special View of History*) as "the *function* of any one of us" (17).

The Cratylic and Adamic also differ in the ways that they conceive of the act of naming. In the *Cratylus*, mention is given to the fact that language, in its basic form of letters or syllables, was created by a nonhuman intelligence and planted in nature, each letter or syllable expressing an essential quality. Naming is a matter of combining letters or syllables, recognizing the correct combination of qualities definitive of each particular thing.

Names, however, can only be grasped correctly by a few gifted individuals, the so-called legislators. In the Bible, Adam is a comparable figure, although the work he accomplishes is a little different from that taken on by Plato's legislators. Adam's naming is creative; the words he chooses do not express in advance the essences of things, but instead are the vehicle through which those essences can become known. God's acts of language are also creative, but more profoundly so. When Adam speaks a name, he creates language, but God's speech brings the things themselves into being, as when God says, " 'Let there be light'; and there was light" (Genesis 1:3). In the Bible, of course, Adam's acts of naming are explicitly offered as an echo of God's, and the two are often confused in popular imagination as a consequence.[18] Thus, in the first chapter of Genesis, we are told that God populates the earth by saying, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and birds that fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky. . . . Let the earth bring forth every kind of living creature" (1:20, 24), while in the second chapter, in the second account of creation, we are told that "God formed out of the earth all the wild beasts and all the birds of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them, and whatever the man called each living creature, that would be its name" (2:19). This, then, is the inception of the Adamic: a power of naming bestowed upon the human race by God, carrying with it the generous provision that "whatever [Adam] called each living creature, that would be its name." The Adamic celebrates the role of human agency in naming, unlike the Cratylic, which drastically curtails human intervention in matters of language, placing its emphasis on the nonhuman origins of letters and syllables.[19] In the Cratylic model, the correctness of names depends upon the recognition of the primal language inherent in things, or, more precisely, depends upon the recognition of letters and syllables distributed throughout nature. In the Adamic model, by contrast, correct naming is a matter of inauguration and depends only on the human intellect, albeit an intellect created and then authorized by God. This understanding of the Adamic leads easily enough to a fusion of human abilities and divine inspiration, a fusion perfected by Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologica*. A word, Aquinas wrote, "originates from the intellect through an act of intellect, and it is the likeness of what is known. . . . So the word originating from the intellect is the likeness of what is known" (cited in Ward at 120). Since the human intellect is illuminated by God, the Adamic utterance is in primordial contact with the language of creation. Thus, Aquinas writes, "The intellect of a man by the word he conceives in the act of understanding a stone, speaks a stone" (cited in Ward at 120).

The Cratylic and the biblical narratives are similar in their assumption that the perfect language of creation can be misunderstood, misused, or

misheard, and therefore spoiled by humankind. In the *Cratylus*, however, this assumption does not contradict the theme of nonhuman origins of language: humans can and will misrecognize letters out of ignorance, as we learn in the very first exchange of Plato's dialogue. In the Bible, fear of misuse contradicts the originary and all-empowering provision bestowed upon Adam as first source of correct naming. This contradiction is explained as a consequence of Adam's and Eve's fall into sin, of their loss of divine guidance, and expulsion from the Garden of Eden. The theme of the "fallen" language as the imminent condition of human language is therefore charged with spiritual overtones in the Adamic, whereas it is treated as a simple matter of misunderstanding (or limited understanding) in the Cratylic. This theme is a necessary precondition to the ameliorative desire of Cratylic and Adamic poetics alike, but while the Adamic focuses on the recovery of a prelapsarian condition, the Cratylic tries to recover an understanding of language as "Substance Logic," a term I borrow from philosopher Eddy M. Zemach. As presented in *The Reality of Meaning and the Meaning of Reality*, Zemach's Substance Logic is a metalanguage in which all words are referential to things, and grammar is rendered entirely through mathematical signs.[20] The term works well as a description of any approach to language in which the meaning of a word is no longer a matter of convention, but is taken instead to be a "perceptible thing" (Zemach 75). I see Cratylism as an extreme form of Substance Logic where language is substantial to things, and linguistic reference is not simply "perceptible," but invariably correct and achievable, provided that the language user knows how to read the substance-level of language. Whitman is exemplary in his adherence to the "substance logic" of Cratylism, as evidenced in his hymn to the "substantial words" of nature, the theme of his "Song of the Rolling Earth." This theme is sustained by his recognition and open acceptance of the material phenomenality of the real, as indicated by his declaration: "I accept Reality and dare not question it, / Materialism first and last imbuing" (LG 51). Language, as Whitman understood it, is part of the "material" presence of the world, consubstantial with it.

What, then, is poetry's place within a Cratylic project? What can or should poetry accomplish while language and society await renewal? And what can poetry do to assist this renewal? First of all, poetry can suggest a plenitude of presence in language, relying on the massive and unadorned power of names of things and places to impart some sense of unmediated reality—precisely the effect Whitman tries to achieve in his poetic catalogues. The concreteness of language's objectual meaning here becomes a kind of word-magic, an effect of the incantatory presence of words on the

page. Poems can also enrich the meanings attached to names with thick, detailed descriptions of the places, people, and histories associated with them. This is what Olson attempted in his poems for particular places such as "Ten Pound Island" and "Dogtown." In works like these, the poem as a whole becomes an act of naming, giving a sense of what the *true* naming of a perfect language might achieve. Beyond these instances, poems can impart at least an inkling of the higher awareness and more acute understanding of the real that a language of nature might produce—the unity of mind and world, the oneness of minds in society, that can only come with a perfect adequation of words and things. (Riding) Jackson used the word "truth" to describe this oneness of minds—which she understood in Spinozist terms—and her poems give continual testimony to it, as do her post-poetic critical writings, especially *The Telling*. Whitman and Olson wrote poems that give inklings of this higher state of knowledge and awareness, Whitman in particular. All of "Song of Myself" is a hymn to the unity of mind and world, a paean to this oneness of minds in society. Finally, poems can describe and so help to produce a desire for the utopian moment when words will become perfectly adequate to things, producing higher awareness and happiness and renewing society.

Plato's Cratylus*, Preliminary Considerations*

The *Cratylus* offers a guide to specific positions on language common among American poets from Emerson onward (and sometimes evident, despite their disparity, in individual poetic projects). Platonic elements in American poetry have often received attention, but the complexity of the positions contained in this particular dialogue and the range of poetic possibilities each position accounts for have not been isolated or studied with specific reference to the discourse of poetics from the mid-nineteenth century to the late twentieth. In this and the next section of my chapter I offer an overview of the dialogue so as to identify its layered complexities.[21] The subsequent section draws on Genette's distinction between primary and secondary Cratylism to establish both the shared elements of and intractable differences between belief in a natural language and the rhetoric of mimesis. Three sections then follow outlining core Cratylic themes relevant to my readings of Whitman, (Riding) Jackson, and Olson: language as the proper, the poet as legislator, and the dream of plenitude.

As already mentioned, the subject of the dialogue is the correctness of names. It is important to note, however, that "name" in the *Cratylus* is a "loose linguistic category, understood as including common nouns and

adjectives as well as proper names" (Sedley 4). This distinction sets relatively flexible boundaries around the subsequent appropriations of the Cratylic, and it disallows restricted understanding of the Cratylic as a philosophical position pertaining solely to proper nouns. A dialogue from Plato's "middle period," composed about 399 B.C. (about the time when Plato began to articulate his theory of Forms), the *Cratylus* occupies an important position in the canon of Western philosophy for its early treatment of the question of language and representation.[22] It is not, by general agreement, an easy text, for it relies on a wealth of cultural, religious, and philosophical references, sometimes presented with parodic effect.[23] The difficulty created by these remote cultural references is compounded by the sudden reversal of Socrates's position on language, which seems to nullify all that came before, and by the inconclusiveness of the ending, which finds the participants departing in a state of intellectual disharmony. Perhaps because of these difficulties—or the strangeness of the dialogue—the *Cratylus* has not received attention commensurate with its importance. Although the speculative matter of the dialogue was not entirely new to Greek philosophy, it had never been the extended subject of a philosophical treatise by any of the pre-Socratic philosophers, nor by Plato himself.[24] In the *Cratylus*, Plato for the first time undertook a thorough critique of contemporary beliefs about language, in particular the belief that names are privileged instruments of knowledge whose mastery guarantees a direct access to the real. As Susan B. Levin remarks, the dialogue "serves as a crucial locus of Plato's theorizing" and is "the central arena in which . . . Plato's philosophy of language manifests itself" (98).

To give a sense of the scope of the dialogue, I will sketch out the broader issues at stake in Plato's relentless focus on names (which, for much of the dialogue, takes the form of a minute consideration of specific etymologies). In the *Cratylus*, we find Plato working out his ideas regarding mimesis in language—that is, regarding language as a means of adequately describing reality—preparing the way for his future discussions of mimesis more generally. In mimesis (Greek for "imitation," but in fact a concept closer in meaning to the broader term "representation"), Plato confronts the limits of description itself as adequate to reality, or better as a means of discovering and communicating the true. Examining the epistemological value of mimesis, he finds it ultimately inadequate, a judgment already rendered in the *Cratylus*, where Plato also offers the first intimations of his theory of Forms (also known as Ideas, a translation of the Greek *eide*, plural of *eidos*).[25] Mimesis may be sufficient for empirical particulars, which are knowable by the senses, but only the intellect can know things in themselves (the Forms). Language, mimetic for Plato, can provide no *direct*

access to the true. In the *Cratylus*, the etymologies of words like "justice" provide comical examples of this, leading Socrates to declare near the end of the dialogue, "[T]he knowledge of things is not to be derived from names. No, they must be studied and investigated in themselves" (439b). Plato will later arrive at a full articulation of this divide between mimesis and the knowledge of Forms in the *Theaetetus* and in the following dialogues of his mature period. Nonetheless, language—and mimesis more generally—persists in Plato as essential to the ethical functioning of society. Thus, Plato's arguments regarding the correctness of names, first mounted in the *Cratylus* but left in a state of suspension by Socrates's turn against mimesis, are incorporated anew in the *Sophist*, where, as David Sedley remarks, "the formulation of a successful statement (*logos*), capable of truth or falsity, is resolved into two asymmetrical acts: first you 'name' a subject, then you go on to 'say' (*legein*) something about it" (162). In Plato's mature work, names cannot provide unmediated knowledge of the real or true, but this does not diminish the importance of striving for correctness in their use.

Three philosophical positions on language are delineated in the *Cratylus*, and they appear in ascending order from the least to the most acceptable philosophically. The first and lowest position is occupied by Conventionalism: the belief that language is a human construct, arbitrarily related to reality ("a contentless tag" [Reeve xiii]), hence carrying no intrinsic meaning. This position is unacceptable for Plato because it robs words of their grounding in reality, leaving language without a governing standard in its development—the wise can use it wisely and the foolish foolishly; it is relativistic. The second position is that of Naturalism: the belief that language, of divine origin, directly emanates from nature, intrinsically expressing the inner reality of things. This position is more acceptable because it does give a grounding to words and thus to language as a whole. It is too rigid, however; it cannot comprehend human use or account for the changes introduced by that use. The third position is that of Mimetism: the belief that language, although divine in origin, is shaped by its users into representations, copies of nature instead of nature itself. Grounded in reality (as is the case with Naturalism), but able (like Conventionalism) to account for human influences, Mimetism strives to reach a correctness of names, conceiving of a governing standard that allows the philosopher to distinguish between the wise and the foolish usage. This makes it the most acceptable of the three positions. Yet Plato's ultimate dissatisfaction with all three positions shows in his hints of a fourth at the end of the dialogue, in what will come to be known as the theory of Forms. This fourth position is not like the others since it is not concerned with the origins of language,

its relationship to nature, or its susceptibility to regulated use, but rather its status vis-à-vis truth. Indeed, Plato's fourth position, Idealism, is to some extent anti-linguistic.

As is customary in Plato's works, each participant in the dialogue (Hermogenes, Cratylus, and Socrates) dramatizes a position: Hermogenes is the Conventionalist, Cratylus the Naturalist, and Socrates the Mimetist (at the end of the dialogue, however, he is revealed to be something of an Idealist as well). The dialogue as a whole follows the course of Socrates's attempts to prove both Hermogenes and Cratylus wrong in their positions on language, at first from the standpoint of Mimetism (presented as a rational mediation between Conventionalism and Naturalism), eventually from the standpoint of Idealism, a rupture in the understanding of language and its epistemological possibilities as previously presented in the dialogue. The Idealist position considers language philosophically insufficient as an instrument of knowledge, conceiving of the true as outside the realm of the representable.

The three positions on language dramatized in the *Cratylus* recur in the history of modern and contemporary language philosophy, linguistics, aesthetics, theology, and poetics, although in an altered hierarchic order than the one conceived by Plato. Conventionalism (or Hermogenism) is no longer conceived as the lowest or least acceptable approach. Steadily on the rise since the sixteenth century, more and more predominant since the appearance of comparative philology in the nineteenth century and the development of linguistics as an autonomous science of language, systematized and radicalized by Saussure, Conventionalism is now the dominant paradigm in matters of language. Naturalism (or Cratylism), after enjoying a position of relative prominence in Neoplatonic, Symbolist, and Romantic discourses, is now considered a past legacy of foundational philosophical systems enamored with the metaphysics of presence, authenticity, and essential truthfulness. This historical turn toward Conventionalism has only partially affected the survival of Mimetism, Socrates's first position. Although contested by postmodern artists and critics on the grounds of its perceived danger as an instrument of ideology, mimesis remains central to any discussion of the nature of art or of art's relation to society, and it continues to occupy a central position in aesthetic, literary, and cognitive theory. Plato's anti-linguistic position, his Idealism, also persists, most notably in theology, and, despite diminished prestige among philosophers, continues to shape discussions of the ineffable, unsayable, or unrepresentable. Whenever words fail their users—and when, as a consequence, what remains unsaid is experienced as a higher, more authentic truth, a truth untouched by everyday language—Plato's fourth position reasserts itself.

The Cratylus

The dialogue opens on Hermogenes's request, posed to Cratylus, to have Socrates join the discussion that he and Cratylus have been conducting on the matter of language. Cratylus consents, but after uttering a few words falls into an enigmatic silence that lasts throughout the first part of the dialogue.[26] Cratylus's ideas about language are henceforth recapitulated by Hermogenes in counterpoint to his own views. The rhetorical choice of presenting the dialogue between Hermogenes and Cratylus as a pre-textual event creates a distinct temporal distancing of this exchange from the actual dialogue held by Hermogenes, Socrates, and Cratylus. This distancing can be read as a sign that Hermogenes and Cratylus stand as proxies for an old-fashioned philosophical audience that needs to be educated on the concept of mimesis (as happens in the first and second parts of the dialogue) and its relation to the nascent doctrine of forms (a theme intimated in the third part of the dialogue). In fact, quite apart from the immediate, pedagogical aims of the dialogue, the casting of Hermogenes and Cratylus is redolent with meaning, for both characters represent historical stages in Plato's own intellectual formation. Called forth, perhaps, as a rhetorical exercise, the two are sent back to the past at dialogue's end, when, parting ways with Socrates, who walks serenely toward the city, a disgruntled Cratylus returns to the countryside accompanied partway by a disoriented Hermogenes.

Through Hermogenes, as Sedley points out, Plato also critiques, in addition to Conventionalism, the relativism of Protagoras. This is a carefully introduced critique, for Socrates could not legitimately insinuate "that Hermogenes's linguistic conventionalism *entails* Protagoras's relativism" (54, emphasis added). The opposite, however, is certainly the case: relativism entails Conventionalism. By linking them together, Plato is able to broaden the attack. Through Cratylus, instead, as already noted, Plato critiques the doctrine of linguistic Naturalism and its archaic understanding of language as an embodiment of meaning. Such doctrine was present in magic and pre-philosophical thought, as well as in the pre-Socratic philosophy of language embraced by Heraclitus.[27] The *Cratylus*, in fact, as commentators never fail to note, dramatizes Plato's rethinking of his own apprenticeship in the shadow of Heraclitus's legacy and the reasons for his distancing from that legacy. This dramatization is enhanced by the fact that the historical Cratylus was, like the fictional Cratylus, a faithful disciple of Heraclitus and an early teacher of Plato. Aristotle, in the *Metaphysics*, mentions that through Cratylus the young Plato learned of the Heraclitean doctrine of permanent flux.[28] Both historically and discursively, Heracliteanism is, from Plato's standpoint, an archaic, irrational kind of philosophical outlook, as

testified to by Socrates's imputation that the followers of Heraclitus are "too easily persuaded" by their sense perceptions, not realizing that perception is not knowledge (*Cratylus* 440d). Further developing this argument in the *Theaetetus*, Socrates clarifies that "knowledge does not reside in the impressions, but in our reflections upon them" and that "perception and knowledge cannot possibly be the same thing" (*Theaetetus* 186d, 186e). It is then of no little relevance that Socrates's maieutic dialogism fails to convert Cratylus to the doctrine of Forms and leaves Hermogenes in a gray area of indecision. The dialogue is a fictional remembrance of past events whose outcome could not be altered, not even by the persuasive Socrates, though the effort is not wasted since it serves to produce a semblance of the birth of Plato's philosophical thought and his break from his older teachers.

The choice of Hermogenes over Cratylus as the first interlocutor to engage Socrates, with Cratylus keeping silent for a good part of the dialogue, is revelatory of Plato's negative assessment of linguistic Naturalism as an irrational form of oracular dictation. Cratylus's enigmatic silence serves as a reminder of the fate of the historical Cratylus, who abandoned language in his old age out of his radicalization of the Heraclitean doctrine, as we learn from Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. According to Aristotle's account, Cratylus became "progressively more extreme about flux . . . so extreme that he decided one should not speak at all . . . he simply moved his finger" so as to prove his belief that "things change so rapidly that you cannot engage with them, either by naming them or by stepping into them in any way that takes any time at all: during the time taken, however short, they become something else" (Sedley 19).

Hermogenes's recapitulation of Cratylus's thoughts about language introduces the latter figure's philosophical radicalism. Thus, at the very opening of the dialogue, Cratylus emerges as the spokesperson of an enigmatic philosophical position eschewing intelligible argumentation or logical reasoning:

> *Hermogenes*: I should explain to you, Socrates, that our friend Cratylus has been arguing about names. He says that they are natural and not conventional—not a portion of the human voice which men agree to use—but that there is a truth or correctness in them, which is the same for Hellenes as for barbarians. Whereupon I ask him whether his own name of Cratylus is a true name or not, and he answers yes. And Socrates? Yes. Then every man's name, as I tell him, is that which he is called. To this he replies, If all the world were to call you Hermogenes, that would not be your name. And when I am anxious to have a further explanation, he is ironical and mysterious, and seems to imply that he has a notion of his own about the matter if he would only tell, and could entirely

> convince me if he chose to be intelligible. Tell me, Socrates, what this oracle means, or rather tell me, if you will be so good, what is your own view of the truth or correctness of names. (*Cratylus*, 383a–384a)

Hermogenes is exasperated by Cratylus's obscurity of speech, and refusal to be intelligible, and so refers to him, sarcastically or with respect, as an "oracle." Cratylus, we understand from Hemogenes' explanation, believes that there is an inherent "truth or correctness" in names. This position, as we discover in the following exchange with Socrates, runs counter to that of Hermogenes. Socrates is called on to mediate between the two, which he does by explaining the principles of Cratylism and translating the oracular pronouncements of Cratylus to Hermogenes.

In the first part of the dialogue, Socrates questions Hermogenes on his understanding of names. Hermogenes does not believe that there is any "truth" in names because he thinks language is a mutable array of agreed-upon conventions that indicate the real. This indication excludes by definition any notion of essential representation: a name is "a contentless tag" or index of the real (Reeve xiii). The arbitrary character of language makes names semantically empty deictical signs (like "here," "there," "this," "that"); they do not refer to anything, and do not mean anything in and by themselves, but acquire reference and significance in relation to the needs and the circumstances of the discursive context in which they are used. In the Conventionalist approach, the "correctness of names" is always relative to the speaker's situation, and dependent on collective agreement on the indexical use and application of each given name. Cratylus's position, as it slowly emerges through Socrates's explanations and covertly undermining analysis, is instead founded on the belief that the reference and meaning of words were established by "a power more than human" and given to the human race with the specific function of providing essential "information about things" to those who would use them (*Cratylus* 438c, 435e). In Cratylus's system, the natural world, in its material state of sounds, shapes, and colors, is conceived as intimately connected to a nonhuman language of letters and syllables, each element of language an emanation of a natural phenomenon carrying a precise, unalterable semantic content. Thus, although connected to nature, entire names are not immediately found in nature, but necessitate the intervention of a higher intelligence capable of lifting, as it were, the appropriate natural letters from their cradle of thingness so as to mold them into whole words, proper (and appropriate) names. For Cratylus, this "power more than human" is embodied in the figure of the "legislator" (*nomothete*), a being who presides over matters of linguistic signification. The work of the legislator guarantees that names belong to things and express their innermost

nature, so that the first tenet of linguistic Naturalism, succinctly expressed by Cratylus with the words "He who knows names knows also the things which are expressed by them," can be fulfilled (*Cratylus* 435d).

Because of their divine descent, and epistemological mandate, Cratylus believes that all names are "rightly imposed . . . if they are names at all" and that all names if they are names exhibit a stringent propriety of designation (*Cratylus* 429b). The criterion of propriety is ultimate and all-defining: if and when a name is found to describe the qualities of a thing or of a person improperly, that name is deemed to be extraneous to the nature of its extralinguistic *designatum*. That name is not only incorrect; it is not a name at all, because it fails to fulfill its epistemological mandate: it cannot tell anything about the nature of the thing, cannot transmit any knowledge about it. Falsity, in Cratylus's doctrine, is inconceivable. To affirm the false, Cratylus explains, is comparable to the act of "add[ing], subtract[ing] or misplac[ing] a letter" when writing a name. That name, as a result, "is not only written wrongly, but not written at all, . . . *becomes other than a name*" (Cratylus 432a, emphasis added). Whenever a name is wrongly appropriated to name something other than its *designatum*, whenever language is wrongly used to affirm the false, the speaker "put[s] himself in motion to no purpose, and . . . his words . . . [amount to] an unmeaning sound like the noise of hammering at a brazen pot" (*Cratylus* 430a).

Positioned between Cratylus and Hermogenes, Socrates argues throughout the second part of the dialogue that the correctness of names is neither a matter of arbitrary conventions nor a function of immanent meaning, but a condition of mimetic adequacy. The assessment of language's mimetic adequacy goes through the etymological analysis of names, a task Socrates undertakes throughout much of the dialogue. For Socrates too letters and syllables have meanings and names are formed by combining them, but he recognizes that those combinations, formed by humans, are liable to error, or can become inexplicable because of accidental additions. In such occurrences, convention overrides accuracy, whether that accuracy be conceived as a matter of imminent meaning or mimetic fidelity. For this reason, Socrates declares, the assessment of the adequate level of mimesis should be assigned to somebody specialized in questions of rhetoric, for the use of names (as distinct from their creation) is a matter of argument-making. "[T]he work of the legislator is to give names," Socrates reasons with Cratylus, but "the dialectician must be the director if the names are to be rightly given" (*Cratylus* 390d). The dialectician is in the position to give rules for the legislators because he is "the name-user *par excellence*" (Sedley 5). The legislator may create the tool, but the dialectician wields it.[29] Once the legislator chooses—or, more precisely, individuates—a name, the dialectician will have to test its appropriateness.

To prove this point to Hermogenes, Socrates tests the appropriateness of a representative group of names of gods and demigods, then a group of abstract nouns of general interest such as "wisdom" and "justice." This testing is accomplished with the help of an eclectic approach that comprehends syntactic analysis of idiomatic expressions, dissection of names into syntagmatic units, suggestive wordplay, and eponymies, as well as etymologies in the more conventional sense.[30] Although this approach may appear playful, irreverent, or arbitrarily conducted (particularly when the appearance of a name is adjusted so as to fit its supposed meanings by dropping or adding a few letters), it was a common methodology in Plato's time, used "to articulate the semantic constitution of *onomata*, largely proper names, with the goal of shedding light on [their] bearers' natures" (Levin 80). In Socrates's case, the interpretative apparatus was deployed to accomplish the work of "decoding" what the legislators had "encoded" (Sedley 42). Carrying out the task of the dialectician, of the one called upon to negotiate the adequate degree of relation between name and *nominatum* (the thing, person, or event named), Socrates makes the search for correct names a matter of rational decision.[31] This search, it must be emphasized, keeps faith with the Cratylic assumption that names are instruments of knowledge bestowed upon humans to help them discern, distinguish, and understand reality. Since, in this system of belief, each individual letter has complete imitative powers, when Socrates adds or drops a letter he is perfecting the bond between name and *nominatum*, but doing so by fulfilling his duty as a dialectician.

Although Socrates presents his form of mediated Cratylism as an appeal to practical reason, a way of improving on Cratylus's belief in the correctness of names, this display of Mimetism as a kind of rational Cratylism gives way toward the end of the dialogue to a sudden reversal of philosophical positions. There Socrates argues that even the most successful act of mimesis will fail to give access to the true, to reality as a state unsusceptible to change.[32] His disagreement with Cratylus emerges, in a well-calibrated rhetorical gesture, around the discussion of the imperfect name "justice" (*dikaion*), a gesture that emphasizes the lack of justice instrinsic to the word's etymology, hence the fact that there is no intrinsic justice in names as such. According to Levin, the turn in Socrates's attitude proves that rational Cratylism was only a setup, that Socrates was only "setting the stage for his argument that . . . a reliance on etymology and [a] privileging of individual natures are fundamentally misguided" (49). But Socrates's surprising dismissal of his own middle position can be easily understood if we keep in mind that the dialogue recapitulates Plato's intellectual development. Just as Socrates overturns the philosophical position of Plato's youth, so Plato overturns the Mimetism of Socrates, having Socrates himself argue that

mimesis (linguistic mimesis in this case) can only provide an incomplete and approximate representation of reality, a merely partial understanding of the "imperceptible but intelligible" ideas (Forms) that shape reality (for instance, the ideas of height, length, space, and time) (Bostock 13). The value of an adequate and therefore truthful mimesis must be weighed on a scale that measures what is seen but transitory (the real as perceived) against what is unseen but permanent (the ideas that constitute the real). It follows, then, that names, even when correct, do not name the real, they only provide perceptions of the real; Mimetism and, indeed, language itself are insufficient for philosophical knowledge. But although Socrates casts his heavy shadow of doubt on the value of mimesis, his disavowal pertains only to language in philosophy. Ordinary uses of language remain valid, indeed necessary. This mixed judgment of language means, moreover, that despite the arrival of Idealism a place remains for Mimetism, that is, for the perfecting role of the dialectician in mediating between Cratylism and Hermogenism.

Primary and Secondary Cratylism in the Cratylus

The *Cratylus* does not present us, as is customary in Plato's dialogues, with the scene of a philosophical *agon*. Granted, there are three characters, each representing a different position on language, but Hermogenes is an easy opponent to convince or convert (it is useful here to remember that Plato in his early dialogues casts Hermogenes as the simpleton; in this particular dialogue he seems to represent instead the voice of *doxa*, or common sense), and Cratylus, for his part, is not exactly an enemy in matters of language. Although Naturalism and Mimetism are different and opposed positions, they are not absolutely opposed; a significant amount of overlap obtains between them. The natural language of Cratylus is still mimetic, albeit a perfect mirroring rather than an act of representation in the modern sense; and Socrates's representation still has as its goal the perfect mirroring that Naturalism claims as the root condition of all language. In consequence of this overlap, Genette regards the two positions as different degrees of a single position, defining Naturalism and Mimetism as primary and secondary Cratylism, respectively. Even more tellingly, Genette uses the terms primary and secondary Cratylism and primary and secondary "mimologism" as synonyms (as, indeed, they may seem to be from a Hermogenist point of view, since Naturalism and Mimetism are more forcefully opposed to Conventionalism than to one another).[33] Thus, while Socrates and Cratylus are in overall agreement on the basic premise that names bear a mimetic relation to things—that

"representation by likeness . . . is infinitely better than representation by a chance sign"—they differ markedly in their understanding of what constitutes mimesis in language (*Cratylus* 434a). For Cratylus, mimesis involves no symbolic or dialectical mediation between thought and reality. It is an immediate given, primary in Genette's terms. For Socrates, mimesis *is* mediation. In Genette's terms, it is secondary. For Cratylus, names are either correct or incorrect, and they are useless if the latter. For Socrates, even incorrect names can be adequate. Though he believes "that the elements of language [i.e., letters, sounds, shapes] have an 'absolute signification'—in other words, a natural one," he accepts that "the words of the actual lexicon can betray [that absolute standard]" (Genette 205). Thus, even when a name contains descriptive elements that run counter to the character of the thing named, as is the case in the wittily chosen example of "Hermogenes," the name can still be viable for everyday use. At least for Socrates; Cratylus, however, will not be satisfied. He conceives of representation as the materialization of a necessary, intrinsic bond between thought and reality. "[A]s the name is, so also is the thing" (*Cratylus* 435d): if Hermogenes is no true son of Hermes, rich and intellectually gifted, as his name promises him to be, then he is *not* "Hermogenes," any more than "a man [would be] a horse or a horse a man" just because someone called it so (385a).[34]

Mimesis in primary Cratylism is nothing else but the manifestation of the essence of things in language. Socrates's task, in the second part of the dialogue, is to prove to Cratylus that this state of unmediated, complete mimesis is not achievable, mostly because of language's intrinsic imperfection, an argument he presents with the help of increasingly arcane etymologies for names that are defective from Cratylus's point of view but nonetheless still capable of conveying the truth of the thing represented. What the etymologies show is that names are not, as Cratylus and, indeed, Socrates himself would like to think, ensembles of letters and other small elements of meaning that in their totality communicate all the essential qualities of the thing named. For Socrates, then, as the dialogue increasingly makes clear, there must be "some other principle of truth . . . in names" than the one put forward by his interlocutor (*Cratylus* 432c). This alternative principle is secondary Cratylism, a form of mimesis in which "the general character [of reality] is preserved" against the pitfalls and shortcomings of language, so that "even if some of the proper letters are wanting, still the thing is signified" (433a). Having identified this new principle, Socrates also argues that perfect "mimologism" (to use Genette's term for linguistic mimesis) would not even be desirable: "But then how ridiculous would be the effect of names on things, if they were exactly the same with them! For they would be the

doubles of them, and no one would be able to determine which were the names and which were the realities" (432d).

Having proven that Cratylus's position is imperfect and undesirable, Socrates asks him to consider a sequence of words (including "knowledge" [*episteme*], "inquiry" [*istoria*] and "memory" [*mneme*]), all of whose etymologies suggest stoppage, cessation of movement, and arrest.[35] At issue in these etymologies is not only the correctness of the individual names, but the correctness of Heraclitean philosophy, to which Cratylus subscribes. Socrates means to catch his interlocutor in a double bind. If the names are correct (if the essential nature of knowledge, for example, is "rather stopping the soul at things than going round with them" [*Cratylus* 437a]), then Heraclitus is wrong in his belief that reality is in a constant state of flux. If Heraclitus is instead correct, then Cratylus should concede the imperfection of language. The presentation of this aporia exposes a problem with primary Cratylism that extends to secondary Cratylism—the fact that truth cannot be founded on language, language has to be founded on truth. This realization leads directly to an intimation of the theory of Forms:

> *Socrates*: But if things are only to be known through names, how can we suppose that the givers of names had knowledge, or were legislators, before there were names at all, and therefore before they could have known them? . . . [O]bviously recourse must be had to another standard . . . , a standard which shows the truth of things. . . . [And] if that is true, Cratylus, then I suppose things may be known without names? . . . [W]e may admit so much, that the knowledge of things is not to be derived from names. No, they must be studied and investigated in themselves. (*Cratylus* 438b–439b)

Socrates's declaration that "things . . . must be studied and investigated in themselves" is one of the most important moments in the dialogue, for even though he is openly declaring here, to borrow Halliwell's words, his "loss of faith in the power of language to unlock the truth about the abiding reality that, he is convinced, must underlie the flux of the world," he is not renouncing language (47). Rather, he is pointing to the limits of language—and mimesis more generally—as a standard of truth so as to suggest the existence of "another standard." The Forms, therefore, as this new standard will soon become known, are extra-mimetic and extra-linguistic, a knowledge that can only be gained "from the 'things in themselves' not from their 'images' in language" (Halliwell 48). This critique, then, is meant to draw Cratylus away from his pre-philosophical commitments toward the Mimetism of Socrates, if not toward Plato's own

doctrine of ideas. In keeping with this goal, the dialogue closes on a double-edged critique of primary Cratylism and Heraclitean philosophy:

> *Socrates*: [N]o man of sense will like to put himself or the education of his mind in the power of names. Neither will he so far trust names or the givers of names as to be confident in any knowledge which condemns himself and other existences to an unhealthy state of unreality; he will not believe that all things leak like a pot, or imagine that the world is a man who has a running nose. (*Cratylus* 440c)

Were Cratylus to accept this argument in its entirety, he would have to renounce both his faith in absolute mimesis and his adherence to Heraclitus. But even if he accepted only part of the argument, he would need to make a hard choice between the two. If he held to Heraclitus, he would need to reconsider his faith in the infallibility of the *nomothete*. If he retains that faith, he must renounce the Heraclitean doctrine that all is flux. Cratylus makes none of these choices. Although he agrees with many of Socrates's particulars, he clings to his previous beliefs. At the end of the dialogue, he leaves for the countryside with Hermogenes; Socrates returns to the city—the opposite directions taken by the two philosophers emphasizing the intractability of their positions and the irresolution of their dispute.

Core Cratylic Themes: Language as the Proper, Poet as Legislator, Dream of Plenitude

Language as the Proper

The distinction between Cratylism and Hermogenism, between Naturalism and Conventionalism, permits itself to be understood as a difference between language as the proper, the necessary, the inherently meaningful; and language as the improper, the convenient, the arbitrarily meaningful. All three of the poets I study desired the former, but accepted the existence of the latter as a historical—and so presumably correctable—fact. The relationship between Cratylism and Hermogenism is thus a prominent problem that each poet addressed in his or her own way.

Whitman was the most hopeful in his attempt to resolve this problem. He acknowledged, on the one hand, that language was a human construct, changing over time and through its everyday use; on the other hand, he put forward a claim that some elements of language, although created by their speakers, are proper and unyielding natural facts. The most notable examples of the latter, Cratylic elements are the aboriginal words of the

Native American tribes and their contemporary counterparts in American slang, words that Whitman described to Horace Traubel as "genuine creations . . . words that will last" (WWWC 5:194). This divided stance is held together by Whitman's understanding that American English is constantly enlarging and evolving through the incorporation of new and foreign words, new idiomatic expressions, and new accents, and that this enlargement and evolution is organic to the life of the nation and its people. The best of America, Whitman believed, was its cosmopolitanism. Moreover, unlike others of his time, Whitman considered the American idiom an authentic language in its own right, not simply a provincial form of British English and not simply an artificial construct in the service of a new polity (as was believed by the "constructive nationalists" of the eighteenth century [Cmiel 924]). Taken all together, this meant that seemingly Hermogenist elements absorbed into or created within a Cratylic design could stand revealed as, in Whitman's words, "the outward expression of wha[t] [von Humboldt] calls the spirit or individuality of a nation" (DBN 3:721). To substantiate this claim, Whitman identified a foundation of words unique to the Americas and to American English, aboriginal names that displayed a natural "fitness" and "charm" and that were eminently "appropriate" to the new nation's geography and the natural features of its landscape (DBN 3:752). Importations and inventions were measured against this standard. Their fittingness, of course, sometimes required adjustment and change. For Whitman, incarnate meanings must be proposed, imagined, and pursued. Pronunciation, for instance, had to be appropriate to the new context. As Whitman told Traubel, "John Quincy Adams . . . declared that . . . when a nation took alien words into its language, it had the right, or assumed it, to fix its new music as it may—to adjust it to the new connections. And I suppose that will stand" (WWWC 9:89).

In the first phase of her career, (Riding) Jackson was engaged in a struggle between Mimetism and Hermogenism—in her terms, between a language of truth and ordinary language—and she considered this struggle a moral and epistemic problem best addressed in the context of literature. As she wrote in *Epilogue*, the journal she edited with Robert Graves in the 1930s, "The difference between life and literature is the difference between fact and truth, and the difference between littleness and entirety, and between the historically comprehensible and the ultimately knowable" (Epil 2:3). Truth, the ultimately knowable, achieves its greatest realization in language, but not all forms of language. Poetry, "the only absolute which is not an abstraction" (Epil 1:152), was (Riding) Jackson's most favored form, precisely because of its "Hospitality to Words" (the title of a poem), its rescue of language from everyday usage, from the mere "blab of mouths" (PLR 70, 137). According

to (Riding) Jackson, we are under a moral obligation to fulfill our humanity through the attainment of a linguistic ideal. In this respect, the everyday falls below the standards of the "suitably human"; it "connotes a lower level in the quality of anything of human mode," is "a sinking down . . . in a . . . less than successful achievement of the true quality of the human" (PLR xxxiv). The willingness of most language users to accept this "sinking down" is a cause of complaint throughout her career. In *Rational Meaning*, for instance, she writes:

> People do *not*, increasingly they do not, use their words as instruments for the direct expression of thought: increasingly, they use them, indeed, as signs, as if they did not have anything with which to *tell* their thought. Increasingly, they communicate in mutual isolation, as if words were the emergency communication-devices of beings lacking natural means of communication. (RM 120)

Toward the end of her first phase, however, (Riding) Jackson came to see that poetry falls short of truth precisely because of its specialness, which distinguishes poetry from what she first conceived of as pure language (in *The World and Ourselves*) and ultimately as natural language (in *The Telling*, *Rational Meaning*, and numerous essays). Although, as I will show in this book, (Riding) Jackson was never blind to poetry's limitations and had decidedly mixed feelings about the sensual properties that marked poetic language as distinct from ordinary speech, it was only with her embrace of Cratylism that those limitations and properties became insurmountable obstacles to truth:

> Poetry depends too much on powers of enlarging upon and exploiting the physical features of words to allow of fulfillment of the function of language—as I conceive language. Poetry is linguistically freakish; and it is not, in its freakishness, the natural spiritual speech of human beings. (LRJR 206)

As a consequence of this loss of faith in poetry, ordinary language became, in her view, the proper vehicle of the natural, even if, and when, everyday use becomes distorted by the changing fashions of the literary, philosophical, or scientific world. In embracing Cratylism, (Riding) Jackson is adamant that language is "a real entity, and one that has a destiny of fidelity to reality, and to the capability of human beings of functioning as articulate residents of reality" (RM 110).[36] She is then careful in distinguishing the natural, the "plain good use of words, which is nothing but an entirely good use of them" (RM 90), from the unnatural usage dictated by intellectual

or aesthetic fashions. This distinction reflects her belief that if professionalization of language *use* (of which poetry is a prime example) distorts natural language out of a misguided focus on craft, the professionalization of language *studies* confounds the natural apprehension of language out of a malicious and self-vested "interest in presenting language as an intrinsically faulty instrument" (RM 90). Contemporary approaches to language willfully breed a wrong disposition in the wielding and understanding of words as empty and variable signs, not as natural meaning-entities. She is confident, however, that notwithstanding the depth of distortion language has reached in contemporary society, and notwithstanding the state of collective forgetting of "plain good use," language, "the grand instrument of human self-correction," can find its way back to a natural course with the help of her linguistic work (RM 90).

For Olson, the problem with Hermogenist language is its abstraction from the concrete. The attraction of Cratylism is its incompatibility with abstraction. Insofar as Olson associated the Cratylic with forms of language reaching back to humankind's earliest practices of communication—stone-writing, glyphs and other nonalphabetic systems, oral culture—its persistence in modern times holds open the possibility that abstraction can be overcome. Abstraction for Olson is a historical fact, which he characteristically dates to the redefinition of *logos* as reason in classical Greece:

> We have lived long in a generalizing time, at least since 450 B.C. And it has had its effects on the best of men, on the best of things. Logos, or discourse, for example, in that time, so worked its abstractions into our concept and use of language that . . . particularism has to be fought for, anew. (CPr 155–56)

For Whitman, Hermogenist elements could be absorbed into a Cratylic design as part of the continuing evolution of language; the ultimate success of this "Cratylization" he linked to the political destiny of the people. For Olson, the coexistence of Hermogenist and Cratylic elements calls into question forward-looking teleologies such as Whitman's; the success of the Cratylic is constructed instead as an act of historical recovery and political resistance. With abstraction comes capitalism, commodification, "spectatorism" (CPr 159). To counteract those forces requires a reacquaintance with what abstraction superseded. This is not a nostalgia for prelapsarian times, but a calculated response to contemporary conditions, a strategic recoiling, "a step like the bullfighter who leaps back in order to deliver the mortal thrust" (CPr 19).

Poet as Legislator

Cratylism offers to writers the enviable position of *nomothete*, the specialized name-giver who knows the proper meanings of things and therefore knows their proper language. In Plato's dialogue, the *nomothete*, the "artificer of names," is a semi-divine being endowed with a "power more than human" (Cratylus 390e, 438c). This figure survives in Shelley's description of the poet as the unacknowledged legislator of the universe, although the power of legislation there is no longer specific to name-giving, but part of the overall prophetic task of the Romantic poet. Whitman, (Riding) Jackson, and Olson were attracted to the prophetic, but the legislative function they ascribe to the poet is closer in spirit to that of Plato's *nomothete* than Shelley's seer.[37] They do, however, diverge from Plato in two important respects. First, their care for the proper in language is not divine in inspiration, but is instead based on a human understanding of the common good. Second, while Plato's *nomothete* stands at the origin of language, Whitman, (Riding) Jackson, and Olson stand in the midst of language's ongoing history; as legislators, they do not confer names, but adjudicate between them, that is, they mark out for others the distinction between the proper and the improper. In this respect, they have more in common with the character of Cratylus in Plato's dialogue than with the mythical figure of the *nomothete*. Cratylus too claims a human understanding of the common good, and he too would adjudicate between the proper and improper. Cratylus as *nomothete* is what I mean by legislator in the American Cratylus, a role that can only be understood in its own right by keeping it separate from that of poet as prophet.[38]

The poet as legislator is dedicated to the well-being of language, which has the primary function of informing us about the real and communicating its meaning truthfully. This primary function has a direct social value; it establishes an ethical society founded on the real and the true—a democratic society, since access to the real and true is not the privilege of a few, but within the range of all. To reassert the primary function of language, then, is to renew society, an important concern for all three poets. For Whitman, inherited language stands to be corrected by recourse to the natural language of the people—the slang of the streets—and by a systematic substitution of "aboriginal" for "colonial" names. (Riding) Jackson began her career by advancing the Emersonian notion that poets and poetry could rectify language, but came to believe that a mindful adherence to the meaning of words (what she would term "speaking true") would itself be sufficient for realizing the oneness of minds, the perfect agreement needed for a renewal of society. "[A]s we speak it true," (Riding) Jackson exhorts her readers in *The Telling*, "we *have* new being, and we are in the new time" (T 37).

For Olson, instead, alienation and commodification have muddled the resources of natural language, and awareness of the originary potentialities of words must be restored for experience to again become whole. This preoccupation with the recovery of a proper use of language had critical implications for their practices as poets. Poetry, they saw, was not exempt from doing injury to language. Whitman, for instance, considered the artificial musicality of verse and its departure from natural speech patterns deadly. This led him, in conversation with Traubel, to criticize the poet and musician Sidney Lanier, author of a book on English prosody. "Study Lanier's choice of words," he advised Traubel, "they are too often fit rather for sound than for sense. His ear was over-sensitive. . . . [T]his over-tuning of the ear, this extreme deference paid to oral nicety, reduced the majesty, the solid worth, of his rhythms" (WWWC 1:171). In a previous conversation, Whitman had declared his almost complete indifference toward the "poetic lilt" or the artificial musicality of poetic language. "Well—the [poetic] lilt is all right: yes, right enough: but there's something anterior—more imperative," he affirmed, adding, "I take a good deal of trouble with words: yes, a good deal, but what I am after is the content not the music of words" (WWWC 1:163). Like Whitman, (Riding) Jackson realized that poetic craft, rather than safeguarding truth in language (the theme of her poem "Come, Words, Away" [PLR 137–39]), smothers truth in "verbal rituals that court sensuosity" (PLR 414). More pessimistic than Whitman, she renounced poetry altogether to become what she described as "a natural teller," speaking in a "diction liberated from both literary exactions and the banal latitudes imposed by everyday 'good' usage" (T 59, 69). Olson was less concerned than Whitman or (Riding) Jackson in defining his project by holding it up against negative examples, but when he praises the verse of Shakespeare's late plays by saying they take "the English language off where it was stuck, on its own motor power, or accent, on that 'flow,' those—'wings'" (CPr 271), or when he writes in "Projective Verse" that "we have suffered from . . . the removal of verse from its producer and its reproducer, the voice" (CPr 245), he too identifies poetry as the site of a struggle to recover the proper in language, not in itself the achievement of the proper.

Because language in Cratylism is univocal in meaning, the legislator, if he or she is to adjudicate between the proper and improper, must act with *exactitude*, a term whose occasional usage by Whitman, (Riding) Jackson, and Olson provides crucial insight into their projects. In "Song of the Rolling Earth," for example, Whitman equates exactitude with nature, declaring:

I swear there is no greatness or power that does not emulate those of the earth,

> There can be no theory of any account unless it corroborate the theory of the earth,
> No politics, song, religion, behavior, or what not, is of account, unless it compare with the amplitude of the earth,
> Unless it face the exactness, vitality, impartiality, rectitude of the earth. (LG 223)

This natural rectitude *is* the proper, and Whitman invokes it in his 1855 preface:

> But to speak in literature with the perfect rectitude and insousiance of the movements of animals and the unimpeachableness of the sentiment of trees in the woods and grass by the roadside is the flawless triumph of art. . . . I will not . . . have in my writing any elegance or effect or originality to hang in the way between me and the rest like curtains. I will have nothing hang in the way, not the richest curtains. What I tell I tell for precisely what it is. (LG 717)

To speak in the way Whitman describes, to have language disclose its content "for precisely what it is," without the intervention of mere style, is ethical speech because it emulates nature, establishing "politics, song, religion, [and] behavior" on the solid principles of "exactness, vitality, impartiality, [and] rectitude."

(Riding) Jackson echoes Whitman when she writes, "What I mean is entirely in what I have said—I mean what I have said literally" (WO 383), as well as when she describes her early poems as having "an exactitude of verbal fitness meeting standards beyond that of mere stylistic nicety" (Conv. 69). Those standards provided a methodology in her first book-length theoretical study, *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (1927), written with Robert Graves, a book widely recognized as an inspiration for the New Criticism. There (Riding) Jackson (then Laura Riding) presented with Graves a practice of reading based on rejection of paraphrase in favor of a faithful adherence to each particle of meaning constituent of the text, a way of letting the poem "interpret itself, without introducing any new association or, if possible, any new words" (SMP 147). The ethical import of this standard of exactness, its "rectitude" in Whitman's terms, is developed most fully in *Rational Meaning*, (Riding) Jackson's posthumously published study of language and its correct use, much of which was researched and written with her second husband, Schuyler B. Jackson.[39] Referring in her "Foreword" to the "reverent sense of the value of *words*," she writes, "I am moved to point out how it is written in the Bible, as to exactitude: 'For it must be precept on precept, line upon line, here a little, and

there a little,' (Isaiah), and how promise is given there of there being turned 'to the people' a pure language" (RM 10). Charles Bernstein in his introduction points out that the impetus for *Rational Meaning* "originated in a project of Riding's from the 1930s, first called *Dictionary of Exact Meanings*" (xii), and one theme running through the ultimate book is the deplorable state of contemporary practice in giving definitions, "the trend in popular, academic, literary and lexicographical views of words as incapable of certain meaning and exact use" (RM 200).[40] At issue is "the deteriorated relationship of people to their language" (RM 201), and "[d]ictionaries," she points out, "are the suitable point of beginning for people's linguistic re-education" (RM 113).

Exactitude also enters into Olson's discourse as a matter of univocal meaning. Like (Riding) Jackson's self-interpreting poem free of "superfluous padding" (SMP 148), the poetry extolled by Olson "means exactly what it says" and relies on "no exterior means or materials, no mechanics except those hidden in the thing itself" (CPr 240, 282). When the means or material of the poem is speech, however, the mechanics of transcription will be required. This is the reason Olson grants special status to the typewriter: "it can, for a poet, indicate exactly the breath, the pauses, the suspensions even of syllables . . . which he intends" (CPr 245). In this aspect, the speech-based poem resembles the hieroglyphs of the Maya, which "in obedience to the phenomenal world . . . very exactly maintain the face and the proportion of nature" (ALMG 97).[41] For Olson, then, the poet as legislator is the one who, in obedience to nature, discovers the most proper use of language and shows others how or directs them to do the same. A powerful instance of this direction is given in Olson's 1956 sequel to "Projective Verse":

> You will speak in the next second by words which are, I propose, *prior* to all you are, and more necessary to you, if you are properly engaged with what it is to be human, than your toes, or your opposable thumb, that if you move as man has since either he or nature raised him to speech, to the capacity to speak, you move with or against yourself—you have more or less life—exactly to the degree that language empowers you. (CPr 424)[42]

For the American Cratylus, language empowers precisely to the degree that nature raises it into a capacity to speak that is organic and necessary.

Dream of Plenitude

In Genette's analysis, Cratylism is "a reverie par excellence, since it is a refusal of and a flight from difference, a desire or nostalgia—projected onto

verbal reality—for the reassuring and blissful . . . identity between word and thing, language and world" (307–8). This nostalgia, Genette concludes in the last pages of *Mimologics*, is essentially regressive, as it resonates with the "[pre-]Oedipal theme of uterine indifferentiation" (334). The recourse here to psychoanalytic theory and the general tenor of the way the "reverie" is described speaks directly to the era in which the book was originally composed and published (it first appeared in France in 1976), but Genette is certainly correct that Cratylic thought has a dreamlike quality and that this dream is one of plenitude. Whether this plenitude is essentially womblike is an open question. I find Genette more compelling when he speaks of Cratylism as "a complex and more or less conscious system of desires or . . . predilections to be satisfied" (334). The fantastic aspect of this system of desires is often its most notable feature. This is especially true of natural alphabets, of which the "Poetical Alphabet" of Benjamin Paul Blood (excerpted in Jed Rasula and Steve McCaffery's anthology *Imagining Language*) is an excellent example. Born in New York in the early nineteenth century, Blood's detailed descriptions of the characteristic traits of each letter's shape and sound were based on intuitions that preceded his confirming reading of "the 'Kratylus' of Plato" (he notes with pleasure that he "unknowingly concurred with Plato . . . in the interpretation of the sounds of a half dozen of the letters") (Rasula and McCaffrey 415). Thus, for example, the short *i* "has a thinning, perpendicularly attenuating effect"; "*g*, *l*, and *r* . . . are the giant consonants, expressive of unquestionable and unequivocal power"; and "*sh* . . . suggests moist confusion" (Rasula and McCaffrey 416, 418, 419).[43]

Notwithstanding the "phantasmic" quality of "mimologic thought," however, the dream of plenitude can also be understood as a sign of Cratylism's utopian aspect (Genette 434). This understanding of "dream" is in keeping with Plato's own, which, as Rachel Barney points out, treats dreaming primarily as a speculative activity, and only occasionally as a flight from reality. Barney identifies two epistemological possibilities for the category: "dream as *source*," the presentation of "an idea without any particular explanation or support," hence a "message" that "demands careful interpretation and testing" (149); and "dream as *state*," either "a state of *misapprehension* and delusion" or an experience of incomplete knowledge, "*the dream as glimpse*," "an instance of . . . hypothetical reasoning about real objects" (Barney 149–51). Only the first of the two states fits the description of a flight from reality. The *Cratylus*, in Barney's account, relies on the other meanings: dream as source and dream as glimpse. Thus, when Socrates confides at the end of the dialogue, "There is a matter, master Cratylus, about which I often dream, and should like to ask your opinion. Tell me whether there is or is not any

absolute beauty or good, or any other absolute existence" (*Cratylus* 439c–d), he is (as Sedley puts it) "describing a *hypothetical* grasp of something—trading on the way that in dreams we treat things *as if* they were true or real, without knowing whether they actually are" (165). Cratylus too is a dreamer. When he maintains his belief in a natural language notwithstanding his encounter with Socrates, he is holding to "a *hypothetical* grasp," the same grasp that Whitman, (Riding) Jackson, and Olson maintained in the face of contrary evidence and the lack of immediate confirmation. As with Socrates, their dream also involved an absolute good, a language of epistemological plenitude.

In the three poets I study, Cratylism's utopian potential—its dream of plenitude—is not limited to language; it has a necessary social implication. Belief that words and things belong to one another—that language can open reality to unequivocal understanding and so bring reality into each person's grasp—brings with it the promise of a total democracy in which each person is empowered by knowledge in equal measure and so maintains an equal ability to participate in public life. Each of the poets I examine emphasized, of course, a different aspect of this perfect society—an emphasis that followed directly from each poet's individual articulation of Cratylism—but all three shared a belief that fullness of human experience could only be achieved through fullness of language, that the perfect society could only be achieved with a perfection of epistemic conditions. Whitman's emphasis on the particular form of democracy and social experience developing in America was supported by his interest in the power of names, in the efficacy of words naturally suited to the things they name (most notably place names, which link language to the land). As he writes of language more generally in "Democratic Vistas":

> Prospecting . . . the coming unsped days, and that new order in them . . . we see, fore-indicated, amid these prospects and hopes, new law-forces of spoken and written language—not merely the pedagogue-forms, correct, regular, familiar with precedents, made for matters of outside propriety, fine words, thoughts definitely told out—but a language fann'd by the breath of Nature, which . . . cares mostly for impetus and effects, and for what it plants and invigorates to grow. (PW 2:424)

(Riding) Jackson's Cratylism was focused instead on the "linguistic ultimate"—on "full delivery" and "full reception" of "the reality of human mind presence" (LRJR 325, 331)—and this dream of plenitude ("the potential of the perfect in word-use that language, in its abundant substance, abundantly promises" [FPPL 181]) had as its goal the collective happiness that

results from perfect communication. Acknowledging Whitman's dream, she eschewed the particularity of his vistas. "As Americans," she writes, "we believe . . . that the fulfillment of the American vision of human happiness is not to be sought . . . in any Americanization, or nationalization, of our linguistic inheritance, but only in the renewal of its time-worn excellence" (RM 60). Olson, too, looked beyond an American horizon. Although deeply engaged with American materials, he was interested above all in the concreteness of experience. Seeking a language as concrete as nature—a language "Equal . . . to the Real Itself," as he put it in the title of an essay on Melville's prose (CPr 120)—Olson hoped to "inhabit" and "act from and by" a "distinguishable and definable area of experience which has to be called totality . . . simply because it is all of everything there is to know and to feel" (OJ 10:95). Society for Olson derives from this plenitude; literally so, as he explains in "Definitions by Undoing":

> POLIS, then, is a filled up thing . . . the community or the body of the citizens, not their dwellings, not their houses, not their being as material, but being as group with will, and that will is from the Sanskrit stem to fill or fulfill, and includes such words as plenus, plebes, po-pulus, publicus, thus our publis etc., and manipulus, thus manipulate, ample, English full . . .
>
> . . . also is
> implere to fill up—impletion to
> finish to end to satisfy to complete
>
> POLIS IS FULL (DU 11–12)

This page intentionally left blank

CHAPTER 2

Substantial Words: Walt Whitman and the Power of Names

> *Cratylus*: The use of names, Socrates, as I should imagine, is to inform. The simple truth is that he who knows names knows also the things which are expressed by them.
>
> Plato, *Cratylus*, 435d

> All the greatness of any land, at any time, lies folded in its names. . . . I say nothing is more important than names. . . . No country can have its own poems without it have its own names.
>
> Walt Whitman, *An American Primer*

A self-described student of language, who thought of his poetry as "a language experiment," "an attempt to give the spirit, the body, the man, new words, new potentialities of speech," Walt Whitman contemplated writing his own dictionary and remained a lifelong collector of words and idiomatic expressions (cited in Traubel, *An American Primer*, n.p.).[1] Living in a time when the question of a national language was at the center of lively political debates and was generally regarded as a critical ground for contrasting assessments of the social and political life of the country, Whitman unhesitantly put his linguistic interests in the service of his nationalism and of his democratic political beliefs and presented himself as an advocate of American language, both in the forms it had inherited from England and in the new cosmopolitan forms it was taking under the shaping impact of cresting waves of immigration. Whitman's

meshing of language studies, political activism, and poetic pronouncements, his acute awareness of the role of the poet as public intellectual, have been the topic of extensive scholarly debate for over half a century, and my discussion of Whitman's poetics in this chapter is greatly indebted to that work.[2] My own approach has the specific aim of uncovering the Cratylic design of Whitman's project, his plan to transform American English into a language of names organically linked to their *designata*, a foundational language that would help to consolidate the nation's cultural identity and assist in the furthering of its political mandate. This project, however, was emphatically poetic, not scholarly or scientific. Whitman's language studies made him acutely aware that for many scholars language use is founded on convention (as Hermogenism argues) and that it functions as a system of representation (as Mimetism argues), hence that the natural and univocal correspondence of words and things is a contested position. As a consequence, the pursuit of a Cratylic American idiom was, as Whitman himself understood, a poetic project undertaken for a noble cause. At its very inception, in other words, the American Cratylus was an intellectual position adopted and elaborated in full awareness of its variance from accepted theory and empirical evidence, a "language experiment" justified above all by its "potentialities."[3]

Whitman's language experiment also took shape in relation to the differently anti-Hermogenist project of Ralph Waldo Emerson. In the following pages I look at that relation in two ways. My first section, "Whitman, Politics, and Language," treats the younger poet's work as a politicizing of Emersonian precepts. Setting Whitman against shifts in language theory from the late-eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth—from the humanly determined national language of the American Enlightenment to the organicism of the Transcendentalists in the Jacksonian period—I show how Whitman's focus on names reveals a desire to assimilate aspects of the earlier period's Conventionalism to the organicism of his own time. My next section, "Platonism and Cratylism," revisits Whitman's departure from Emerson as a philosophical difference, contrasting the older poet's commitment to a transcendental understanding of meaning to Whitman's emphatic materialism. Thus, where Emerson's poet stands in a hermeneutic relationship to reality, the "substantial words" of Whitman's Cratylism make reality immediately available (LG 219). My final section, "Cratylization," looks at Whitman's writings on language to show how he struggled to assimilate Hermogenist aspects of language to his overarching Cratylist program. Here I also show the link in Whitman's thinking between his theory of language and political beliefs, concluding with the coordination of the two in his poetry.

Whitman, Politics, and Language

Whitman's linguistic consciousness and his accentuated interest in language (his "linguisticity," in Michael P. Kramer's terminology) partake of the rich and complex background of language studies in America. The birth of a national debate on the American language came in the second half of the eighteenth century, at a time in which American intellectuals from all fields participated in the constructive search for a language that could, unmistakably, signify American independence from England, demarcating a final shaking off of any lingering vestiges of colonialism. In its early stages, the American interest in language was influenced by the empiricist philosophical climate of the Enlightenment, as evident in Noah Webster's *Dissertations on the English Language* (1789), a treatise of descriptive linguistics based on the Conventionalist assumption that "*the general practice* of a nation is the rule of propriety," a rule that, as Webster advised his readers, should "be consulted in so important a matter, as that of making laws for speaking" (cited in Kramer 58). Webster's scholarship was, in its epistemological parameters, empirical and antifoundational, in other words Hermogenist. American language, for Webster, was an ongoing construction determined by the necessity of its use in trade and the growing cultural complexity of American society. Consequently, in his dictionary he recorded and systematized the "general practice" of the American language, studying the functional basis of meaning variation through time. Webster considered matters of "propriety" in naming, but related them to questions of semantic accuracy and logical clarity. His approach derived from Locke, an omnipresent influence in the Early National period.[4] As Philip F. Gura notes in *The Wisdom of Words: Language, Theology, and Literature in the New England Renaissance* (1981), Locke's philosophy of language was founded on the assumption that "'neither vocabulary nor syntax had an inherent organic rationale,'" and that words were not "gifts from God standing as precise ciphers to reality but only 'noises, having no transcendental or preternatural correspondence with what they name'" (21). In this Hermogenist approach to language, words were seen as "implements forged for a particular situation, and the continuity of meaning from generation to generation came through the agreed-upon usage of articulate men" (Gura 21). There was in this an "implicit analogy between Locke's theory on government and language" both being "artificial constructs resting upon a contract 'voluntarily' entered or, more precisely, upon a *contextual* arrangement" (Gura 20). The Unitarian Church of New England (of which Webster was an intellectual representative) found the analogy especially congenial, for it legitimized its hermeneutical approach to the reading of Scripture and served well its independent and rationalist understanding of politics.

In the early nineteenth century new intellectual currents came to influence language theory, especially among the Transcendentalists. The most important of these new influences was Romanticism, which—reinforced by the diffusion of Swedenborg's doctrine (first popularized in Sampson Reed's 1826 booklet *Observations on the Growth of the Mind*)—supported the emerging organicist theories of language developed by European philologists and comparative linguists, chief among them Wilhelm von Humboldt. In New England, the new currents helped to erode the dominant rationalism and functionalism of the Unitarian Church. The chief figures in this were the "Christian Transcendentalists" James Marsh and Horace Bushnell (Gura 53). Bushnell had been a student of Josiah Gibbs, whose 1839 essay "On the Natural Significancy of Articulate Sounds" addressed " 'the life and energy which pervades language' . . . by showing the natural propensity of certain sounds to represent particular ideas and feelings" (David Simpson 240). Bushnell himself argued in *God in Christ* (1849)—a book that nearly led to his trial for heresy—that there are two types of languages, one made up entirely of nouns and tied to physical things, the other founded on the first, but used to grasp ideas. Even animals could learn the first, he argued, but the second, depending on analogical thinking, was only available to humans. As a consequence, he wrote, theologians are wrong to "assume that there is a literal terminology in religion as well as a figurative" (39). Literal meaning belongs only to the animal world of physical things.

Ralph Waldo Emerson drew on this cultural shift, which eventually led him away from the church, and in turn contributed to it, consolidating diverse themes in a holistic philosophy that caught the imagination of a broad public. Abandoning empiricism, his philosophy conceived of nature, after Bushnell, as a language in which material things impart spiritual meanings. Thus, in the chapter on language in *Nature* (1836), he wrote that "Nature is the vehicle of thought," a definition that he expanded upon with three explanatory claims:

1. Words are signs of natural facts.
2. Particular natural facts are symbols of particular spiritual facts.
3. Nature is the symbol of spirit. (*Essays and Lectures* 20)

Thus, already in his first book, language had come to stand for Emerson as a natural manifestation of the Spirit or divine will, a metonymic designator of God's manifest presence in the world. Words, he granted, are natural facts, but the facts themselves had *significance* only as symbolic of spiritual truths. An avowed Platonist, Emerson's rejection of Conventionalism absorbed aspects of Naturalism and Mimetism, but made them subservient

to an encompassing Idealism (the title of another chapter in *Nature*). This composite language philosophy drew on other sources besides Bushnell. The most significant of these was Swedenborg, whom Emerson first absorbed by way of Reed. Reed's *Observations* includes such choice aphorisms as "Everything which surrounds us is full of the utterance of one word, completely expressive of its nature. This word is its name" (47). And:

> There is a language not of words, but of things. . . . [E]verything which is, whether animal or vegetable, is full of the expression of that use for which it is designed, as of its own existence. If we did but understand its language, what could our words add to its meaning? (46)

From Swedenborg, then, by way of Reed, Emerson took up the notion of a primordial language, of an utterance embedded in nature. Influential also was Coleridge, encountered by Emerson by way of James Marsh. In Marsh's edition of *Aids to Reflection* (1829), Emerson would have read for instance that words are "LIVING POWERS, by which the things of most importance to mankind are actuated" (cited in Gura 48). Guillaume Oegger was yet another source, cited in *Nature*: " 'Material objects,' said a French philosopher, 'are necessarily kinds of scoriae of the substantial thoughts of the Creator, which must always preserve an exact relation to their first origin; in other words, visible nature must have a spiritual and moral side' " (22–23). Empiricism, as judged from this transcendental viewpoint, was a sterile intellectual proposition lacking access to the spiritual vision of ordered patterns holding human and divine spheres together, allowing the will of the divine to become manifest to humans.

The notion of a knowable divine pattern pervades Transcendentalist language theory. As David Simpson observes, words for the Transcendentalists "are not arbitrarily produced by the imagination, but arise in response to some evident quality in the things they denote"; language emerges naturally "from the world of things" (235). In direct contrast to the empiricism of the eighteenth century (a nominalist position with regard to language), the spiritual perspective of the Transcendentalists is marked by what Simpson calls a return to "the realist potential in language-theory," the belief in a one-to-one correspondence between words and things, in an "intrinsic" or "necessary" meaning as distinct from the "extrinsic" or "arbitrary" meaning of the empiricists (236). Elizabeth Peabody, for example, wrote that "proper action is always to name correctly sensuous things" (cited in Wilson 235), and Thoreau, who described sound as "the language which all things and events speak without metaphor," recapitulated the Cratylus in deriving words and the letters within words from natural objects (111).[5] The cultural

implications of this position had an immediate and lasting appeal, for the desire for an American linguistic specificity could then be framed as a spiritual call, a search for divine truth incarnated in the American ideals of independence, freedom, and democracy. Throughout the antebellum period, but increasingly after the Civil War, national debate on language was supported by the rhetoric of a higher destiny manifested in the political life of the country. Merging with this debate was the promise of a new life in letters. Emerson concisely enlarged upon this theme in "The American Scholar," an address delivered in Cambridge in 1837:

> The scholar is that man who must take up into himself all the ability of the time, all the contributions of the past, all the hopes of the future. . . . Mr. President and Gentlemen, this confidence in the unsearched might of man belongs, by all motives, by all prophecy, by all preparation, to the American Scholar. We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe. . . . A nation of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men. (69–70)

Language for Emerson participated in this destiny by "fasten[ing] words again to visible things; so that picturesque language is at once a commanding certificate that he who employs it, is a man in alliance with truth and God" (20). But regarding the American language in particular, Emerson was relatively silent.

Emerson's forward-looking Idealism was formative for Whitman, although Whitman's interest in language was marked by a stronger belief in America's *political* destiny. Radicalizing Emerson, Whitman understood language to be historically determining as well as spiritually meaningful. Thus, in his 1855 introduction to *Leaves of Grass*, alluding to Thomas Paine, he described American language as derived from British English but independent from it, becoming "the powerful language of resistance . . . the dialect of common sense . . . the chosen tongue to express growth change self esteem freedom justice equality friendliness amplitude prudence decision courage. It is the medium that shall nigh express the inexpressible" (LG 727). After the Civil War, in "Song of the Universal," he celebrated American Democracy as an incarnated "thought," as "the seed perfection," both "good" and "universal." This "thought," writes Whitman, is what "no poet has as yet chanted," for only now has the "inexpressible" found its full historical actualization:

> Come, said the Muse,
> Sing me a song no poet has yet chanted,
> Sing me the universal.

In this broad earth of ours,
Amid the measureless grossness and the slag,
Enclosed and safe within its central heart,
Nestles the seed perfection.

By every life a share or more or less,
None born but it is born, conceal'd or unconceal'd the seed is waiting.
…
Out of the bulk, the morbid and the shallow,
Out of the bad majority, the varied countless frauds of men and states,
Electric, antiseptic yet, cleaving, suffusing all,
Only the good is universal.
…
And thou, America,
For the scheme's culmination, its thought and its reality,
For these (not for thyself) thou hast arrived.
…
Is it a dream?
Nay, but the lack of it the dream,
And failing it life's lore and wealth a dream,
And all the world a dream (LG 226–29)

Infused with Hegelian language and themes, Whitman's poem salutes America as the arrival of the "good" and relates its actualization to the spirit's journey through human history (note, however, that Whitman uses the word "soul' instead of "spirit").[6] The fullness of America's political realization makes the country coincide with "the scheme's culmination, its thought and its reality," a line consonant with the Hegelian dictum "the real is the rational." Whitman was an enthusiastic if not thorough reader of Hegel, declaring in one of his unpublished lectures, "Only Hegel is fit for America—is large enough and free enough" (NUPM 6:2011). What Whitman found attractive in Hegel was precisely the vision put forward in "Song of the Universal" of "the partial to the permanent flowing" in "[s]uccessive absolute fiats" (LG 226–27). As he wrote in *Specimen Days*:

> According to Hegel the whole earth, (an old nucleus-thought, as in the Vedas, and no doubt before, but never hitherto brought so absolutely to the front, fully surcharged with modern scientism and facts, and made the sole entrance to each and all,) with its infinite variety, the past, the

> surroundings of to-day, or what may happen in the future, the contrarieties of material with spiritual, and of natural with artificial, are all, to the eye of the *ensemblist*, but necessary sides and unfoldings, different steps or links, in the endless process of Creative thought, which, amid numberless apparent failures and contradictions, is held together by central and never-broken unity—not contradictions or failures at all, but radiations of one consistent and eternal purpose; the whole mass of everything steadily, unerringly tending and flowing toward the permanent *utile* and *morale*, as rivers to oceans. (PW 1:259)

Translated, then, into Hegelian terms, the coming into historical existence of American democracy—of "the permanent *utile* and *morale*"—is the very production of reality. By contrast, the "lack of it," the failure of America to come into existence and "[e]mbracing carrying welcoming all" (LG 228) develop into a democracy, would, as Whitman indicates in his last stanza, make reality unreal, render "all the world a dream."

This poem is a good example of Whitman's strong sense of the historical destiny of American democracy, and a good indicator of his use of Hegel to produce a political reading of Emerson. Politicization here is the key to Whitman's position. As Simpson explains, the appeal of the Transcendentalists' "realism" (which was not, as noted above, an empiricism) lay in the fostering of a cultural climate where "the avoidance of any strong image of disjunction between the human and the natural worlds" was an absolute "priority," for the cultivation of such "avoidance" successfully kept feelings of alienation at bay and therefore helped keep out of sight the historical conditions of "exploitation . . . and conflict" that were pervasive throughout the nineteenth century (Simpson 236, 246). Indeed, despite their enthusiasm for social reform, many of the Transcendentalists maintained a strong distaste for the masses and were antipolitical in outlook, eschewing direct engagement with public life in ways that edged individualism toward social elitism. This was hardly the case with Whitman. As Betsy Erkkila has noted in her stringent assessment of the Whitman-Emerson relationship:

> Whitman was not a student of E. T. Channing at Harvard nor a member of the Transcendental Club in Concord; his roots were not so much in the religious as in the political battles of his time. . . . While Emerson was advocating a flight from the world into nature and spiritual transcendence, Whitman was living and working in New York City, in the world of banks and tariffs, newspapers and caucus, stump and crowd. (69)

A socially restless, antielitist intellectual from the lower middle classes, Whitman was at home in the city precisely because it brought him into close contact with "the blab of the pave," "the fury of rous'd mobs" (LG 36), and he embraced industrialization, appropriating the Cratylic dream of a seamless fusion of the human and the natural, of language and the world, with a progressive spirit, using his Cratylism to advance a cultural project of social renewal. This is the burden of Whitman's "Song for Occupations," where the poet announces, "In the labor of engines and trades and the labor of fields I find the developments, / And find the eternal meanings" (LG 211). Going beyond the Emersonian claim that "[o]bjects gross and the unseen soul are one" (LG 216), Whitman upholds the masses, not as exemplars of alienation from nature, but as the very source of what nature is said to produce:

> Doctrines, politics and civilization exurge from you,
> Sculpture and monuments and any thing inscribed anywhere are tallied in you,
> The gist of histories and statistics as far back as the records reach is in you this hour, and myths and tales the same,
> If you were not breathing and walking here, where would they all be?
> The most renown'd poems would be ashes, orations and plays would be vacuums. (LG 215)

In Whitman's hands, then, Transcendentalist philosophy becomes a means of counteracting rather than avoiding the disjunction between "natural" and "human." Language is the medium of this counteraction, a language "barbaric" and even animal-like by genteel standards, but which, by virtue of this very naturalness, becomes capable of supplanting dead and/or artificial forms of expression, both linguistic and other.

In his unpublished notebooks leading up to *Leaves of Grass*, and in his voluminous notes on American language (which he hoped to transform into a series of lectures), Whitman gave close consideration to this difference between natural and merely conventional forms of expression, which he recast as a conflict between spoken, always evolving, uncodified language (the Cratylic) and a language that is written, no longer evolving, hence heavily codified (the Hermogenist). He considered the latter an unwelcome legacy of the past, criticizing its dead usages as reflections of the colonial rule of England, Spain, and, going further back, imperial Rome. As Tenney Nathanson notes, Whitman associates writing with

> an embracing cultural mechanism that entangles us in images and symbolic artifacts; the poet's unfallen utterance, by contrast, should fasten

> words again to things, restoring to us the organic and integral presences culture has sequestered and allowing us to resume this proper status ourselves. In his language theory Whitman associates all these antinomies with the crucial opposition between voice and writing. (173)

In keeping with this project of restoring to things their proper names, he argued that words with colonial associations should be rejected in laying out the new territories. The best alternatives of all would be Native American, aboriginal inheritances that Whitman conceived of as "natural breaths, sounds of rain and winds, calls as of birds and animals in the woods, syllabled to us for names" (LG 26), but any language equal to the new experience of the new nation would be preferable to those bequeathed by the European powers:

> Californian, Texan, New Mexican, and Arizonian names, ~~all~~ have the sense of the extatic ~~devotee~~, monk, or ~~nun the breviary~~, the cloister, the idea of miracles, and of ~~can men and women~~ devotees canonized after death.—They are the results of the early missionaries and the elements of ~~p~~ piety in the old Spanish character.... Such names stand strangely in California.—What do ~~such names~~ they know of democracy, of the ~~gold hun~~ [?] hunt for the gold leads, and the nugget or of the religion that is ~~scorn~~ scorn and negation? (DBN 3:756–57)

The Spanish names are not in themselves without merit. They convey, after all, "the sense of the extatic...the idea of miracles." What they lack is appropriateness; they "stand strangely" in, for example, the gold-rush camps of California. But then, Whitman had decidedly mixed feelings about the old languages. He could, on the one hand, praise the "English tongue" as "[b]y far the most precious inheritance of our America" (NUPM 5:1682–83), and, on the other, look forward to a time when the new nation would "throw off ~~all~~ the ultramarine names" of its colonial past (DBN 3:755). Nor did he mistakenly believe that all European words in American use were mere survivals. He recognized the fact of continued importation, and even embraced it. As Traubel reports, Whitman considered such borrowings a quintessential part of the "American...cosmopolitan...range of self-expression" (cited in Traubel, *An American Primer*, n.p.).[7] By and large, those borrowings came from the living language of trade and the arts, not the colonial past. Situating America in a global context, they were necessarily involved in what "A Passage to India" calls "rondure of the world at last accomplish'd," "the distant brought near," [t]he earth...spann'd, connected by network" (LG 412, 414). Linguistic usages that furthered the cause of unity had for Whitman their own propriety.

When it came to names, however, Whitman was especially stringent in his judgment. Names are, he wrote, "the turning point in who shall be master," and also "an undemonstrable nourishment that . . . exhilarates . . . the soul" (DBN 3:756). In a proper name, especially a place name, there should be a "curious rapport" (DBN 3:753), an affinity between the sound and the sense, the word and the thing. Importation would not be viable for such usages, and inherited language would only be worth preserving if it recorded an intrinsic relationship to the thing named. Hence Whitman's distinction between aboriginal and classic in the naming of American places:

> Names of cities, islands, rivers, new settlements, &c. . . . should/ must assimilate in sentiment and in sound, to something organic in the place, or identical with it.—It is far better to call a new inhabited island by the native word, than by its first discoverer, or to call it New anything.—Aboriginal names always tell it finely; sometimes it is necessary to slightly Anglicise them.—All classic names are objectionable. (DBN 3:705)

In his notebooks, Whitman sketched plans for a language reform that would have replaced "objectionable" names with those more appropriate to their purpose. "Someone should authoritatively re-name the mountains (? by act of Congress)," he wrote, adding, "The great rivers & many of the smaller are saved to us by—Majestic & musical names" (NUPM 5:1672). But not all plausible substitutes were equally appropriate. Thus, in one note, Whitman cited "Chippewa" as "the best name for the new n.w. Territory," remarking that " 'Wyoming' is an inappropriate name doesn't belong out there at all" ("Idaho," he continued, "would have been better applied to Colorado") (NUPM 5:1707). Whitman's adjudication was not unique. Adoption of Native American language in the Romantic era often involved reapplication as well as reshaping or reinterpretation. According to George R. Stewart's lively history of place names in the U.S., "sometimes the names became more European than Indian" (10). Pronunciations in particular were often adjusted. "Wyoming," for example, was shortened from "something like M'chweaming" (Stewart 311). Whitman's objection to this name, however, was probably due to another reason. The Wyoming Territory, established in 1868, might have been named for Lincoln had Charles Sumner not blocked that measure in the Senate.[8]

In his early language studies, Whitman envisaged two quite different linguistic foundations for a proper American language: Native American and Anglo-Saxon. Both languages he considered autochthonous to the new nation, but for different reasons. Native-American words (or aboriginal words, as he preferred to call them) composed a natural vocabulary

for geographic locations and physical features on the earth; Anglo-Saxon was foundational instead for the continent's new English-speaking inhabitants. Thus, as one born in the New World ("in fish-shape Paumanok," as he put it in the poem that precedes "Song of Myself" [LG 15]), Whitman could lay claim to the natural correctness of Native American words—the live embodiment of the continent's original spirit—while extolling the virtues of Anglo-Saxon on genealogical and, indeed, racial grounds. The latter occurs most notably in "America's Mightiest Inheritance," an uncollected essay from 1856.[9] There Whitman acknowledges the philological development of language, an emphatically non-Cratylic idea that he assimilates to his linguistic Naturalism by speaking of "*Stocks and Grafts*" (56), an organic metaphor indebted to von Humboldt, who wrote, "One must not consider a language as a product dead and formed but once: it is an animate being and ever creative" (cited in NUPM 5:1651).[10] Of Anglo-Saxon, Whitman writes, it is the "stock of our language, the most important part, the root and strong speech of the native English for many centuries" (NYD 58). This view, as Heidi Kathleen Kim has shown, was typical of the time and served an ideological purpose by situating language in an expansionist narrative defended on racial principles. Like a nation, language expands, absorbs, and consolidates, a point that Whitman himself emphasizes:

> Our language . . . is a composite one, differing from all others. Still, it is simple, compact, and united. None other has the elasticity it has, with such perfect precision. Whatever we want, wherever we want any addition, we seize upon the terms that fit the want, and appropriate them to our use. Objects, acts, sentiments, art, wit, religion, freedom, physiology, the house, the field, the tastes of the common people, joy, dislike, amativeness, despair, resistance, self-esteem, war, land-life, sea-life, machinery, the sights of cities, ceremonies, reforms, new doctrines, discoveries, disputes—all these, as their occasions have arisen, have been furnished with additional words from far and near, where they could be found, as a workman is furnished with tools, or a soldier with arms. The same process must continue as long as our blood is a growing one. (NYD 56–57)

Whitman's genealogical appeal to Anglo-Saxon has been troubling to recent scholars, who have sought to distinguish his racialism and expansionism from the democratic and cosmopolitan values that predominate in his work.[11] My focus here, however, is not the particular politics of Whitman's Anglo-Saxonism (or of his appropriation of Native American language), but the more basic idea of a natural language intrinsically linked to the life of a

people and their place of habitation. The conjunction of Native American and Anglo-Saxon was important for Whitman's project, whatever other purposes it may have served, because it indicated that the American language was not simply a provincial dialect of English, but a new entity drawing at least in part on its own linguistic and natural resources.

There is poetic justice, however, in the fact that Whitman's desire to found the American language on natural principles should introduce contradictions in his vision of society; his vision of American society introduced contradictions in his treatment of language. Historically, as my opening sketch of linguistic theory in America shows, nationalist attempts to establish a specifically American language had borne the Lockean imprint of Conventionalism. According to Locke, language was a human invention developed in response to necessity and regulated by consent. This meant that new societies could create new languages, in effect on the same principles that justified new governments. In the Early National period, that potential for invention was taken to heart, with numerous proposals for new and reformed alphabets, orthographies, and spelling systems. "The United States have changed from a *Monarchical government* to a *republican*; from *dependence* to *independence*. And why not change in other respects?" asked one of the reformers, Abner Kneeland (cited in Lepore 204 n. 46). The most prominent of that group and the most significant for the history of language in America was Noah Webster, whose work Whitman read. Webster's radicality rested on the problem of necessity, which in his view justified innovation. Organicist theories of language had managed to accommodate change without succumbing to Conventionalism, but change on the order imagined by Webster, who argued that "a language must keep pace with improvements in knowledge," outstripped the capacity of mere evolution (cited in Kramer 108). Whitman was swayed by Webster's position. He felt, writes Kramer, "that the resistance to neology . . . is unnatural, that 'the blank left by Words wanted, but unsupplied has sometimes an unnamable putrid cadaverous meaning' " (110, quoting DBN 3:745). Not only newly needed words but newly needed social conventions prompted his acceptance of invention. According to David S. Reynolds, "He imagined a language in which gender distinction would be abolished: 'hater' and 'hatress,' for instance, would become 'hatist' " (320; cf. DBN 3:686). Invention, then, insinuated its way into Whitman's thinking about language, a Hermogenist obstacle to his Cratylist desires.

Whitman had a pragmatic, empirically keen intellect—an empiricism that served him well during his years as a journalist—and he was clear in his recognition of the determining role language plays in the building of a nation. He considered language the crucial element of the social contract, not

unlike his Lockean predecessors, a means of maintaining by design a strong and diverse political union. But he also described language as an organic force, a power that was not shaped by, but shaping, of human designs. Those two points of view, the Hermogenist and Cratylist, are blended together in a fragmentary note from Whitman's last decade:

> [W]ithout . . . a uniform spoken and written dialect, elastic, tough, and eligible to all, and fluid and enfolding as air—, —the Liberty and Union of these Thirty Eight or Forty States, representing so many diverse origins and breeds would not be practicable. . . . For the chief and indispensable condition a political union such as ours and (only to be firmly knit and [*illeg.*] preserved, by a general interpenetration and community of social and personal standards, religious beliefs and literature, essentially the same,) is a copious and [*illeg.*] uniform language, embodying the principles of growth, change, and sloughing [*illeg.*]. (NUPM 5:1682–83)

As a socially useful construct, American English is characterized by its function: it holds the Union "firmly knit" and so has to be "elastic" and "copious"—while remaining "uniform"; this is how it becomes "eligible to all." Uniformity, a sign of human control, was a central tenet of nationalist language theory in the early Republic. Thus, when Whitman contends that a "diverse" union "would not be practicable" without "a uniform spoken and written dialect," he is reprising an eighteenth-century argument of Webster's, that "political harmony" depends upon "uniformity" of pronunciation and spelling (cited in Kramer 60). With Whitman, however, this Conventionalist argument is rearticulated with the help of Naturalist tropes. Language, he writes, is "fluid and enfolding as air," "embodying the principles of growth, change, and sloughing." Presumably, the human control required for uniformity must be enacted on the principles identified by von Humboldt—language use legislated in Plato's sense, by a *nomothete*—but Whitman does not say so directly, and does not make any effort to explain in this note how natural diversity and the aim of social unity might be reconciled in language when they come into conflict.[12] Certainly, however, Whitman understood such resolution of conflict as part of his project. In the 1855 preface, he writes of "the American poet," "He bestows on every object or quality its fit proportions neither more nor less. He is the arbiter of the diverse [. . . .] He is no arguer . . . he is judgment. He judges not as the judge judges but as the sun falling around a helpless thing" (LG 712–13, bracketed ellipses mine).

All through his writings on language we see Whitman striving to assimilate nationalist aims (and their Conventionalist entailments) to an overarching

Naturalist conception. In the final section of this chapter, I will look closely at those efforts. Here, I want to emphasize the problem of contradiction introduced by those acts of assimilation, one sign of which is the conflict noted above between Whitman's cosmopolitan democracy and his racially defined national imperative. Contradiction, however, is too static a word for what we discover when we read Whitman. It would be more accurate to say that he labors strenuously to accommodate and through that labor resolve irreconcilable positions. For some scholars, that labor is the source of Whitman's strength, even when it ends in failure. According to Mark Bauerlein, who looks closely at the poet's desire for "a natural bond between sign and meaning, sign and intention," and who notes the poet's troubled appraisal of "[a]rbitrary conventionalism," "Whitman's . . . dilemmas, prevarications, denials, and affirmations, all related to his ambivalent attitude toward the sign, are what makes *Leaves of Grass* the singular voluminous poetic event that it is" (24, 52). A poetic event, of course, is not a realized society, although, as Allen Grossman notes with specific reference to Whitman, "a poetic structure *is* a political policy" (*Long Schoolroom* 84 n. 32, emphasis added).[13] In this sense, the friction between Whitman's Naturalism and Conventionalism can be understood as the discrepancy in politics between policy and its application or realization.

Platonism and Cratylism

In the previous section I described the difference between Emerson's view of language and that of Whitman in terms of the latter's political reading of the former, but there is also a philosophical difference between the two, one that might best be described as the difference between Emerson's Platonism and Whitman's Cratylism. To be sure, there is also an important overlap between their two positions, most notably in the shared belief that all matter is infused with spirit and therefore speaks of the divine. For Emerson, this speech, so often unintelligible, apprises us of the essential difference *between* spirit and matter.[14] Thus, in *Nature*, in the chapter on "Spirit" (which follows "Idealism"), Emerson writes, "Three problems are put by nature to the mind; What is matter? Whence is it? and Whereto?" (37). In answer to the first of these questions, he writes:

> Idealism saith: matter is a phenomenon, not a substance. . . . Yet if it only deny the existence of matter, it does not satisfy the demands of the spirit. . . . It leaves me in the splendid labyrinth of my perceptions, to wander without end. Then the heart resists it, because it baulks the affections in denying substantive being to men and women. . . . Let it stand

> then, in the present state of our knowledge, merely as a useful introductory hypothesis, serving to apprize us of the eternal distinction between the soul and the world. (37–38)

In answer to the second and third questions, Emerson is much more cryptic. Creation is an emanation of "the Supreme Being," he declares, but not in the form of a series of works built up around us (38). Rather, the world of material things is put forth "*through* us, as the life of the tree puts forth new branches and leaves through the pores of the old" (38, emphasis added). "The world," then,

> proceeds from the same spirit as the body of man, It is a remoter and inferior incarnation of God, a projection of God in the unconscious. . . . It is, therefore, to us, the present expositor of the divine mind. It is a fixed point whereby we may measure our departure. As we degenerate, the contrast between us and our house is more evident. We are as much strangers in nature, as we are aliens from God. We do not understand the notes of birds. . . . We do not know the uses of more than a few plants. (38–39)

For Whitman, instead, the infusion of matter by spirit makes the two a perfect unity. They are, as it were, interchangeable terms, hence Whitman's programmatic declaration, "I will make the poems of materials, for I think they are to be the most spiritual poems" (LG 18). Far from being tempted by Idealism, he considered the material occurrence of reality to be primary. "Materialism first and last imbuing," he affirms (LG 51), recognizing that this "imbuing"—the saturation of reality with matter—is precisely the manner in which the fecundity of spirit makes itself known:

> Every day something more—something unsuspected the previous day. Always changing, advancing, retreating, enlarging, condensing, widening, being wafted to spirituality. —Always new materialism and things. . . . O I see now that I have to make of materialism and things, // And that intellect is to me but as hands, or eyesight, or as a vessel. (NUPM 1:365)

Thus, where Emerson conceives of the intellect as a measure of the distance between matter and spirit, Whitman allots it the role of articulating their conjunction.[15] As he wrote in a brief note headed "My Poems, When Complete," "[The] Great Constituent elements of my Poetry [:] . . . *Materialism* [and] *Spirituality*[.] The intellect, the aesthetic, what is to be the medium of these and to beautify, govern & make serviceable these" (NUPM 1:352).

The relationship between matter and spirit has implications for language. Where the intellect measures a distance between the two, human language will be a point of mediation, a translation of the language of nature that paradoxically becomes more accurate the more it draws away from nature toward the divine. Where the intellect is instead the articulation of their conjunction, language will be the immediate apprehension of corporality and spirituality together. Thus, for Emerson, the relationship between language and reality is hermeneutic. His method of reasoning is analogical:

> We are . . . assisted by natural objects in the expression of particular meanings. But how great a language to convey such peppercorn information! . . . [T]he memorable words of history, and the proverbs of nations, consist usually of a natural fact, selected as a picture or a parable of a moral truth. . . . This relation between the mind and matter is not fancied by some poet, but stands in the will of God, and so is free to be known by all men. (*Nature* 21–22)

Emerson is more explicit in stating that all language follows this model in his later essay "Intellect":

> The constructive intellect produces thoughts, sentences, poems, plans, designs, systems. It is the generation of the mind, the marriage of thought and nature. . . . It is a conversion of all nature into the rhetoric of thought, under the eye of judgment, with a strenuous exercise of choice. (*Essays: First Series* 198–99)

For Whitman, by contrast, language requires no hermeneutic; it incarnates meaning just as matter incarnates spirit. The reality that we can know only analogically according to Emerson presents itself directly in Whitman's account. As a passage in "The Primer of Words" titled "~~Our~~ Language" puts it:

> Much is said of what is spiritual, and of spirituality, in this, that, . . . or the other—in objects, expressions.—For me, I see ~~nothing that exists~~ no object, no expression, no animal, no tree, no art, no book, but I see, from morning to night, and from night to morning, the spiritual.—Bodies are all spiritual.—All words are spiritual—nothing is more spiritual than words.—Whence are they? . . . along how many thousands and tens . . . of thousands of years have they come? those eluding, fluid, beautiful, fleshless, realities, Mother, Father, Water, Earth, Me, This, Soul, Tongue, House, Fire[.] (DBN 3:730)

As the list of words, mostly nouns, with which this passage ends indicates, a language of incarnated meanings will look very different from the rhetoric of thought produced by Emerson's constructive intellect. And here the difference between the two men becomes more clearly recognizable as a difference between Platonism and Cratylism. Notwithstanding his dislike of Idealism's repudiation of nature, Emerson treats nature as an analogical interpretation of the ideal (language, for its part, is also an interpretation of the ideal, but one that depends upon nature for its vocabulary). For Whitman, instead, nature is irreducible. Notwithstanding his gestures toward the unity of all matter in spirit, he treats the diversity of nature and the language of discrete meanings it produces as significant in their own right. Even when he echoes Emerson and speaks of analogical understanding, as in the poem "Kosmos," he differs from his mentor by returning understanding back to the material in which it began, and, indeed, necessarily resides: "Who includes diversity and is Nature, / Who is the amplitude of the earth, and the coarseness and sexuality of the earth, and the great charity of the earth, and the equilibrium also, / . . . out of the theory of the earth and of his or her body understands by subtle analogies all other theories, / The theory of a city, a poem, and of the large politics of these States" (LG 392–93).

Because all understanding tends toward the ideal in Emerson, there can be no ugliness in his philosophy. "The ruin or the blank, that we see when we look at nature," Emerson contends, "is in our own eye," and it only happens when our "axis of vision is not coincident with the axis of things, . . . so [that] they appear not transparent but opake" (*Nature* 43). When the "axis of vision" is aligned with "the axis of things," the divine "relation between mind and matter" becomes perceptible in the things themselves. In this act of perfect "seeing," the "relation between mind and matter" (22) is centered, and as a result, things are dematerialized, become "transparent," for matter is revealed to be spirit. Here as elsewhere in Emerson's writings "transparent" stands for correct whereas "opake" stands for distorted. This alignment of "transparent" and "correct" is very relevant, for it is how Emerson signals that his account of nature as a language is not Cratylic, although one might at first confuse it for being so. There is no spiritual revelation in Cratylus's language of correct names, only a revelation of matter as such. The knowledge of names is a knowledge of things, that is, a knowledge of the material constitution of things. In Emerson, instead, once the user of language reaches a condition of "transparency," the closest equivalent to finding a correct name, he or she moves away from the particular thing and gains (or better, recovers) a knowledge of its essence. "We know the authentic effects of the true fire through every one of its million disguises" (*Essays: First Series* 96).

The spiritual dynamic of this dematerializing act of seeing is at the center of Emerson's essay "The Poet." The poet, Emerson's argument reads, is the "beholder of ideas, and an utterer of the necessary and causal" (*Essays: Second Series* 6). At times in the essay this utterance gives the impression of being the divination and expression of the true forms of things by the *nomothete* in Plato's *Cratylus*. "[T]he poet is the Namer, or Language-maker, naming things sometimes after their appearance, sometimes after their essence, and giving to every one its own name, and not another's. . . . The poets made all the words" (13). But there are two ways that this eminently Cratylic conception of the poet turns out to be a dissemblance. First of all, human language as actually used is, as Emerson acknowledges, unequal to the task:

> For poetry was all written before time was, and whenever we are so finely organized that we can penetrate into that region where the air is music, we hear those primal warblings, and attempt to write them down, but we lose ever and anon a word, or a verse, and substitute something of our own, and thus miswrite the poem. (5–6)

In "Nominalist and Realist" Emerson makes it a principle that the empirical provides no proof of the essential, which does not, however, invalidate the latter. "Webster cannot do the work of Webster. We conceive distinctly enough the French, the Spanish, the German genius, and it is not the less real, that perhaps we should not meet in either of those nations, a single individual who corresponded with the type" (*Essays: Second Series* 136). The poet, likewise, cannot do the work of the poet, and it is therefore with a measure of sarcasm that Emerson describes his joy when he reads actual poems published in actual books:

> With what joy I begin to read a poem, which I confide in as inspiration! And now my chains are to be broken; I shall mount above these clouds and opaque airs in which I live,—opaque, though they seem transparent,—and from the heaven of truth I shall see and comprehend my relations . . . I am invited into the science of the real. (*Essays: Second Series* 8)

Yet Emerson is sincere in his admiration for the poet as an ideal.[16] In other words, his Cratylic poet exists only as a Platonic Form. This is the second way that his reference to the poet as "the sayer, the namer" (5) turns out to be a dissemblance. At the beginning of the essay, Emerson laments, "There is no doctrine of forms in our philosophy," and he complains that "Criticism is infested with a cant of materialism" (5). At the end of the essay, in an apostrophe to the poet, matter and its diverse names are brushed aside as "an old

shame before the holy ideal": "Thou shalt lie close hid with nature. . . . And this is the reward: that the ideal shall be real to thee, and the impressions of the actual world shall fall like summer rain, copious, but not troublesome, to thy invulnerable essence" (24). When opacity dissolves into transparency, the world dissolves with it.

Whitman's response to Emerson took inspiration from the essay's dissemblance, the call for a new American poet who could be a sayer, a namer, and not from the disparagement of poetry as an empirical craft and not from the Platonic brushing aside of the empirical world. Taking seriously the older poet's dictum that poetry must invite the reader "into the science of the real," Whitman opened his work to the contemporary facts of America's cultural life, "keenly aware . . . that he himself was the ultimate cultural fact, a composite of tendencies, events, currents, and intensities" (Folsom 4). To clarify the difference between Emerson's position and Whitman's, I would like to return to a poem cited in chapter 1, "A Song of the Rolling Earth." A hymn to the materiality of things and words, the poem begins by dismissing written language as mere squiggles, affirming that the only real language abides in the substance of the earth and in human corporeality. But unlike Emerson's disparagement of human language as inadequate to the task of communicating the true poetry of nature, Whitman's dismissal allows that "[i]n the best poems re-appears the body, man's or woman's, well-shaped, natural, gay, / Every part able, active, receptive" (LG 219). It is noteworthy, moreover, that the poem is identified as a *song*. Voiced words are embodied, formed of "breath . . . obedient to its organs" (LG 224).[17] In this radical perspective, in which meaning resides in things and, indeed, is one with them bodies become propositions in the full sense of the word:

A song of the rolling earth, and of words according,
Were you thinking that those were the words, those upright lines?
those curves, angles, dots?
No, those are not the words, the substantial words are in the ground
and sea,
They are in the air, they are in you.
. . .
Human bodies are words, myriads of words,
. . .
Air, soil, water, fire—those are words,
I myself am a word with them—my qualities interpenetrate with
theirs— . . .
. . .

A healthy presence, a friendly or commanding gesture, are words, sayings, meanings,
The charms that go with the mere looks of some men and women, are sayings and meanings also. (LG 219–20)

Throughout this poem, Whitman articulates the belief that the meanings communicated by language are effective because part of nature itself:

The true words do not fail, for motion does not fail and reflection does not fail,
Also the day and night do not fail, and the voyage we pursue does not fail.
…
Say on, sayers! sing on, singers!
Delve! mould! pile the words of the earth!
Work on, age after age, nothing is to be lost,
It may have to wait long, but it will certainly come in use,
When the materials are all prepared and ready, the architects shall appear.
I swear to you the architects shall appear without fail,
I swear to you they will understand you and justify you (LG 221, 224)

This ultimate justification in a complete understanding is well removed from Emerson's idea of the poetic activity as a piercing through of the layers of obfuscating verbiage so as to reach a truer vision of things. In Emerson's conception, we may recall, things are dematerialized, with the poet's exact vision coinciding with the perfect transparence of things; true poetry, in Emerson, is not so much the language of things as the language of the ideas that things allow us to think. In Whitman's poem, instead, things, far from dematerializing, persist in their substantiality, like time itself, "Tumbling on steadily, nothing dreading, / Sunshine, storm, cold, heat, forever withstanding, passing, carrying, / The soul's realization and determination still inheriting, / The fluid vacuum around and ahead still entering and dividing" (LG 222). As in the "Substance Logic" of Eddy M. Zemach (mentioned in chapter 1), the "substantial words" of "A Song of the Rolling Earth" resolve the difference between object and essence, particular and generality, in the very persistence of their thingness. As put by Zemach:

A thing is a particular, a specific entity that can be identified. Most important, it can recur and be re-identified as the same thing. Many philosophers taught that things cannot recur, but that is absolutely false.

> A thing is exactly what can survive change and re-occur in another time, place, or form. A thing is a trans-index entity; it can be here today and there tomorrow; that is to say, it can have various occurrences at various indices in any dimension. (50)

As such, Whitman's substantial words link diverse people together, though those people may not be present at the same time ("If they did not echo the phrases of souls what were they then? / If they had not reference to you in especial what were they then?" [LG 224]). This Cratylic position is in direct contrast with Emerson's Platonism, which predicates the disappearance or dematerialization of the material reality of things and the hierarchical positioning of the reader under the poet's guidance. In the elevation of the poet as the "beholder of ideas," the "namer" and the "sayer," a mistrust of ordinary language is insinuated. Ordinary representation does not give access to knowledge. This is, as we recall, the position advocated by Socrates at the end of the *Cratylus*: true knowledge of things cannot come from names. Socrates scolds Cratylus with the words, "No man of sense will like to put himself or the education of his mind in the power of names. Neither will he so far trust names or the givers of names as to be confident in any knowledge which condemns himself and other existences to an unhealthy state of unreality" (*Cratylus* 440c). Emerson is a Platonist who thought the language of poetry begins where all representation (and all language) ends and what is transmitted is the knowledge of the ideal order of the divine.

The goal of Whitman's Cratylism in "Song of the Rolling Earth" is to alert his readers to the existence of a natural language capable of expressing the reality of things by embodying their substance. Since this natural language is susceptible of becoming obscured in its presentation as written words—the transcript of the "Song" that embodies them—the text is at best an announcement of what its own performance would accomplish. The very act of bringing substantial words to the page (primary Cratylism in Genette's terminology) demands recourse to an act of mimesis, a mere description of substantiality (secondary Cratylism). Is the dream of the Cratylic only a dream? Or is representation's "mere description" but a preparation for the dream's realization? The announcement, in any case, leaves in its wake the notion that the "architects" to come shall use those words to build a perfect world and that the people who are themselves words, although they belong to ages past, "shall be glorified" in that work (LG 224–25). "Amelioration is one of the earth's words," Whitman writes (LG 220). Yet the visionary aspect of this amelioration leads easily enough to an explicitly religious appeal. Thus, in

his "Primer on Words," Whitman refers to Christ as the most exemplary language user, a man whose speech was "divine" and whose physical touch brought "miracles":

> Out of Christ are divine words.—Out of this saviour
> Some words are ~~divine sweet~~ fresh-smelling lilies roses to the soul, blooming without failure.—the name of Christ—all ~~Such~~ words ~~are those~~ that have arisen from the life and ~~and~~ death ~~Christ~~ of ~~Jesus~~ Christ, the ~~saviour of men, the~~ divine son, ~~of Mary,~~ who ~~was crucified~~ went about speaking perfect words, no patois—whose life was perfect,—~~who the well—beloved, whose hands,~~ the touch of whose hands and feet ~~did~~ was miracles—who was crucified—his flesh laid in a shroud, in the grave (DBN 3:744)

Drawing on the foundational teaching of the Christian church—that Christ is the incarnation of God's good news, universally accessible to all who believe—Whitman bolsters the utopian dimension of his Cratylic argument, that substantial words universally available to all will bring about a future glory. In Whitman's vision, of course, the incarnated message is not Christ's alone, but comprised of all men and women, the "myriads of words" out of whose couplings the future ages unfold (LG 219). Here Whitman reaches back to the logic of the Old Testament, as in Isaiah 56:5, "I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name which shall not be cut off."

If anything translates person into meaning, it is a name, and so the permanence of meaning rests indeed on the permanence of names. "What we want above all," Whitman confided to Traubel, "what we finally must and will insist upon—in future—actual men and women—living, breathing, hoping, aspiring books—books that so grow out of personality, magnificence of undivided endowment, as themselves to become such persons, stand justly in their names" (WWWC 5:203). Such names are the substantial words of American democracy, composing what Whitman described in "The Eighteenth Presidency!" as "the organic compact of These States," a compact comprising "Workmen" and "Workwomen" who communicate in their very labor the message "that all . . . are born free and equal" (NUPM 6:2129). Whitman's own labor as a wordsmith, put in the service of that compact, thus leads naturally enough to the name-language of his catalogues, which have so often been the object of antipathy by his readers. "[I]t is that catalogue business that wrecks them all," he told Traubel, "that hauls them up short, that determines their opposition: they shudder at it. . . . They

call the catalogue names: but suppose they do? it is names: but what could be more poetic than names?" (WWWC 4:324). And further:

> Oh God! how tired I get of hearing that said about the "catalogues!" I resolved at the start to diagnose, state, the case of the mechanics, laborers, artisans, of America—to get into the stream with them—give them a voice in literature: not an echoed voice—no: their own voice—that which they had never had before. I meant to do this naturally, however—not with apologies—not to lug them in by the neck and heels, in season and out of season, where they did belong and where they didn't belong—but to welcome them to their legitimately superior place—to give them entrance and lodgement by all fair means. Maybe I have failed, maybe I have succeeded—but whatever, my intention has always remained clear, unshakeable. (WWWC 2:142–43)

This unshakeable purpose, the utopian design of Whitman's poetic catalogues, rests on a carefully worked out theory of language, a Cratylic theory that took shape by assimilating the empirical evidence that words, like governments, are not always natural, but must sometimes develop on grounds other than nature so as to meet the needs of the people. This assimilation is the subject of my next section.

Cratylization

A self-taught student of comparative linguistics and philology, Whitman left a number of published and unpublished works on language. The most important of these to see print in his lifetime was "America's Mightiest Inheritance" (1856), already mentioned, which deals with the origins and development of language in ethnological terms, and which concludes with a glossary of "*a few foreign Words, mostly French*," for the benefit of "Working-People, Young Men and Women, and . . . Boys and Girls" (NYD 60–61). A second published essay, "Slang in America," appeared in the *North American Review*, 1885. Whitman later disparaged this text as an "insignificant" knock-off that drew lazily on his many years as "an industrious collector" of idiomatic expressions (WWWC 1:461–62). Far more substantive, but uncertain in authorship, is the 1859 pamphlet *Rambles among Words*, credited to William Swinton but quite likely written in collaboration with Whitman. The topics of the twelve "*Rambles*" include "Fossil Poetries," "Words of Abuse," "Medals in Names," "The Growth of Words," and "English in America," and Whitman's hand is suspected in particular in the latter two. The unfinished writings on language are of even greater interest for readers of Whitman's

poetry, as they show him working through primary sources and coming to formulate the ideas about language most pertinent for *Leaves of Grass*. The best known of these manuscript texts is "The Primer of Words," apparently worked on in the 1850s, first as preparation for a series of lectures, then as the germ of an abandoned book, and later edited by Horace Traubel for posthumous publication as *An American Primer*. Two other collections of notebooks, "Words" and "Other Notebooks, &c. on Words," are less discursive, presenting clippings, copied quotations, word lists, etymologies, and sketches of catalogues for the poems along with the occasional prose notations; these have been meticulously transcribed by William White. Finally, Whitman left a number of prose fragments on loose sheets of paper, and these have been arranged thematically by Edward F. Grier. These include comments on oratory and elocution as well as language per se.[18]

Whitman's readings on language are difficult to trace, and many of the important currents in linguistic theory that he gives evidence of knowing come through secondary sources. We know he read Maxmilian Schele de Vere's *Outlines of Comparative Philology* (1853), which exposed him to von Humboldt and organicism, and the two volumes of Christian Charles Josias Bunsen's *Outlines of Universal History, Applied to Language and Religion* (1854), which schooled him in German philology more generally (including the ideas of Grimm, Schlegel, and Max Müller). His Naturalist thinking drew on two elementary textbooks, *A Handbook of English Orthography* (1852) and *A Handbook of the Engrafted Words of the English Language* (1854), but Whitman also learned Conventionalist ideas from such texts as Lindley Murray's *An English Grammar: Comprehending the Principles and Rules of Language* (1816). Dictionaries too formed an important part of Whitman's reading. He himself owned at least four, including the 1847 edition of Webster's (which included a theoretical introduction), but was not satisfied with any yet existing, holding out hope for a "Real Dictionary" that would "give all words that exist in use, the bad words as well as any" (DBN 3:734–35, page division elided).[19] Thus, while his theoretical readings on language supported his overall organicism and Naturalism, Whitman's attention to language as an empirical fact, comprising good words and bad words alike, fed a less pronounced but still strong Conventionalist bent.

Whitman certainly understood the conflict between these two positions. In *Rambling among Words*, he or Swinton, or the two together, wrote:

> It is one of the current wranglings, How language originated: as though Language were not an innate energy and aspiration! Language is not a cunning conventionalism arbitrarily agreed upon: it is an internal necessity. . . . Language is begotten of a lustful longing to express, through the

> plastic vocal energy, man's secret sense of his unity with nature. (NUPM 5:1652)

Yet in formulating his own ideas about American language, Whitman drew on linguistic insights that he encountered on the far side of the theoretical divide between Naturalism and Conventionalism, as well as from the more ameliorating ideas of the Germans who, according to Hans Aarsleff, naturalized Lockean ideas by focusing on the organic development of language systems wholly human in origin.[20] Whitman, of course, did not conceive of organicism as a compromise position. From von Humboldt's understanding of language as the historically unfolding expression of a nation, he took the Naturalist insight that "[t]he great proper names used in America must commemorate ~~what dates from~~ things belonging to America, and dating thence"; that "America too . . . shall stand rooted in the ground in names" (DBN 3:755). *Name* in these passages is no simple metonymy for *language*. The word "name" holds all the meaning it carried in the *Cratylus* and even more, for Whitman believed that "[e]very principal word? name in our language is a condensed octavo volume, or many volumes," that they are "the essence and last representative crystallization perhaps *of civilization*, certainly of language. Briefly, they *are* language; for every thing else both concentrates there, and radiates thence again" (NUPM 5:1698–99). From Bunsen, instead, Whitman absorbed ideas that he recognized as a synthesis of discrepant positions, most notably the notion (so important for a colonial dialect) that languages evolve and individuate themselves in a movement of detachment and departure from a shared linguistic matrix. In a series of notes that he took after reading Bunsen's work, Whitman recorded that "[i]n Southern Asia there are distinct dialects spoken by only forty or fifty families," and he wrote out lists of individual tongues that he identified as "<u>continuations of one common</u> spring of Language" (DBN 3:722). "Thus individualism," he concluded (moving far away from a Naturalism in which names are "rooted in the ground"), "is ~~seen~~ a law in modern languages, and freedom also.—The words are not built in, but stand loose, and ready to go this way or that" (DBN 3:723). It is not hard to see why Whitman is drawn in this Conventionalist direction, notwithstanding his deeper sympathies with Naturalism. The freedom of words to go this way or that is on the scale of entire languages a direct analogy of the freedom of colonies to break away from their parent nations. If there is a danger of babelization (as Whitman suggests in his example of the southern Asian dialects), there is also the possibility of a flowering of civilizations (as in the "Spanish, Portuguese, French, Provençal, Italian, & Wallachian," all of them "<u>Latin</u> under different aspects" [DBN 3:722]).

Whitman's embrace of linguistic independence and the freedom of a language to expand in response to evolving conditions relied on Webster's empiricist scholarship and benefited from Webster's understanding of neologisms as linguistic adaptations emerging "not so much from the character of the people as from their situation" (Kramer 55).[21] Eighteenth-century linguistic nationalists saw the growing expansion of American English as the result of material, not spiritual necessities, and Whitman followed that legacy closely when he argued that "an immense number of new words are needed . . . to supply the copious trains of ~~facts~~ facts, and flanges of facts" (DBN 3:736–37). Some of those new facts were natural ("Then the new word, *blizzard*, quite settled by the late furiously storming winter of 1880–'81" [NUPM 5:1680]), but many more were man-made, originating in politics, science, and trade. In "The Primer of Words," we see Whitman struggle to restate this Conventionalist attitude in Naturalist terms. When first confronted with the need of providing an account of what words are, he offers a wholly Cratylic argument that, upon close examination, reveals itself to be a form of sophistry:

> What do you think words are? Do you think words are ~~arbitrary~~ positive and original things in themselves?—No: Words are not original and arbitrary in themselves. —Words are ~~a~~ result—they are the progeny of what has been or is in vogue.—If iron architecture comes in vogue, as it seems to be coming, words are wanted to ~~express~~ stand for ~~those iron girders, facades~~ all about iron architecture, for the work it causes, for the different branches of work and of the workmen—those blocks of ~~bu te os~~ buildings, seven stories high, with light strong facades, and girders that will not crumble a mite in a thousand years. (DBN 736 [page division elided])

What Whitman must reject at all costs is the absolutely Hermogenist position that words originate in themselves, without intrinsic reference to an external reality. But in stating that certain words originate in man-made things (such as "iron architecture"), he does not want to compromise his Cratylism so much as to say that men make the words for those things as well. Thus he argues that "[w]ords are ~~a~~ result," "the progeny of what has been or is in vogue." Describing them in this way, of course, he elides reference to the agency that creates them. This allows him to suggest that those words are read, as in the Cratylus, from the things themselves, are not "fancies" of the *nomothete* (Cratylus 427c). The argument is coherent, and keeps faith with his Naturalism, but the notion that men or women can create things out of their imagination but not the names for those things strains credulity.

The difficulty obscured in this passage presents itself each time Whitman discusses the need for new words, for if, on the one hand, he allows that those words will need to be *supplied*, he must, on the other hand, demonstrate that they are nonetheless *authentic*. The simplest way to do so is to naturalize them with organic metaphors, which he does when he describes the "copious train of . . . facts" cited above as "*growing* out of all the new ~~sciences~~ knowledges" (DBN 3:737, emphasis added), or when he speaks of "the *rills* of civilization" in his "Song of the Exposition" (LG 200, emphasis added). Tellingly, moreover, Whitman makes no distinction between such metaphorical organicism and the ostensibly truer organicism of "[w]ords arising out of the geography, agriculture, and natural traits of a country" (DBN 5:695). Another way to naturalize new words is to emphasize the organicism of the people who supply them. Thus, in "I Hear America Singing," Whitman describes the representatives of several different occupations as accompanying their labor with song, an accompaniment that in effect transforms their various arts (mechanics, carpentry, masonry, shipping, shoemaking, sewing, etc.) into "melodious" speech, song-sound being a product of the human body (LG 12–13). It is not a stretch to suppose that this song-sounded speech, when it concerns new things associated with the trades, will have the authenticity of the old words attached to natural things, a democratic extension of Emerson's notion of the American poet as privileged sayer or namer. No longer a unique individual, Whitman's poet will now be a function fulfilled by the entire working-class population (which is why "[t]he United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem" [LG 709]). As Whitman writes in "The Primer of Words," "The Americans are going to be the most fluent and melodious voiced people in the world—and the most perfect users of words" (DBN 3:732).

This process of "Cratylization," in which aspects of language whose identification one might otherwise associate with Hermogenist positions are naturalized, is set forth as a kind of natural history of American English in an unpublished prose piece entitled "Our Language, ~~and Future~~ & Literature." Reading through Whitman's over-struck words in this text we see him struggle to articulate his thought, and also, in places, to work out what his thought might be. Some of the sentences, when all of the revisions are taken in, remain incomplete, but the gist of the argument is certainly clear: the speech of American citizens may have its beginnings in British English, but its own "genius" ("which is not what the schoolmen suppose") requires further adaptation and growth. Here Whitman extends the concept of organicism in language to cover not

only the development of English but also its transplantation into a new continent, a new polity:

> Of all the ~~wonderful things~~ wonder-growth's of ~~the universe~~, humanity ~~what is more~~ nought more ~~wonderful~~ wonderful than language~~?~~—Of ~~all~~ languages ~~which what~~ which other is so grand . . . as ~~this~~ the English? . . . Born to have . . . an identity of its own, . . . adopting into itself freely from ~~Celtic, Latin, Gothic, Greek, Latin Scandinavian sounds~~[?]—many immigrances, many clinics—passing through ~~many~~ changes, ~~expansions, and~~ developments—here we ~~have~~ possess it at last, . . . our most precious inheritance . . .
>
> It is not a polished fossil language, but the true broad fluid language of ~~individuals~~ democracy.—~~But upon it~~ Then ~~have~~ have we upon ~~it~~ it ~~we too have doubtless~~ great improvements ~~no Yes this language Yes~~ to make—very great ones.—~~Large numbers of~~ It has yet to be acclimated here, and ~~fash~~ adapted still more to us and our future— many new words are ~~still~~ to be ~~added~~ formed . . .
>
> A certain, I know not what—a kind of smell—betrays ~~all the~~ every passage of elegant writing, ~~in their English language~~ old and new in ~~all~~ British works, that it is ~~not the~~ no fresh and hardy growth, but has been scented from outside, ~~and~~ and ~~which shortly~~ only becomes stale.— . . . [It must] conform to our ~~genius~~ uses,—[be] boldly compelled to serve the ~~g~~ ~~true~~ real ~~genius character~~ genius ~~of the language~~ underneath our speech, ~~tongue~~, which is not what the schoolmen suppose, but wild, intractable, suggestive—perhaps, in time, made a free world's language. . . .
>
> ~~A great engrafting~~ ~~primal~~ ~~First~~ of The life-spirit First ~~the~~ of ~~America~~ ~~These~~ States must be ~~had~~ engrafted upon ~~the lan English its our~~ their ~~imported~~ inherited language:—indeed I ~~perceive~~ see the beginning of this ~~is begun~~ already and enjoy.—it. (DBN 3:809–11, page divisions elided)

The transposition of an old language to a new continent and the rapid introduction of new words to compensate for the change would seem to expose the metaphoricity of von Humboldt's organicism and require a purely Hermogenist explanation, but Whitman is not so tempted. To account for the rapidity of linguistic change he defines language as a "wonder-growth," and, shifting metaphors, as a family "adopting into itself freely from . . . many clinics." It is living matter—grown "stale" in Britain, whose literature is "no fresh and hardy growth"; "wild, intractable, and suggestive" in America—animated by the "life-spirit" of its people. Thus, while the newness of American language did not develop naturally out of British English, it is not artificial; the people made it, but only insofar as they "engrafted" their "life-spirit" onto the "inherited" language from Britain. The metaphor is agricultural, and

Whitman indeed finds the language growing in any field where the people labor, that is, not in "books" (as the essay goes on to say), but "amidst the strong coarse talk of men . . . as they give muscle and bone . . . to . . . every word they speak." The argument, of course, is also nationalist, hence the bold disparagement of the essay's conclusion, which relates the power of that common labor to America's social status in the world at large:

> The the tendencies of other na minds ~~are~~, ~~to~~ when viewing languages, politics, religion, literature, &c ~~to~~ consider one or all of them as arbitrarily established, and ~~to~~ as ~~something~~ thus better than we are, and ~~therefore~~ thus to rule us, the ~~tendency~~ American mind shall boldly penetrate the ~~arena~~ interiors of all, ~~those things~~ and ~~con~~ treat them as servants . . . sternly to be discarded the day we are ready for superior expressions. (DBN 3:811)

Linking, as I see it (for the passage is dense and not fully articulated), the artificiality of class distinctions to the false belief that language itself is "arbitrarily established," Whitman suggests that the American nation (or American mind), because of its experience, knows better, and is therefore able to "penetrate the ~~arena~~ interiors of all," that is, is able to grasp what is inherent to language and enter the very centers of power. Despite his acknowledgment that language is a "precious inheritance," Whitman has no high regard for mere tradition. This is why he earlier disparaged the "polished fossil language" of Emerson, who famously declared, "Language is fossil poetry" (*Essays: Second Series* 13). The true broad fluid language of democracy, as Whitman puts it, is not dead but living, and not polished but vulgar. Whitman expands on the political implications of those differences in one of his prose fragments:

> They are not patriotic
>
> Of Emerson, (& the New England set) in Life, in its grand turbulence: in the United States with all its multitudinous noise & practical business and politics, and vehement and oceanic crowds, rushing to and from the trains, and voices as of squads and regiments and armies, endlessly gesticulating & talking in every key, especially the loud ones, is painful to them, grating upon their ears, their nerves, & they shun & abuse it. They teach, and maintain in their writings a proper demeanor, & seriously condemn laughing. They secretly, (and not always secretly) despise the idea of patriotism & think it fine to substitute some other ism in its place. (NUPM 5:1719)

Notwithstanding his admiration and affection for Emerson, then, Whitman understood their differences as a function of their different attitudes about

language and different social sensibilities, a political and philosophical dynamic that linked his own Cratylism to the diversity and materialism of democracy while identifying Emerson's Idealism as a commitment to the polished and the traditional.

For Whitman, the substantiality of language and the corporeality of its users are reflections of one another, and so it is not surprising that he loves to personify language, depicting it as a living body having consonants for its bones and words for its muscles and sinews. In "Slang in America," he calls language a "vast, living body," and in his notebooks he describes key clusters of words as having distinct physical traits. "This is the age of the metal Iron," he writes, and the words drawn from it, "as ~~the~~ ore has been drawn," "are welded together in hardy forms and characters.—They are ponderous, strong, definite . . . they are ~~iron~~ iron words, wrought and cast.—I ~~consider~~ see them all good, ~~and~~ faithful, ~~trem sturdy~~, massive, permanent words" (DBN 3:747). "Kosmos-words"—that is, words related to thought, history, and literature—are instead comely, "showing themselves, with ~~grand large and~~ foreheads muscular necks and breasts" ("These gladden me!" he adds, "I put my arms around them—touch my lips to them") (DBN 3:739). Of course, corporeal metaphors were hardly unique to Whitman, and some of them indeed come from his reading. "Consonants are the Stamina of Words" was a line he copied out of Webster (to which Whitman added parenthetically, "the bones of words"), and the status of the individual letter in that passage may explain why he took time to record his quarrels with Webster over spelling (DBN 3:715).[22] Overall, however, his metaphors took stock of larger units. "The whole osseous muscular and fleshy structure of language is its Names, (nouns) and the Verbs are its blood and . . . circulation" (NUPM 5:1697), he writes in one prose fragment, while in "America's Mightiest Inheritance" he enjoins the reader, "Read the works of modern language-searchers . . . they will open and enlarge your mind. You will see, interwoven like the network of veins . . . all the races of men and women . . . discrepancies fall into line. All are of one moral as well as physical blood—the blood of language" (NYD 59–60). As the correlation of philology and genealogy in this passage suggests, words are not only corporeal, but fertile. Thus, "From each word, as from a womb, spring babes that shall grow to giants and beget superber breeds upon the earth" (NUPM 1:125) (figure 1).

These personifications, often jotted down with the intention of using them as rhetorical points to be made in poems and lectures, translate into figural language Whitman's antifigural belief that "language tells the interior" (NYD 59). Appropriately enough, the personification is often used to advance notations on the misuse of language, occasions where words are injured or vexed, or violently wrenched from their proper meanings by bad

or ignorant usage, much as a body is injured or vexed, or a person is wrenched from his or her natural habitat. "Names or terms get helplessly misapplied & wrench'd from their meanings," Whitman reports, adding that "sometimes a great mistake is perpetuated in a word, (as the term calling the American aborigines *Indians*—the mistake is rectified but the word remains" (NUPM 5:1664). Alluding to the same mistake in "Words," he writes, "It confuses and vexes language to have ~~these~~ such synonyms with contra-meanings" (DBN 3:709). Occasionally, language is found to cause harm because of some unnatural application, as in the misnaming of "[t]he great western mountain peaks," which, he writes, "are seriously injured by vulgar names" (NUPM 5:1707). In the case of the mountains and others like it, Whitman argues for an institutional return to the natural language of "aboriginal" names.

Whitman's pointed comments on the misadventures of language have the flavor of moral fables or didactic tales meant to impress on their hearer the need for exactitude in the use of words, a favorite topic of Laura (Riding) Jackson (who decried "the immorality" of "contrived indiscipline" [RM 181]). Whitman, for his part, detested imprecision and often expressed his distaste for it freely, as in his recollection to Horace Traubel of his preference for the word "blacks" to the more common (and then-more-polite) "colored," which he found obfuscating: "In my abolition days, some of my friends were furious at my allusions to the *blacks*: as if *colored people* were nearly so definite—*colored*, which might mean red or green as well as black. It is a violence we do to the use of words" (WWWC 6:151). In "The Primer of Words," this antipathy for imprecision is presented as a firm belief in the "beauty of . . . exactitude," a sentiment again expressed with the aid of personification: "To me, each word out of the that now compose the English language, has its own meaning, and does not stand for anything but itself—and there are no two words ~~that use~~ the same ~~and~~ any more than there are two persons the same" (DBN 3:736). This beauty of exactitude should not to be confused with mere euphony: "I like any word which sharply defines its object," Whitman told Traubel, "I prefer the ugly to the beautiful words if the ugly word says more: ugly words you'll often find drive more immediately to their purpose" (WWWC 4: 220). Exactitude, therefore, is not a stylistic notation, but a moral condition that must be met for language to function properly.[23] A clipping in "Words" makes that point homiletically: "How many words men have dragged downwards with themselves, and made partakers more or less of their own fall. . . . What a multitude of words, originally harmless, have assumed a harmful meaning as their secondary lease; how many worthy have acquired an unworthy!" (DBN 3:703).

Within the framework of Cratylic thinking no issue is of greater significance than that of exactitude of meaning, and Whitman's concern for this issue is one sign of his refusal of the relativism of Hermogenism. He was certainly aware, however, of the arguments in favor of that position. As Nathanson observes, he willfully ignored "the linguistic relativism characteristic of the most sophisticated contemporary language theory," especially that of von Humboldt, whose ideas he otherwise admired (209). In picking and choosing ideas out of his reading, Whitman was driven by his concern for the broader implications of his Cratylism. More was at stake in his exactitude than the right choice of words. If words can have inherent meanings, if names can have inherent characteristics, then so too can poems, institutions, societies. "The poets of the kosmos," he declared in his 1855 preface, "advance through all interpositions and coverings and turmoils and stratagems to first principles. They are of use . . . they dissolve poverty from its need and riches from its conceit" (LG 721). In pragmatic terms, Whitman's belief meant that inexactitude could cause the poetic and social advance to fail, could cause the future-oriented project of American democracy to collapse. Thus, Whitman's nationalist agenda extended beyond the legislation of correct names for American places to include education of the public on the purpose and value of naming. Whitman's notebooks on words, although never completed, were motivated by this pedagogical aim, and he often made notes that suggest a working out of what tone to take in that work. Several include a direct address to the reader. In one he writes, "I am going to gossip with thee, Reader, about names—that is, indeed, about LANGUAGE. In a philosophic sense all words, all in the dictionary, are names:—but we will, restrict the term a good deal, in this gossip" (NUPM 5:1673). And in another:

> Hast thou never thought . . . how there are certain studies & researches . . . almost as necessary for thee, for thy body & soul, as food, as good air, as human association and friendship? and that this very one of Names (*Language*) is one of them?
>
> Then the satisfaction, the ease, the pleasure, the sanity, the growth upward, and the mellowing vigor, expansion, (I say the *democracy*) of such study! (NUPM 5:1622–23).

Names are democratic, he tells us, because "truly the things commonest & cheapest, nearest to us of all our daily lives" (NUPM 5:1622), a sentiment that Charles Olson would express even more strongly in the next century when he wrote (in lines cited in my first chapter), "You will speak in the next second by words which are, I propose, *prior* to all you are, and more

necessary to you, if you are properly engaged with what it is to be human, than your toes, or your opposable thumb" (CPr 424).

Whitman's belief that names are at once cognate with all language and a privileged category within it is a key instance of his positioning in relation to the language theory he knew. The point of controversy in this positioning was the elemental character of names. Are they the source of all language, out of which all other parts of speech and usages developed? Or are they instead a peculiar category with no broader significance for the understanding of language as a whole? Whitman confronts this problem head on in "Words" when he takes issue with a passage copied out of Webster. The passage begins with a reference to Antoine Court de Gébelin, whose etymological studies led to the claim that verbs "are posterior to language," which began "composed solely of monosyllables drawn from nature to paint natural or physical objects" (cited in Genette 93). Webster disagrees, and Whitman in turn disagrees with Webster:

> "Mons. Gebelin, in his Monde Primitif says the Noun is the root of the other words. — Never was a greater mistake.—That some nouns may be, is possible —but, as languages are now constructed, it is demonstrable that the verb is the radix or stock from which have sprung most of the nouns, adjectives, and other parts of speech belonging to the same family. This is ~~the~~ result of all my researches in the origin of languages."
>
> ***
>
> (Me, W. W. I think with the Frenchman that nouns begin the matter.—Language may have since been scraped and drenched down to the completer state, which makes the verbs the centres, for grammatical purposes; but, in the nature of things, nouns must have been first, and essentially remain so.—(DBN 3:715)

Whitman supports this argument a few pages later with a quote from von Humboldt: "Language expresses originally objects only, and leaves the understanding to supply the connecting form—afterwards facilitating and improving the connections and relations by degrees" (DBN 3:721). Whitman did take "the connecting form" into account in his thinking about language (as when he described verbs as the "blood and [~~dynamic be~~] circulation" of the social body [NUPM 5:1697), but the Cratylic constitution of his poetics dictated an almost exclusive emphasis on what Zemach calls "Substance Logic," the integration of word and thing signified by a name, whose elemental character he links to the corporeal mise en scène of the singular and incontrovertible existence of common things: objects, people, occupations, and places. As Whitman saw it, "[t]he full history of Names would be the total of human, and all other history" (NUPM 5:1695).

Overall, what we have in Whitman is a continual process of Cratylization in which his poetic project moves beyond mere description or dramatization (the secondary Cratylism of Mimetism) to become, as he conceived it, the instantiation of the things named. Whitman often presents this goal as a repudiation of art (a stance that parallels his disparagement of "polished fossil language"). Thus, "[i]n these *Leaves*," he writes, "every thing is literally photographed. Nothing is poetized, no divergence, not a step, not an inch, nothing for beauty's sake, no euphemism, no rhyme" (NUPM 4:1323–34). In one of his last poems, the same point is expressed wistfully, not as a claim, but in the form of a desire:

> Had I the choice to tally greatest bards,
> To limn their portraits, stately, beautiful, and emulate at will,
> Homer with all his wars and warriors—Hector, Achilles, Ajax,
> Or Shakspere's woe-entangled Hamlet, Lear, Othello—Tennyson's fair ladies,
> Metre or wit the best, or choice conceit to wield in perfect rhyme, delight of singers;
> These, these, O sea, all these I'd gladly barter,
> Would you the undulations of one wave, its trick to me transfer,
> Or breathe one breath of yours upon my verse,
> And leave its odor there. (LG 514)

Whitman's burden, then, is to present the world in all its materiality, without mediation, granting that mediating language *is* invoked in the poems, but precisely as a manifestation of nature. As nicely summarized by Mark Bauerlein:

> Whitman explicitly calls attention to his protagonists' encounters with signs and their resulting predicament. He frequently employs the word "sign" or its equivalent ("word," "type," "symbol," "clew," "hint," "mark," and so on), sometimes at crucial dramatic occasions, often making the poem's outcome rest upon how that sign is read. "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" culminates in "the sea" revealing to the boy "the word final, superior to all." "As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life," originally published in *Atlantic Monthly* (April 1860) as "Bardic Symbols," begins with the poet wandering along the shore "seeking types." In "When I Read the Book," Whitman calls his knowledge of his "real life" "a few diffused faint clews and indirections." And in "Song of Myself," when a child asks the poet, "What is the grass?"—a significant question

considering the book's title—Whitman says, among other things, "I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic." (21)

Bauerlein's examples point toward the Emersonian element in Whitman, nature's language establishing human beings in a hermeneutic relationship to reality. More often, however, the language of nature bestows its meanings upon Whitman in the form of a gift, a bounty of meaning requiring no interpretation and no artifice. In "Song at Sunset" he exclaims:

O amazement of things—even the least particle!
O spirituality of things!
O strain musical flowing through ages and continents, now reaching me and America!
I take your strong chords, intersperse them, and cheerfully pass them forward. (LG 496)

And in "Song of the Open Road":

You air that serves me with breath to speak!
You objects that call from diffusion my meanings and give them shape! (LG 150)

The "barbaric yawp" in "Song of Myself" sounded "over the roofs of the world" (LG 89) is presumably modeled on the "*Ya-honk*" of "the wild gander" sounded down to the poet "like an invitation," about which Whitman says, "The pert may suppose it meaningless, but I listening close, / Find its purpose and place up there toward the wintry sky" (LG 40).

Whitman's name-language is evoked most directly in his famous catalogues, not only in their emphasis on *things* ("hypostatized class names imagined as magically incarnate particulars," in Nathanson's words [47]), but also in their *form*, which hews to what he himself conceived of as the elemental properties of language. ("It is quite astonishing how many nouns . . . Whitman is able to cram into a sentence or what passes for such," writes Erik Ingvar Thurin [77].) In his catalogues, of course, Whitman also presents his vision of society, expressing his belief (always implicit, sometimes explicit) that society itself makes and is in turn made by the resulting poem. In "A Song for Occupations," for example, after a long list of trades, tools, and materials ("Blacksmithing, glass-blowing, nail-making, coopering, tin-roofing, shingle-dressing, / Ship-joining, dock-building, fish-curing, flagging of sidewalks by flaggers, / The pump, the pile-driver,

the great derrick, the coal-kiln and brick-kiln," etc. [LG 216]), Whitman concludes:

> The hourly routine of your own or any man's life, the shop, the yard, store, or factory,
> These shows all near you by day and night—workman! whoever you are, your daily life!
> In that and them the heft of the heaviest—in that and them far more than you estimated, . . .
> In them realities for you and me, in them poems for you and me, . . .
> In them the development good—in them all themes, hints, possibilities. (LG 217–18)

The renewal of society, then, is itself a process of Cratylization, the conversion of arbitrary distinctions and mere tradition into the living language of democracy. Through substantial words, amelioration; through poems of materials, a song for these States; through song, chorus, and chant, the new society proportionate to nature; through the power of names, history's cycles forwarded.[24]

This page intentionally left blank

CHAPTER 3

The Linguistic Ultimate: Laura (Riding) Jackson and the Language of Truth

> *Hermogenes*: Any name which you give, in my opinion, is the right one, and if you change that and give another, the new name is as correct as the old—we frequently change the names of our slaves, and the newly imposed name is as good as the old. For there is no name given to anything by nature; all is convention and habit of the users. . . .
> *Socrates*: But how about truth, then?
>
> Plato, *Cratylus* 384d, 385b

> But where are our natural words to be found? The words of common talk are shreds, slivers, dabs, blobs, sometimes no more than shadows, or vapors; they are scarcely language, rather the refuse of repeated haphazard word-using. The words of more formal or more stylized use, of contrived address, are in the main imitation of real words—"good" imitations, in the higher literary levels; in their best use of words, people rarely do more than use plausible versions of the dimly-known originals. However, our words—the *real* things—are at hand, at mind, all the while.
>
> Laura (Riding) Jackson, "The Road to, in, and away from, Poetry"

The survival of Cratylism into the modernist period and beyond makes clear that Whitman's linguistic project of renewing society through language was not a peculiarity of his own poetics or historical moment. The long career of Laura (Riding) Jackson provides an

equally compelling example.[1] From 1925, when she announced herself to the literary world in a bold manifesto calling for spiritual renewal through poetry, until her death in 1991, when she was preparing several manuscripts on language and the human condition for publication, (Riding) Jackson developed and affirmed her guiding belief that individual and collective life achieve their full dignity through language, and that, as a consequence, language provides a natural path to the achievement of the common good. Like Whitman, she conjoined intense research into language with an encompassing social vision. Indeed, her research was far more thorough, sophisticated, and longer lasting than his. While Whitman's surviving writings on language are principally clustered in the mid- to late-1850s, dating from shortly after the appearance of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, (Riding) Jackson spent half a century producing her monumental *Rational Meaning*. Written with her husband, Schuyler B. Jackson, and published six years after her death, *Rational Meaning*'s 400-plus pages (supplemented with another hundred pages of essays) address the logical foundations of words, in part through a polemical review of linguistic theories spanning the ages from Plato to Chomsky.[2] No other poet, certainly no other American poet, has ever produced so ambitious and systematic a work of linguistic philosophy; that this work is Cratylist in orientation only makes it the more remarkable. My description, however, requires some adjustments, as (Riding) Jackson did not write this book *as* a poet, but began it most likely in 1941, at a time when she had, in her own words, "[come] to see poetry . . . as a harmful ingredient of our linguistic life" (LRJR 203). Thus, unlike Walt Whitman (or, later, Charles Olson), who, confronting the unavailability of Cratylism in everyday language, sought to find it in poetry, (Riding) Jackson confronted the unavailability of Cratylism in poetry and sought to find it in words close "at hand, at mind," in an everyday language fully realized by proper understanding and use (LRJR 251).

(Riding) Jackson's interest in linguistics developed early but not immediately in her writing life. By 1933, she was planning a children's dictionary—soon to be a dictionary for adults—a project that underwent many changes and never saw the light of day. Her first published work on language as such was an essay written with Robert Graves, "The Exercise of English," which appeared in 1936. Her renunciation of poetry followed only a few years later, a renunciation due to changes in her attitude about language and roughly coinciding with her embrace of Cratylism. I say roughly because we have no precise chronology for this crucial period of transition, a period that saw three significant, overlapping changes in direction: her abandonment of literary projects in order to research and write what became known as *Rational Meaning*; her repudiation of poetry and poetic language in favor of

a notion of a perfect, natural language; and her change of name from "Laura Riding" to "Laura (Riding) Jackson." The first of these shifts was a change of practice; the second, an ideological change; the third, a public change that marked the irrevocability of the first two. The first two changes, though obviously related, did not occur together, however, or even in discreet, separate moments, but came instead in stages of realization and decision—sometimes restrospective realizations and decisions—beginning about 1938 and only becoming definitive and public in 1955.[3] There are, in any case, two general phases in (Riding) Jackson's career. These are ordinarily divided by her renunciation of poetry, and this is understandable since her renunciation is so singular an act, and since her later writings have largely been read by poets, which, at least in terms of reception, places the whole of her career within a horizon illuminated by poetic concerns.[4] From (Riding) Jackson's own perspective, however, and from my own perspective in this book, the more significant break is in her evaluation of everyday language, and so I prefer to mark this division between phases as a turn to Cratylism.[5] Before 1938, (Riding) Jackson believed in the manner of a Mimetist that perfection in language was a goal, not a given, and she further believed that this goal could best be achieved in poetry, which she conceived of as a rectification of everyday language. Sometime after 1938, but certainly by 1955, she rejected both the notion of poetry as rectification and the disparagement of everyday language that supported it; perfection became instead a given of language that only required a better practice in order to be realized. This better practice was sometimes defined as a more attentive listening to the language of the mind, sometimes as greater exactitude in externally established usage.

Even before her turn to Cratylism, during her intense involvement in poetry (when she was still publishing under the name "Laura Riding"), (Riding) Jackson evinced a strong disposition toward the exactitude that became so central to her later linguistic projects. *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (1927, coauthored with Robert Graves) offers a good indication of this disposition. A justification of modernist difficulty framed for the "plain reader," *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* presents a series of meticulous interpretations of poems by Hart Crane, E. E. Cummings, T. S. Eliot, H. D., Marianne Moore, Edith Sitwell, Gertrude Stein, William Carlos Williams, and William Butler Yeats, among others. The readings have as their goal "letting the poem interpret itself" (SMP 71), but do so by attending with what was then an unusual degree of exactness to the meaning of each word, to syntax, and to such seemingly small details as punctuation and line break. The method was not intended to be specific to modernism. In fact, the most famous of these readings concerns a sonnet by Shakespeare and had a formative impact on William Empson, leading by way of Empson to

the interpretive practices of the New Critics.[6] More indicative of (Riding) Jackson's own interests, however, is the emphasis on literalism that went with this methodology, a literalism that in some cases becomes a repudiation of interpretation. The most extreme example of this is a reading of a poem of Riding's own. Acknowledging that the poem's "'obscurity'... would probably cause it to be put aside by the critic after he had allowed it the customary two-minute reading" (66), Riding and Graves argue strenuously against the value of paraphrase in overcoming that obscurity, declaring without a hint of irony:

> If, then, the author of the lines beginning "The rugged black of anger" were asked to explain their meaning, the only proper reply would be to repeat the lines, perhaps with greater emphasis.... If the poet were pressed to employ some familiar metaphor or simile to explain them, he would have to prefix his remarks with some such insult: "At your request I shall make my poem into a bad imitation of itself."... What are we to do, then, since the poem really seems to mean what it says? All we can do is to let it interpret itself, without introducing any new associations, or, if possible, any new words. (SMP 68–69, 71)

And at this point they quote the poem at length. The emphasis on close attention to individual words and the prizing of literalness in *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* leads logically to the dictionary project mentioned above, and which some commentators take as the origin of what became *Rational Meaning*. In its first conception, the project was to be a collaboration with Graves, "a straightforward dictionary omitting words like cat, dog, table, chair, etc., with which children are instinctively familiar, and concentrating quite seriously on words that puzzled children and for which they find in ordinary dictionaries explanations that mean little to them and they really do mean little."[7] After the focus shifted from children to adults, Alan Hodge and Jacob Bronowski joined the collaboration, now titled *A Dictionary of Related Meanings*. By "related," the authors meant something akin to a thesaurus, but "not like Roget's Thesaurus jumbling together a lot of words of different value and not explaining the distinction between them."[8] Exactitude required that they sort out categories of words according to their similarities and differences, and not stop at definitions. Bronowski (a Cambridge mathematician who had joined Riding and Graves in Majorca) eventually left the group in disagreement, and Riding later convinced the other two to leave the project as well, allowing her to continue the work on her own with Schuyler Jackson. Graves and Hodge absorbed some of their work into *The Reader over Your Shoulder* (1943), a

book that bears comparison with *A Survey of Modernist Poetry*. The Jacksons stuck longer with the project, retitled in 1942 *The True Word: A Dictionary and Thesaurus of Coherent Language* and then a year later to *A Dictionary of Analogous Words*, but in 1946, Little, Brown, which had offered a contract in 1939, rescinded it over the authors' inability to meet their deadline, and in 1950 the Jacksons themselves realized that they could not bring the project to completion.[9] More necessary than the dictionary, in any case, they found, was "the examination of the general actuality of language, the definition of linguistic principles, the formulation of linguistic values, the exploration of the nature of meaning itself," and in this pursuit they truly embarked upon the writing of *Rational Meaning* (quoted in Friedmann at 391).

Because (Riding) Jackson's most widely known work from after her renunciation of poetry is *The Telling*, a beautifully written summation of her philosophy of life, language, truth, and community (first published in *Chelsea* in 1967, reprinted as a book with extensive annotations and an additional preface in 1972), it has been easy to overlook the fact that *Rational Meaning* was the more significant project for (Riding) Jackson herself. Moreover, the unavailability of the text until very recently (it was published in 1997) has kept readers from fully assimilating *Rational Meaning*'s argument into their accounts of her career. As a consequence, the nature of language in her philosophy and the depth of her thinking about it have been obscured. In *The Telling*, language is a vehicle for truth, but the emphasis is on the speakers of language and on the facilitating role they play in truth's disclosure. *Rational Meaning*, by contrast, focuses relentlessly on the vehicle—not language as an abstraction to be situated in a broader philosophy, but as the very matter of the mind, a natural phenomenon that must be understood in all its particulars in order to guarantee the proper and truthful uses announced in *The Telling*. Subtitled *A New Foundation for the Definitions of Words*, *Rational Meaning* indeed conceives of language as a body of words, deemphasizing syntax (a subject taken up in but one of the book's seven sections). Her principal argument is that words are natural facts, the perfect expression of reality, and that a correct understanding of their meanings permits the mind to achieve its full dignity and potential; a word's meaning is "rational" insofar as it allows its user to comprehend the inner essence of reality. As a corollary of this argument, she warns that the rational use of words can easily be lost under the sway of professionalized intellectual authorities who, for one reason or another, do not recognize the true nature of words. Substantial portions of *Rational Meaning* are concerned with answering these authorities, occasionally in a harshly polemical manner. The list of opponents is extensive, and includes Plato, Aristotle, Locke, Peirce, Wittgenstein, Ogden and Richards, Levi-Strauss, and Derrida, all deemed to be, with various degrees

of culpability, false guardians of language, overseers of "barbaric developments" in language studies, enemies of the orderly knowledge of words, and robbers of the "internal realities of . . . [language] existence" (109, 113, 359). Much of the book involves reiteration of key points, but the material is neatly parsed in a manner that facilitates (Riding) Jackson's pedagogical purposes. Divided into seven parts, each made up of three chapters (though some of the parts also have forewords), *Rational Meaning* has four general movements: parts one through three present the book's objectives along with an extensive review of opposing linguistic and philosophical studies; parts four and five examine the principles of definition, proposing a new partition of words into names, nouns, terms, and vocables; part six looks at syntax; and part seven closes with a prospectus for the future of lexicography. In addition to these four movements, the book as finally published includes a foreword and three prefaces, all written by (Riding) Jackson after her husband's death, and thirteen supplementary essays on such topics as "The Externalistic View of Language," "The Universal Pattern of Language," "Ambiguity," and "The Physical Aspects of Words" (the last of these a rebuke to structuralist and post-structuralist schools of thought).

(Riding) Jackson did not pour all her energies as a student of language into her work with Schuyler B. Jackson on *Rational Meaning*. There are numerous other essays on linguistic topics, some published in her lifetime (almost all of these in *Chelsea*), the majority composed for two posthumously published collections that (Riding) Jackson began preparing in her last two decades, *Under The Mind's Watch: Concerning Issues of Language, Literature, Life of Contemporary Bearing* and *The Failure of Poetry, The Promise of Language*.[10] Almost all of these essays are short, reiterating in new ways the analyses of *Rational Meaning*. The majority are polemical in nature, aimed at defining (Riding) Jackson's position on language and distinguishing her thought from that of other modern and contemporary theorists, linguists, and philosophers. Her tone is often censorious, if not scathing, as revealed in her titles: "On Some Absurdities in Contemporary Thinking on Language," "Structuralism, and the General Decline in Human Intellectual Well-Being," "Lexicographical Abandon," "Making Do with Deterioration."[11] Correct linguistic usage and the correction of fallacious understandings of language are the dominant topics. (Riding) Jackson believed ardently in the possibility of a good and true usage accessible to all speakers and felt besieged by contemporary philosophy's acceptance of a radical form of Conventionalism as dogma and its nonchalance toward infinite variations in meaning. Language in a Cratylic project is univocal and unvarying in meaning; it is thus not surprising to find that (Riding) Jackson perceived a dismayed ignorance in contemporary attitudes. As she

complains in "Lexicographical Abandon," "the principle of consistency of meaning, that is the foundation-principle of the existence of language," has "recede[d] into historical distance" under the impact of a "broadening practice of vagrancy of meaning in word-usage" (UMW 110). The piling up of definition for a single word, she vehemently argues, amounts to a radical "dissolution" of language's "proprieties," which she sees as a social problem as well as a linguistic one. As in Plato's *Cratylus*, once the foundational rules of the proper and correct use of words are violated, language becomes mere noise. The exposure to such noise, (Riding) Jackson contends, destroys the proper functioning of our minds.

The social implications of this view of language are given their most optimistic and most stirring treatment in *The Telling*, but all of (Riding) Jackson's late work attends to them. In the second phase of her career, Whitman's dream of a progressive democracy returns, "a new human unity founded on the *universal* principle of language" (Masopust 50, emphasis added). Thus, while she signals with eloquence her belief that Americans have a prophetic task to fulfill, her Cratylism is only peripherally concerned with language as a national phenomenon. The special quality of America, for her, is its historical openness, an openness that makes possible an appreciation of the universal.[12] This is made clear in *The Telling*, in a passage where (Riding) Jackson looks at the English language through two national lenses, the British and American:

> [I]f one looks at the English through the magnifying-glass of one's appreciation of the virtues of their language, as I have, one finds them impressive by reason of its nobility. But, if one looks at the Americans through the magnifying-glass of one's American birth, as I have, and knows the English language also as one's own, its virtues gradually acquire in one's eyes a broad human history. (T 74)

America as such held no particular interest for her, and she could be dismissive of the American failure to be American in the prophetic sense.[13] What mattered to her was recovering and making available a sense of the ultimate dignity of human and social life. This recovery, she consistently argued, could only be attained through a proper use of language. Like Whitman, she believed that America's prophetic task—the renewal of society—was intrinsically linked to the fate of the language that bound its people together. The principal difference between the two lies in the trajectories of their careers. Whitman's socially utopian Cratylism stands at the origin of his poetic work, and he never waivers from it, notwithstanding the accommodations that allowed him to work with the imperfect language of his time. (Riding)

Jackson, by contrast, embraced Cratylism midway through her writing life, at a crucial point of transition that saw her, in fact, abandon poetry. In her own eyes, however, the work she subsequently produced fulfilled the work of her poetry by achieving the perfect communion of minds that her earlier poetic work sought without success.

In the 1970s, (Riding) Jackson acknowledged the slow and at time tortured process of the emergence of her mature beliefs.[14] In the first preface to *Rational Meaning*, written in 1973, she revisited her past, locating her shift from poetry to language study in a growing impatience with the restriction of a literary perspective:

> In the late 'thirties a sense of crisis entered into my view of language and words, and of the human linguistic condition, and I bent myself towards putting my plan for a book of definitions . . . into practical effect. . . . I conceived of my writing in general and of the special lexicographal project as being work for truth's sake. But my vision of what could be done for truth's sake began, towards the close of the decade of the 'thirties, to enlarge in scope. I became impatient with literary horizons, and restive, also, in the simplification of the problems of word-meaning knowledge that this project in its inception-stage wrought. (RM 15–16)

Moving beyond a literary horizon did not in itself resolve the crisis. An ongoing internal questioning prodded (Riding) Jackson toward her mature position. As she put it in the introduction of a 1976 issue of *Chelsea* dedicated to her work:

> It has taken long for the lines of absolute difference to show, as between true and false . . .
>
> Taken long for everything, the content of life's apparent disagreement with itself, to be ejected into total viewability, the incompatibles at last dividing into that which must pass and that which *is*.
>
> My writing has moved in the rhythms of life's debate. (Taken 13)

This chapter traces that long debate and highlights the self-reflexivity with which she arrived at her Cratylism, at what she called in a late essay the "linguistic ultimate" (LRJR 331). In the first section, "The Emergence of a Cratylist," I discuss her gradual transition from an equivocation between Mimetism and Idealism to a Cratylism in which traces of Idealism (transformed by way of Spinoza into a "natural spiritual speech" [LRJR 206])

can be found. As stated above in my analysis of Plato's dialogue, the Idealist stance locates the achievement of truth in intuitions independent of language and in the apprehension of a reality obscured by the diversity of its material manifestations. This undercurrent of Idealism was thus in conflict with the predominant Mimetism of her first phase, in which poetry was assigned the task of achieving truth through the rectification of language. Her decision to abandon poetry can thus be understood as a necessary step in the overcoming of an impasse to which Socrates himself fell victim, between the perfecting mimesis he advocated throughout the dialogue and the doctrine of forms hinted at in the conclusion. In the second section, "The Failure of Poetry," I look more closely at this impasse, showing that (Riding) Jackson's ultimate renunciation of poetry in favor of a program of natural language was not provoked by a belated recognition of poetry's failure, but by a reappraisal of the value of that failure as a mediate stage in the achievement of truth. Embracing Cratylism allowed her to avoid mediate stages altogether, situating truth in the plenitude of everyday language correctly understood and used. My third section, "Natural Literateness," looks at (Riding) Jackson's theoretical account of that plenitude in *Rational Meaning*. I begin with her general account of the natural in language and the original, rigorous way she brings this Cratylism into conformity with a Spinozist conception of rationality. A detailed examination of her treatment of words follows, showing how, notwithstanding her privileging of nouns, she replaces a hierarchy of parts of speech with a classification of language into "true words," "terms," "names," and "vocables" (RM 376). I conclude with a discussion of the morality of good usage (Riding) Jackson propounds, what she calls "a new conception of literateness," and the social implications of that morality (RM 239).

The Emergence of a Cratylist

As mentioned in the previous pages, there are two general phases in (Riding) Jackson's career: a first phase of approximately fifteen to twenty years, beginning in 1923, in which she believed it was the task of poetry to improve upon language; and a second phase, lasting until the end of her life, in which she rejected the notion of improvement, committing herself to the realization of what everyday language already permits. Throughout her life, her primary concern remained the same: to bring about a more exact and truthful linguistic practice.[15] But language itself she conceived of in different terms in the different phases. In this section, I will discuss that difference as the movement from a Mimetism complicated by currents of Idealism to Cratylism. As also mentioned in the previous pages, the exact moment of the change

is impossible to specify, happening as it did through a number of individual realizations and decisions. The best known of the changes is (Riding) Jackson's repudiation of poetry, effected for all practical purposes with the publication of her 1938 *Collected Poems* but first announced publicly in 1955. A less well-known but perhaps more important moment of transition is to be found in *The World and Ourselves*, also 1938, a text in which she first presents her idea of "pure language"—the earliest manifestation of her emerging Cratylism. During the first phase of her career, she considered language, at least as actually used, an imperfect medium for the transmission of thought, a "fretting substance" unequal to the demands of truth, unequal to reality (PLR 137). She believed that poetry could rectify everyday language ("the social rhythmic clutter of communication" [A 116]) of all its accidental falsities and imperfections, and thus elevate language to a superior epistemic and ethical level. This belief that everyday language obfuscates our perception of reality whereas poetic language retains the capacity for presenting it truly and more exactly was foundational.[16] Poetry, to borrow L. S. Dembo's words, had for her the epochal "power of a logos that immediately reveals the poet's encounter with bare reality" (4). Her attempt to achieve such a poetic logos was, according to my account, a contemporary rendition of Socrates's practice of "perfecting mimesis," a mimesis conducted by the dialectician (the knower of words), but not without some hidden feeling of ambivalence toward the intrinsic limitations of human language. This ambivalence helps explain the Idealist note on which the *Cratylus* dialogue ends, a note that (Riding) Jackson also sounds when she writes that "Exactly I and exactly the world / Fail to meet by a moment and a word" (PLR 198). I would recall here that Socrates's commitment to a perfecting mimesis (his mediation between the linguistic Conventionalism of Hermogenes and the Naturalism of Cratylus) is ultimately undermined by his admission that, no matter how correct or proper nouns can become through the intervention of the dialectician, language does not give us access to truth, which can be known only through ideas that, as Socrates defines them in this dialogue, exist outside the realm of the linguistically representable. Socrates's Idealism, based on the claim that it is not possible to address philosophical truths through language, brings a disturbing rupture in the understanding of the epistemological possibilities of correct naming. In a fashion similar to Socrates, (Riding) Jackson in her first phase acknowledged the arbitrary nature of language, accepting the prevalent Conventionalism of twentieth-century linguistic studies; at the same time, she made the pursuit of truth through exactitude (or through correctness, in the terms of Plato's dialogue) a theme of capital importance. She became a dialectician in the Socratic sense, a specialized user of words, capable of determining if and when "a name is rightly given" (*Cratylus* 390d).

Like Socrates, however, her commitment to such perfecting mimesis was undermined by her Idealist belief that no final truth can be affirmed or even arrived at in language, since language (she then maintained) is inherently flawed and ultimately inadequate. Notwithstanding the exalted task she assigned to poetry in her first phase, she was not shy about acknowledging its ultimate "futility" (FA 280). Thus, a brief essay in *Anarchism Is Not Enough* that declares "Poetry is an attempt to make language do more than express; to make it work; to redistribute intelligence by means of the word," goes on to say, "Poetry always faces, and generally meets with, failure" (A 14). I will take up this equivocation in greater detail in my next section. For now, what matters most is that the dynamic of (Riding) Jackson's first phase, like the dynamic of Socrates's thought in the *Cratylus*, was marked by the irresolution of her twofold commitments to Mimetism and Idealism. Her turn away from poetry was, in all likelihood, caused by her growing awareness of the impasse this twofold commitment produced. She could overcome this impasse only by turning away from both Mimetism and Idealism and embracing Cratylism. Poetry was eclipsed by this radical change of orientation in her philosophy of language, for poetry was only a means to an end, not an end in itself.

The eclipse of poetry took place over a decade, from 1938 to 1948, although it was officially announced in 1955 (and at that time dated back to 1942). During this transitional period, (Riding) Jackson arrived at a radical reassessment of her sense of what everyday language can achieve and transformed herself from an advocate for poetry's redemptive powers to an advocate for the natural correctness of language. In this new role she no longer professed the need for poetry as a superior form of expression meant to correct the shortcomings of everyday use. In her first public acknowledgment of the change in her views, she presented herself as proud of her poetry, although eager to point out its shortcomings:

> I foretold in my poems the coming of a time of truth; the necessity and imminence of this was with increasing force their inspiration. . . . I circumvented the inveterate unveraciousness of poetry as an art of creating simulacra of truth. My whole art was an anticipating of the intonations of truth; thus my word-style had a peculiar rectitude of accent. My words were still, however, the words of a careless tradition of speech, and their intractability as such drew me ever closer to the crux of the human problem: the question of the validity of words. (Bio2 482)

Adumbrated in this rationale is her realization that no specialized practice such as poetry was needed to elevate everyday language to a superior epistemic and ethical level. Everyday language, however, must be properly

used, a determining condition that, in (Riding) Jackson's eyes, was violated by the "careless tradition of speech" of her contemporaries: "[T]he meaning of words, I had come to feel, had to be known with perfect distinctness before they could be used with perfect truthfulness" (Bio2 483). Measured by this standard, the perfecting mimesis of poetry fails in its supposed rectification of everyday language because its special qualities (i.e., rhythm, rhyme, metaphor), far from escaping "the careless tradition of speech," augment that carelessness. Noteworthy in this regard is (Riding) Jackson's earlier, negative description of everyday language as "social *rhythmic* clutter," a description that defines everyday language in poetic terms. After her embrace of Cratylism, she would denigrate poetry precisely for such sensual qualities. Whatever the positive virtues her own poetry achieved, she declared in a 1962 BBC broadcast, they were "ever sucked into the whorl of poetic artifice, with its overpowering necessities of patterned rhythm and harmonic sound-play, which work distortions upon the natural properties of tone and word" (LRJR 203). In her second phase, then, she found poetic language guilty of presenting mere "*simulacra* of truth," which it did by distracting its users (both makers and readers/hearers) from the unadorned meaning of the words they use. In this suspicion of the sensual properties of language, (Riding) Jackson *apparently* departs from the Cratylic model. In Plato's dialogue, for example, in articulating Cratylus's position, Socrates asks (referring to the role of the *nomothete*), "Then, as to names, ought not our legislator also to know how to put the true natural name of each thing into sounds and syllables, and to make and give all names with a view to the ideal name, if he is to be a namer in any true sense?" (*Cratylus* 389d). (Riding) Jackson echoes this view when she writes in *Rational Meaning*, "A word is . . . a linguistically natural fact. It embodies its function, is a meaning-process in which sound and meaning are inseparably joined" (210). There is a difference, however, between a just relation linking sound and meaning in natural language and an exaggerated emphasis on sound meant to compensate for imprecisions of use. The latter is what (Riding) Jackson came to find in poetry. Yet her suspicion of the sensual properties of language goes further, in a way that marks the originality of her version of Cratylism, an originality that is partly the consequence of her emphasis on the spiritual character of truth. Whitman too tried to emphasize the spiritual significance of a natural language, but his insistence on the *substantiality* of words in such a language made it difficult for him to reconcile his Cratylism with what was, at root, an enthusiasm for Hegel's vision of history. (Riding) Jackson was not so concerned about substantiality, no doubt because of her repudiation of poetry. "Poetry is linguistically freakish," she declared in 1962, "and it is not, in its freakishness, the natural spiritual speech of human beings" (LRJR 206).

(Riding) Jackson's embrace of this "natural spiritual speech" was a gradual process and did not always proceed in a straight line. Cratylic inclinations circulated in her work throughout the 1930s. Yet even as she moved toward a recognition of the superiority of the natural over the artifice of the poetic, she remained caught in the impasse of reconciling the perfecting mimesis of poetry to the ideal of truth her poetry foretold. Ultimately, she overcame the impasse by embracing Cratylism, but the Idealist component of her project survived, in altered form, in her yoking of the natural and spiritual. Certain aspects of her Mimetism also survived in the late phase; she ceased to repudiate everyday language, but her critique of "the careless tradition of speech" retains something of the character of her perfecting mimesis. Notwithstanding the interlacement of old and new stances, however, a real difference is at stake in the transformation of (Riding) Jackson's perfecting mimesis to a critique of carelessness (that is to say, of inexact and thus untruthful uses of language). Before her Cratylic turn, perfecting meant minimizing the similarities between truthful speech and everyday language; after, truthful speech could *only* be achieved in the form of everyday language. The persistence of a "careless tradition" in this second phase she attributes to willful misconstruction (i.e., to Conventionalism), which leads, for example, to an emphasis on context rather than inherent meaning, and thus to a cultural climate in which the very possibility of inherent meaning is forgotten. Instead of following the "*natural* in language," she claims, "the contemporary ordinary linguistic life of people" has fallen prey to "diffuseness," to "a morally inert sophistication" (PLR xxxiii, xli). Language, she claims in her late work, is naturally perfect, but, being a living thing, it loses its animate power through carelessness and/or through the professionalized usages that kill language by making it a jargon. Her arguments on this point recall almost exactly Whitman's complaints about the injuries that people inflict upon words.[17]

More obvious than the difference between her perfecting mimesis and critique of carelessness is the difference involved in her transformation of Idealism from a Platonic belief in a truth beyond language to a spiritual Cratylism in which language embodies the truth. For (Riding) Jackson, words are inherent to the mind, and when their inherent meanings are respected (i.e., when their coterminousness with things is recognized), they bring the mind and the world into complete agreement (i.e., they become manifestations of truth). In *Rational Meaning*, she presents this philosophy of language in direct opposition to the "externalistic" view that language is a physical experience of constantly moving sounds and shapes (RM 487). The externalistic view makes allowances for the arbitrariness of language and justifies the fact that meaning, even when grammatically and contextually

constrained, can be capriciously altered by the sonorous or visual characteristics of the linguistic sign, as happens in poetry. The traditional Idealist hierarchy in which understanding of the sensible is the lowest form of knowledge becomes in her critique of externalism an outspoken contempt for the erratic multiplication of pseudo-meanings. These pseudo-meanings and the conception of language that enables them are, in (Riding) Jackson's account, not only epistemically wrong, but socially dangerous and ethically reprehensible. The epistemic concerns of Cratylus are thus not simply echoed by (Riding) Jackson, but powerfully amplified. In her pursuit of truth, Cratylism has become a comprehensive social mission.

(Riding) Jackson's Idealist imprint, the source of her heightened contempt for the materialist approach to language, can be traced back to her earliest intellectual formation. In philosophy, the thought of Baruch Spinoza was a point of reference, one that (Riding) Jackson pays tribute to in several texts, including one of her very last. In poetry, the British Romantics were among her first loves, and she pays tribute to Shelley in particular.[18] Poetry, of course, was (Riding) Jackson's original sphere of intellectual engagement, and so Shelley was the more prominent intellectual model in her earlier phase. For example, in her first poetic manifesto, "A Prophecy or a Plea" (1925), she announced herself to the literary world as a proponent of "vigorous idealism," aligning herself with "egotists and romanticists," but those "romantics with the courage of realism" (FA 278).[19] The new figure of the poet she imagined was, by all measures, an American Shelley continuing, with renewed courage, the work of a few select predecessors, though it is not Shelley but Whitman to whom she pays the highest tribute.[20] This manifesto is an emblematic memento of the complex orientation of (Riding) Jackson's early thought. As Emerson had done in "The Poet," (Riding) Jackson in "A Prophecy" sends out a call to initiate a spiritual renaissance under the guiding example of poetry. The time is ready, she argues, for the advent of new poets, "men and women possessed of a passion they can communicate to life," eager to "put their hands upon the mysterious contour of life not to force meaning out of it, . . . but [to] press meaning upon it, outstare the stony countenance of it, make it flush with their own colors" (FA 278). The manifesto has a pronounced nationalistic element. The new poets are portrayed not as Shelleyan legislators but as a recognizable American character, "a pioneer . . . muscular . . . equipped not merely for static ecstasy or despair but for a progress into an unexplored terrain" (FA 279–80). The nationalistic impetus here is clearly indebted to Whitman, but the spirit of the manifesto comes from within the Romantic tradition of linguistic Platonism, of which Emerson is the more prominent American exponent. Poets, for Emerson, stood at the summit of the spiritual experience of their society and

were meant to radically transform the experience of ordinary people and everyday language use. Likewise, in (Riding) Jackson's prophecy, the forceful summoning of an "eternal form" presently missing is the exclusive task of poets, and the transformation of the real is promised as an overcoming rather than as an affirmation, as Whitman would have had it, of everyday language and quotidian reality (FA 275). The political design adumbrated in (Riding) Jackson's manifesto reflects the hierarchical Emersonian vision rather than the democratic Whitmanian call for a nation where every citizen, without distinctions of class or ethnicity, is a natural poet.[21] This social vision is different from the democratic utopia (Riding) Jackson will present four decades later in *The Telling*; her ideas about language in this early manifesto are likewise different from those expounded in *The Telling* and *Rational Meaning*. In her later work, complete understanding resides in all of us and is accessible by all through a more careful and rational approach to language. There are no leaders, no poets or poet-pioneers; the only guidance needed is that of the individual mind. Coming closer to Whitman, she imagines a radical democracy based on an equally radical individual autonomy, and like Whitman this radical vision is tied to a Cratylic project. At the same time, the particular form her Cratylism takes accommodates a trace of her early Idealism, not in the contradictory manner of Whitman's equivocation between language as material and language as spirit, but in a more holistically conceived "natural spiritual speech." Unlike Whitman (and later Olson), (Riding) Jackson is not attracted by the substantiality of natural language (the fact that language makes things present), but by the fact that language gives us the truth of things. For her, a Cratylic language is a pure language, a language of truth, and her Cratylism first emerges in this form in a book published the same year as her *Collected Poems*, *The World and Ourselves*.[22]

The World and Ourselves, one of the last books she published as "Laura Riding," is an unusual volume. It begins with a call for statements from an international group of friends, most of them writers, on the present state of the world; the letters of response follow. The book concludes with (Riding) Jackson's own commentary on the best course of action to be taken in regard to what was then an advanced state of political disarray (the book was planned in the midst of the Spanish Civil war, which forced her to leave Majorca, where she had been living since 1929; the book appeared on the eve of the Second World War). But *The World and Ourselves* was more than an international forum on the topic of correct conduct in the face of political crisis; it was explicitly designed to facilitate a collective imagination of the future renewal of society. What (Riding) Jackson herself imagined was a peaceful community of like-minded, spiritually evolved people (the same

people to whom the book was directed, many of them included in the section of correspondence), and she expected this community to exert an influence on the world through the force of their example; the last section of her book presents fourteen recommendations and twenty-seven resolutions regarding proper behavior. The last recommendation is titled "How to Speak Purely, in a Way to Avoid Fallacies of Language and Mediocrity of Thought," and it is here that (Riding) Jackson first presents her idea of a pure language. In her description, pure language is a language of linguistic exactitude and complete referential correctness, naturally occurring and emphatically *not* poetic, not tainted by artifice, and not spoiled by carelessness. It is, in other words, a Cratylic language:

> If we impose upon ourselves a discipline of keeping wordless until the thing thought of is fully and directly present to our minds—so that we do not speak until we are speaking as if with it—then we shall avoid . . . approximation to what we mean, the half-statement prepared for use before we have brought ourselves to actual experience of the thing we are speaking about. . . . In putting ourselves into language, rather than communicating by a pantomime of signs or not communicating at all, we are putting the very essence of our being into circulation. (WO 510, 513)

Those committed to a practice of pure language, then, live in truth and speak only the truth. No specialized guidance or teaching is needed, no rectifying of ordinary language, only a few gentle instructions meant to encourage speakers to recognize language in its naturalness by listening to their own thoughts as they take shape, rejecting professional authorities of all kinds (political, philosophical, religious, or literary). The practice of this language is the natural manifestation of a correct disposition toward language; this correct disposition, however, is attainable only by a few elect individuals, those whom (Riding) Jackson terms the "inside people" (their moral sensibilities and understanding of human affairs more evolved than those of the "outside people"). Inside and outside refer to the home and to public affairs, but also to the life of the mind and the world of action. (Riding) Jackson's epigraph to the book makes clear where her own priorities lie: "Order is not achieved by taking action but by taking thought." Elsewhere she writes:

> [W]e know that all these outside affairs outside the houses, both political and diplomatic . . . are the less important ones; they are subsidiary to what goes on inside the houses; they are intended to serve the amenities of private lives and all the inner realities of the mind. We, the "inside

> people," have left all these matters to those who seemed functionally best equipped to act as outside people. (WO 15–16)

With the world coming to crisis, she considers the relationship between the inside and the outside people:

> What shall we do? . . . A confused, outer brutality envelops the inner hearth of life where we cultivate all that we know to be precious and true. We on the inside are not afraid but we are unhappy: who dares to deny it? The danger is not to ourselves, but to the outside people. We are unhappy on their behalf. . . . Can we rehumanize them by thrusting ourselves into the outer employments—we who have dedicated ourselves to the inner ones? I think that such translation from inner to outer employment results only in the dehumanization of the inner faculties. (WO 16–17)

Not everyone, in other words, is ready or even equipped to be initiated into (Riding) Jackson's social utopia or into the use of the pure language that supports it. She is explicit on this point:

> Another obstacle in the way of serious attention to the important subjects and realness of language in discussing them is the democratic assumption that, since everyone is concerned in everything that goes on, all discussion and definition must be in a language equally intelligible to everyone. (WO 511–12)

Hence, though (Riding) Jackson's idea of pure language is Cratylic in its allegiance to the notion of inherent meaning, her overall imagination of its place in human society is not. In Plato's dialogue, the recognition of a language of naturally correct meanings is not the privilege of a few. Rather, it is the way language exists in the world, the way it could and ought to be experienced by all.[23]

The Cratylic propositions about language introduced in *The World and Ourselves* troubled (Riding) Jackson's work to its very foundations. A long period of public silence and very intense private labor followed, during which language study displaced nearly everything else in her thought to become the very horizon of her project, and within this horizon she came to include all of humanity. The antidemocratic note sounded in *The World and Ourselves* is hushed, with purity of language now linked to a universal human capacity for language and a universal desire for truth. ("Human beings," she writes in *Rational Meaning*, "come well-provided with equipment for the tasks of word-use as beings fated to live by words" [78].) This

is not to say that "spontaneous devotedness to words" is always realized in correct usage, but (Riding) Jackson is emphatic now that correct usage can only be developed in a language available to all (RM 79). "The only safe, unprejudiced ground for developing maximum attention to the individual word and to all words individually in their use," she writes, "is the open ground of general human speaking" (RM 171).

The first public announcement of (Riding) Jackson's mature thinking came in 1967 with the appearance of *The Telling*. In that key text, nothing survives of the distinction between inside and outside people, although the professionalized discourses that *The World and Ourselves* attributed to the latter are still disparaged. Written in plain, unadorned language, in a voice that is both intimate and inspirational, *The Telling* takes up the universal human desire for "the missing story of ourselves," by which (Riding) Jackson means, more simply, truth (T 9). Truth, she writes, can only come in the form of such a telling, for "there is no answer outside the story of us, truth-told by us to one another" (T 38). Much of the text absorbs her, however, in discussions of the scientific and humanistic discourses (including politics, religion, philosophy, psychoanalysis, and literature) that have long monopolized and long deformed the truthful telling of our story. The central thesis of her book is that the story does not need the intercession of these "patron-doctrines" (T 32), but can be known through individual acts of speech.[24] With religious fervor, she advances the proposition that the language needed resides within us, in our minds, and that the story to be told concerns the oneness of humanity and the sameness of souls that only appear to be separate and different. There are important similarities between this community of speakers and the community of the inside people in *The World and Ourselves*, but the very validity of *The Telling*'s social vision resides in its inclusiveness, and this inclusiveness is precisely what language allows us to recognize.[25] Through the act of telling one another our stories, exactly as those stories present themselves to the mind, we discover our sameness and unity. Collective truth-telling thus forms the foundation of an ethical society, one in which the sharing of words provides a model of reciprocal responsibility. "The self," (Riding) Jackson writes, "is implicated in the totality as a speaking self of it, owing it words that will put the seal of the Whole upon it. On what we each may thus say depends the happiness of the Whole, and our own" (T 6). We can here appreciate the difference between *The Telling* and *The World and Ourselves*. The truthful and natural language of *The Telling* aims at the common good; the pure language of *The World and Ourselves* aims at the good of a restricted part of society, and the benefits of the practice of linguistic purity stay within the circle of the inside people. In contrast to that elitist collective, the society of *The Telling*, also

fostered by belief in natural language, is radically equalizing, predicated on the promise that individual distinctions and aspirations will disappear once our story is fully told.[26] The principal obstacle to this ultimate unity of ourselves is the aforementioned reliance on professionalized discourses, a "falseness of word that mocks our human distinction" (T 27). Thus, she finds that "scientific-philosophic thinking . . . threw out the human substance of words" (T 12); that its words are "dressed" as truth but are "a counsel of sin" (T 14). Philosophy's words, though full of wisdom, "do not *live*" and therefore "are not the words waited for" (T 12). Politics uses "loosely . . . defined" words so as "to dignify impulsive intransigence" and "pedantry" (T 87). And poetry, which for (Riding) Jackson herself "had seemed the guardian angel of our words," is a travesty of professional self-absorption that can only present "a persuasive appearance of truth" (T 65, 66). Although she does not speak explicitly of everyday language, it is clear from her disparagement of jargons that that is what she means by the speech that comes naturally to mind in telling the story of ourselves. The point is made most adroitly in one of the supplemental essays to *Rational Meaning*. There she also makes clear that no one national language has a monopoly on the natural. The sameness of humanity manifests itself in diverse tongues, provided those tongues remain true to the law of univocal meaning. Thus, she writes, "Language everywhere opens up the interior of existence to complete occupation—which can occur 'in' any language if its laws of meaning are observed to the full of the human mind's loyalty to itself" (RM 495).

Both *The World and Ourselves* and *The Telling* champion everyday language as truthful language, but the earlier text relegates language to one of fourteen recommendations (the others include comments on private property, self-government, codes of conduct, and protection from the outside world). *The Telling* instead makes language the central fact of all aspects of society, with every other topic included in the book (the social contract, the common good, human destiny) treated in relation to a fully realized human speech. As revealed in her 1972 addenda, the project of *The Telling* was motivated by a desire to exemplify the possibilities of a diction that, although plain, has infinite potential (T 68). *The Telling* elevates this diction to the status of a "linguistically ordained ideal" capable of expressing "the total potential of human utterance," and the book itself aspires to that ideal. As (Riding) Jackson writes:

> I have aimed at a normal diction, a kind that could be described as developed, or expanded, normal, in distinction from the familiar varieties of normal—the formal normal, the informal normal, the static conventional normal, the unstable unconventional normal . . . What I have

> aimed at is an ideal. It is not my private invention, but a linguistically ordained ideal. . . . This ideal is the total potential of human utterance, which has no limits except the bounds of rational congruity that language sets for it—a wondrous-seeming potential, though natural, because still strange to our tongues; we may go anywhere within it, and outside of it there is only place for saying what is mad or wicked to say. (T 68)

Although eloquent in her praise of the potential of normal diction, (Riding) Jackson does not provide guidance on how to recognize "the bounds of rational congruity language sets for it." Similarly, she offers no indication of what measures need to be adopted so as to guarantee that language users do not exceed such bounds. Indeed, *The Telling* does not progress beyond the affirmation of "the natural instant intimacy of words and their speakers" (T 22) and the copious vituperations against the widespread "sickliness of word" that has "settl[ed] into our serious speech" (T 34). The practical explanations and guidance needed by these speakers are the subject matter of *Rational Meaning*.

The relation between thought and its linguistic actualization is a core epistemic concern that (Riding) Jackson deploys to underscore moral and existential positions. In *Rational Meaning,* this actualization is tied to a proper understanding of words and thus to proper lexicographical practice and to a proper "linguistic criticism," a philosophy of language concerned with "thinking *into* words, not *about* words, acquainting oneself with language as a structure of meaning-values" (RM 387). Adds (Riding) Jackson: "Only such a criticism can make room for moral considerations, concern with the moral factor in meaning" (RM 387). The existential implications of this critical practice are best worked out in "Body & Mind and the Linguistic Ultimate," one of her last essays. There, "thinking *into* words" (as *Rational Meaning* has it) is presented as the fullest manifestation of the "dignity" of "human beings," the realization of "the ultimate in human self-identification as mind, minds" (LRJR 311, 331). "Self-identification," then, involves recognition that the destiny of being human lies in a oneness made possible by language. *The Telling* concludes with this recognition, set forth as a mandate: "And look upon one another with the look of One. And speak with one another with a self in which the selfhood of One moves, lives" (T 54). In "Body & Mind and the Linguistic Ultimate," the emphasis is on the source of this oneness, which (Riding) Jackson calls "the all-embracing mind-nature of being" (LRJR 324), an existential philosophy offered in tribute to Spinoza, whose "substance monism" (according to which the multiplicity of nature descends from and belongs to a divine substance that human minds are equipped to understand) helped to

reconcile her Idealism and Cratylism.[27] The Idealist element in her thought survives in an appeal to the spiritual character of language. Words for her are substantial in Spinoza's sense, which "denies the application of the term [substance]... to finite things within the universe" (Wolfson 1:71), and not because they have the materiality of actual (and finite) things, as in Whitman's "substantial words," which are embodied in "[a]ir, soil, water, [and] fire" (LG 219–20). Yet in deriving language from the "all-embracing mind-nature of being," an adaptation perhaps of Spinoza's divine substance, she is crediting her natural language, as Cratylus did, to "a power more than human" (*Cratylus* 438c). For (Riding) Jackson, language is the "gift" of this power, except that power is a word she would reject, suggesting as it does an anthropomorphized divinity; she speaks instead of "the universal frame of being" (LRJR 325).[28] The full realization of this gift is what (Riding) Jackson calls the linguistic ultimate, "a total linguistic naturalization" of "the reality of mind—the reality of its [human] substance as mind" (LRJR 307). But notwithstanding the seemingly asocial character of these metaphysical pronouncements, "the history of the struggle of human beings to realize... their reality as human" is always recalled in the effort to achieve total linguistic naturalization (LRJR 223). "The linguistic ultimate—what language, of its provision for complete thinking and the saying of it, makes naturally possible—requires complete address of mind to the undertaken commitment of human presence to communicate the mind's humanly pertinent content" (LRJR 331). In this sense, poetry's inadequacy is not simply its failure to achieve truth, but its social failure in making good the struggle of human beings to achieve "their reality as human."

The Failure of Poetry

Looked at in light of her entire career, (Riding) Jackson's project as a poet becomes—as she herself presents it in her restrospective accounts—an abandoned attempt to arrive at the truth-telling to which her later works point more directly. In this construction of her career, the failure of poetry, because recognized and corrected through a change of direction away from poetry, acquires a kind of nobility. And certainly there is truth in this story, a story whose narration provides (Riding) Jackson's later work with some of its evangelical power. "I was religious in my devotion to poetry," she writes in the 1980 introduction to a reissue of her *Collected Poems*; " I believed in the possibility of transformation... of ordinary human verbal intercourse into a spiritually expressive, a spiritually successful order of human existence" (PLR xxx, xxxii). Once she lost faith in this possibility of transformation—so the story goes—poetry became an obstacle left behind with regret.

But (Riding) Jackson's poetry also permits the narration of another story, a story in which the failure of poetic language is accepted as an unavoidable stage in the achievement of a spiritual truth purged of language altogether. In this counternarrative, poetry's perfecting mimesis (its rectification of ordinary language) is coordinated with an apocalyptic Idealism. There was, then, no belated recognition of poetry's failure, only a belated revaluing of it. In her first phase, (Riding) Jackson's poetic project contained a destructive tendency, a courting of failure whereby the limits of Mimetism opened onto the perfection of a truth beyond language, a truth often evoked as a paradoxically silent language, an "utter telling / In truth's first soundlessness" (PLR 139). It must be noted, of course, that (Riding) Jackson, even in her first phase, did not always hold to this counternarrative. Quite often before her formal renunciation of poetry she did conceive of poetic language as an end in itself, declaring (as in a 1936 essay written with Alan Hodge) "that poetry is concerned with material as it is finally and indissolubly organized into truth" (Epil 2:150). What this equivocation indicates, however, is that (Riding) Jackson's attempt to reconcile Mimetism and Idealism brought her to an impasse insofar as she wanted her own language to be more than a stage in truth's revelation.[29] Cratylism provided her with a solution.

In 1980, (Riding) Jackson insisted that her poetry was not the expression of private sentiments or subjective knowledge, but a totalizing "dedication to . . . ultimate knowledge, a will to think, to be, with truth, to voice, to live articulately by, the essentialities of existence" (PLR xxx–xxxi). The defining traits of her poetics of "ultimate knowledge" resided in its determination to set poetry against an "ordinary language" whose opaque "imitativeness" and "common indulgence" cover up the more authentic "plane of utterance" on which the true "language of being" is spoken—or can be spoken—with "a full, universal explicitness" (PLR xxxiv, xxxv). This universal explicitness is what (Riding) Jackson sought in *Rational Meaning* by way of ordinary language, and setting it forth as the goal of her earlier belief in poetic language highlights the continuity of her two phases. But because of the equivocation noted above in her earlier evaluation of poetry, it is possible to restate her poetics of ultimate knowledge in a manner that highlights the discontinuity between phases. In her first phase, especially in the poems, (Riding) Jackson puts forward a complex proposition positing three stages in the achievement of truth: the muddle of ordinary language, the rectification of that muddle in poetry, and the ultimate arrival at an ideal of truth (sometimes presented as an ideal language). Ordinary language is an umbrella term covering all the careless, semantically empty, and therefore unethical uses of words that plague human communication. The ideal is language only paradoxically. It stands diametrically opposed to ordinary

uses of language and is the desired goal of poetic utterance, but is invariably described as silent or empty. Poetic language thus operates as the transition from the ordinary to the ideal. It prepares the advent of the ideal within ordinary language. In this construction of her project, poetic utterance for all its virtues cannot be equated with its ideal goal and for all its failings cannot be consigned to the muddle from which it sprang.

Poetry, then, can only approach the ideal, cannot achieve it, for this achievement spells the end of the language in which the poem is written. Yet (Riding) Jackson defines her poetic drive as a "smarting passion" for such an ending (PLR 139) and imagines a condition of unutterability represented by the congealed fragment of a death mask:

> [M]outhless lips break open
> Mutely astonished to rehearse
> The unutterable simple verse. (PLR 92)

In this poem, called "Opening of Eyes," "[t]hought looking out on thought" becomes caught in the "false horizons" of language (PLR 91). Only by remaining within itself, "not divided," can thought discover "[a] single whole of seeing" (PLR 92). In the poem, however, this "single whole" is not seen, but "foreseen" (PLR 92). The poem is a middle stage in a process of revelation (an opening of eyes), a stage that ought properly to be left behind by the superior, ineffable truth whose advent it prepares. Poetry, in other words, is given two tasks: the task of *telling* the struggle to establish its middle ground between ordinary language and truth, and the task of *foretelling* its own end, the doomsday of all language, including poetic language. "Poems," she half-facetiously tells us, is simply another word for "doom" (PJW10).

The dual task of telling and foretelling is not acknowledged in (Riding) Jackson's retrospective accounts of her poetic career. In my account, however, this twofold responsibility is important, for it illuminates the impasse to which she was brought by the Idealism that initially inspired her as a writer, an Idealism that her predominant Mimetism could accommodate only by setting severe limits to poetry's scope of accomplishment. What (Riding) Jackson came to perceive as the failure of her first phase, the unaccomplished (and unaccomplishable) realization of a rectified speech in poetry, is in essence a reframing in negative terms of her project of *telling*. That negativity was mitigated in her first phase by the project of *foretelling*, which upheld poetry apocalyptically by welcoming its supercession. The impasse lay in the fact that the ultimate goal of truth-telling was deferred in each case. Poetry, by definition, could never accomplish this goal, could only whet the appetite for it and prepare its advent. Yet the ideal it foretold could

never be fully accomplished either since its actualization would dissolve language. The mind might know this ideal, but no words, no matter how rectified, would be able to share it. Poetry's truth-telling was at best a foretelling of poetry's own destruction, one that brought no practical gain, certainly not the social gain that might come from a community established on the basis of a proper use of language as eventually described in *The World and Ourselves*. What we might say, then, is that, instead of *discovering* poetry's failure to reveal truth, (Riding) Jackson grew tired of it.

Whatever its limitations, however, poetry did offer (Riding) Jackson a refuge from the far greater and far less defensible imperfections (as she then saw them) of ordinary language. Thus, the most immediate task set for poetry was the analysis and denunciation of ordinary linguistic habits. But a methodological difficulty besets this task, since, for all its difference, poetry must still rely on the ordinary language it critiques. Poetry's success (its rectification of speech) depends upon its ability to dissociate itself from what it remains. When (Riding) Jackson's claims of success are strongest, the difficulty is ignored and poetry's perfecting mimesis is championed. Thus, in an editorial for the second volume of *Epilogue* (speaking of literature and not just poetry), she writes, "Literature is a world of effective truth; and people belong to this world in so far as the world of people discharges them from itself because they represent some extra burden of consciousness for which it has no room" (Epil 2:2). Poetry's dissociation from the ordinary is what Mimetism achieves by creating its own world: "The difference between life and literature is the difference between facts and truth, and the difference between littleness and entirety, and between the historically comprehensible and the ultimately knowable" (Epil 2:3). The ordinary is the historically comprehensible, but how precisely ordinary language is to be transcended (Riding) Jackson does not say. When, on the other hand, she concentrates on the difficulties besetting that transcendence, Mimetism is deemphasized and even, occasionally, disparaged in favor of apocalyptic Idealism. In *Anarchism Is Not Enough*, for example, (Riding) Jackson presents poetry as an analytic entity, which she distinguishes from the other arts, defined as synthetic. The synthetic arts are mimetic and social. Poetry, arriving at an ideal of truth so pure and singular as to thwart communication, is in this text anti-mimetic and asocial:

> An original poem is only seemingly synthetic; the words of which it is made are both the instruments of the analysis and the substance of the pure self of the poem which emerges from the analysis. Every poem of this kind is an instance of fulfilled originality, a model, to the reader, of constructive dissociation: an incentive not to response but to initiative. . . . Synthetic

> entities [pictures, musical pieces, sculpture] are imitative, communicative, provocative of association: their keynote is organized social sanity. Analytic entities are original, dissociative, and provocative of dissociation: their keynote is organized personal insanity. (A 114–115)

Insanity here is meant as a positive term (and may well derive from Mallarmé's "ce jeu insensé d'écrire," *this insane game of writing* [481]). The constructive dissociations of poetry that produce it—nicely described by Lisa Samuels as "*subjective correlatives*" ("Creating Criticism" xli)—do away with what (Riding) Jackson calls "the social rhythmic clutter of communicative language" (A 116), a clutter that manifests itself in the poem "Echoes" as the "tattle rattle" of common sense (PLR 69). In "Hospitality to Words," poetry rescues language from "the common brain of talkers" by doing away with the tattle-rattle, "[t]he unmeant meanings / Of sincere conversation" (PLR 70). In "The Talking World," she is more damning, declaring that "[t]he pleasure of talk is the pleasure of weakness," "[r]inging changes on dumb supposition":

> The tired ones talk,
> Abandoning the written destination
> For whatever say-so can be spoken
> . . .
> And truth is anybody's argument
> Who can use words untruthfully enough
> To build eternity inside his own short mouth.
>
> The nicest thought is only gossip
> If merchandized into plain language and sold
> For so much understanding to the minute.
> Gossip's the mortal measure. (PLR 203–205)

Following her desire to transcend the "mortal measure" of gossip, where language is degraded into an instrument of untruth, (Riding) Jackson carefully prepares the scene so that each instance of telling can be transformed into a foretelling of the "written destination," although it would be more truthful to say the languageless destination that writing foretells.

In *Anarchism Is Not Enough*, (Riding) Jackson presents the stylistic strategy of her poetics of constructive dissociation as a choosing of words on the basis of rhythm that clarifies the muddle of everyday language by keeping to what is essential. She describes the choosing as a clearing away of rubble and rhythm as a destructive but efficient force that accomplishes this clearing. The end of poetry, she writes, is to leave "everything as pure

and bare as possible after its operation," and to this end poetry's "tools of destruction should be as frugal, economical as possible" (A 117). Through the help of the "deadly hammer" of poetic rhythm, poetry comes to be "a selection of a few words from [the] inert mass" of ordinary language; individual words chosen through the hammering away of poetic rhythm "justify, quicken themselves" in this "destruction" (A 118). Poetry's destruction of language makes space for the ideal, and in some poems the cleared space is itself offered as a model of the ideal language in which truth can be spoken, a paradoxical language without language, as already noted. When (Riding) Jackson writes in "The Signs of Knowledge" that "language in extreme / Makes full the famished grail," she has in mind a language comprising a single sign, "[t]he sign of emptiness," the "one sign" by which we "shall . . . first know All" (PLR 229–30). This sign of emptiness is itself empty, "an empty grail" signifying "an empty world / Of world drained to be world-full" (PLR 230).[30] The ultimate of language here is an empty language delivering a plenitude of meaning by emptying the world.[31]

With (Riding) Jackson's stylistic strategy in mind it becomes possible to understand why her commitment to truth was so often expressed in her poems as a hostility to poetry. The more profound and complete the act of destruction performed in the poem, the more profoundly and completely it foretells the advent of truth. Other poems, of course, concern themselves with poetry's other task, with the telling of poetry's struggle to establish a middle ground.[32] But the impasse that provoked her eventual embrace of Cratylism is most evident in the former type. "Poem Only" begins, "Poem talking silence not dead death," and ends, "Cruel if kind and kind if cruel / And all if nothing" (PLR 112). I take this to mean that poetry is not inertly but actively destructive, and that the more completely it destroys the closer it comes to achieving all. And yet this "all" is "death," a bitter recognition that contrasts sharply with the "All-Being" of *The Telling*, where, "guarded by our words," "we can live All, Always" (T 50). The bitterness is an indication of the impasse of (Riding) Jackson's first phase, in which poetry was assigned the task of openly denouncing its own untruth, of applying its hammering to its own "hostile implements of sense," knowing that it could only foretell, never truly tell, the truth that invested her labors with value (PLR 198). The pathos of this impasse is expressed in an early fragment later gathered in the poem "Echoes":

> Forgive me, giver, if I destroy the gift!
> It is so nearly what would please me,
> I cannot but perfect it. (PLR 67)[33]

Poetry must destroy its own gift in order to perfect it; must bring language, as already announced in *Anarchism Is Not Enough*, into a "death of sense" where words will finally be "safe from the perjuries either of society or poetry" (A 12). The telling must yield to the foretelling. But in speaking of poetry as a gift she makes plain that something valuable is lost in all the necessary destruction.

When (Riding) Jackson renounced poetry, she did so by blaming it for its reliance on the sensuous characteristics of language, but these characteristics had long been an object of her scorn. Notwithstanding her defense of rhythm as destructive hammering in *Anarchism Is Not Enough*, her poetry had generally disparaged language's reliance on sound effects. In "Poet, A Lying Word," for example, she declared, "Does it seem I ring, I sing, I poet-rhyme, I poet-wit? Shame on me then!" (PLR 237); and in "Echoes" she called rhyming an "illness" (PLR 67). If these qualities of language were not debilitating to her project, it was only because the project depended, finally, on the destruction of poetry, on calling attention to and superseding poetry's defining characteristics. A hopeful articulation of this project is given in "Disclaimer of the Person":

> So have I lived,
> Approaching rhythms of old circumstance
> To the perilous margin, moment.
> And struck the string which breaks at sounding,
> Taken the tremorless note to mouth,
> And spoken sound's inversion. (PLR 258)

Throughout her later writings, (Riding) Jackson continually refers to her early hope that poetry might be a vehicle for truth, asserting her eventual realization that poetic language is no less prone to semantic distortion than the misused ordinary language it was intended to correct and transcend. Through this story of the failure of poetry, she established a continuity between her two phases. In the counternarrative traced here, however, poetry's inadequacy was no late discovery, and we must look instead to a discontinuity between phases in order for her renunciation of poetry to be understood. The continuity of (Riding) Jackson's commitment to truth is insufficient as an explanation; the discontinuity of her beliefs about the nature of language is more determining. Embracing Cratylism allowed her to escape the interminable deferral of truth demanded by her ultimately unsatisfying combination of Mimetism and Idealism. As she wrote in "Then, and Now" (ca. 1974), "The implicit objective of poetry, that of forming a perfect way of speaking, becomes its ideal objective in *not* being practically pursued"

(FPPL 56). Once poetic artifice had been fully rejected, a new practice of language could emerge, a practice prepared upon "the open ground of general human speaking," "[t]he only safe, unprejudiced ground for developing maximum attention to the individual word and to all words individually in their use" (RM 171). Announced in *The Telling* and fully explored in *Rational Meaning*, this open ground was not a path cleared by destruction, but a natural site for truth's disclosure. There would be no more deferral. "The total import of what I have to say is a happy one. It is, that truth—the speech of truth—is a real and immediate possibility" (FPPL 54).

Natural Literateness

In her mature writings, (Riding) Jackson rethinks her earlier belief in poetry as the rectification of ordinary language and, as a consequence, abandons her commitment to poetry as the language of truth or (as she often conceived it) as a mediate stage in truth's unveiling. The Mimetism and Idealism that supported those beliefs and commitments are replaced by a Cratylist faith in "the *natural* in language" (PLR xxxiii), although traces of her Idealism survive in her framing of "consciousness of language" as "a most intimate work of the human mind—the word 'mind' being allowed its spiritual full of meaning" (RM 138). The natural in language, or the language that comes naturally to the mind, a language whose meanings are intrinsically true, stands in opposition to habitual usage on one hand and professional discourses on the other, each considered an inexact and distorting form of utterance because unfaithful to "the given, the natural, language-wisdom with which people make their linguistic start in life" (RM 77). Habitual usage is an "intellectually defective . . . sub-linguistic performance" so riddled with inexactitudes as to turn meanings into "amorphous vapor" (RM 49, 86). Professional discourse is more exact in its use of words, but it tends in the sciences "towards formalization rather than toward articulate intensification of thought, constrict[s] expression while fostering dogma," and tends to be in the humanities, when not aping the sciences, "self-consuming, self-infatuated, self-dehumanizing, and the more so as it strains to justify to itself as humanly valuable" (RM 161, 576). In her second phase, (Riding) Jackson treats poetic expression as just such a professional discourse, one that relies on distracting orchestrations of rhyme and rhythm to "sanction, and even promote, linguistic deformities" (LRJR 219). *Rational Meaning*—the most important text of her second phase—discusses both types of misuse, directing extensive polemical attacks against the ills of habitual usage and offering substantive critique of professional discourses, in particular linguistics and lexicography, which not only exemplify bad language practice but

disseminate justifications for it. Through an extensive range of philosophical and linguistic arguments, *Rational Meaning* addresses the general public in an attempt to inspire recognition of "humanly indigenous language-wisdom" (RM 86). As (Riding) Jackson explains, the book is intended "to serve . . . the instinctive virtue informing the beginning linguistic wisdom of people," but she insists that the book neither awakens nor reawakens that wisdom (RM 87):

> The first aid available to people for their liberation from the life-enveloping linguistic befuddlement in which they are entrapped is in what they have to learn from themselves. We recommend this before all other aids. We regard nothing that we adduce or expound or show in this book as of itself remedially instructive: we postulate for the usefulness of this book the working presence in its readers of their wisdom of words, their human genius of affinity with words. (RM 86)

Rational Meaning serves the instinctive virtue of good language use by providing an extensive theoretical account of the nature of language in support of that use along with practical examples and by pointing out the errors both in bad language use and bad language theories.

The monumental undertaking of *Rational Meaning* is based on firm Cratylic principles brought into conformity with Spinoza's substance monism. Language, (Riding) Jackson argues, "externalizes . . . a universal force of reason" and is "the means of human perfection, providing human beings with rational, self-consistent reference-points" (RM 71). By *externalize*, she means that language concretizes and makes shareable the substance of thought, which, following Spinoza, she equates with the substance of the universe. Words, she writes, "are perpetuated realizations of one-mindedness"; "they exemplify the essential character of being" (RM 570). In Cratylic terms, words have a plenitude of meaning, and this plenitude is the source of their goodness. "No language is insufficient to its speakers," we read in *Rational Meaning*. "Every language carries a pattern of perfection . . . is perfect in principle, and capable of perfect practice" (RM 71). Presupposing this postulation of plenitude and perfection is the belief that language does not originate from within the human mind, but has instead an incorporeal, nonhuman basis. "Language," (Riding) Jackson explains,

> is not . . . a mere miracle of inventive cleverness, a bootstrap device by which a certain class of creatures raised itself above animal level. . . . It issues naturally from the universal circumstance, it is not the work of

> intellectual upstarts in the universe, but the work of that which is intellectual in the universe—which is active yet immaterial, which is One but not numerable. (RM 569)

(Riding) Jackson alternatively terms the universal circumstance of this intellectual force pervading the universe "being," "reason," and "God" (RM 570)—God as imagined by Spinoza, "*the immanent, not the transitive, cause of all things*" (*Ethics* 1, Prop. 18). Issuing from the immaterial intelligence of the universe, that is, from the nonhuman cause of things, language appropriates the things caused, making them knowable. In a visionary passage of *Rational Meaning*, (Riding) Jackson describes this appropriation as a corporealizing of thought. "In language," she writes, "the rational order of things, in the universe, meets with physical order, and, in this manner, and to varying extents, according to the degree of universality of mind (rationality) attained in the use of words, digests it" (RM 569). In other words, linguistic meaning, the actual distribution of the universe's intellectual substance, is not simply embodied in individual words, but comprehended by them. Digested in language, meaning is always complete, perfect, and intrinsic. Word by word, meaning by meaning, reality is entirely comprehended, and through the learning of those comprehending words the users of language are able to domesticate their minds within the substance of thought. "They discover in themselves innate powers of habituation to them; and the habituation, quickly achieved, comes to have an automatic character, almost that of a physically ingested lore" (RM 83).

The corporealizing of thought actualizes the Cratylic belief in the consubstantiality of language and reality, echoing Whitman's materialist doctrine of language. Words, she remarks, are "linguistically natural fact[s]," "organic entities, components of a live language" (RM 210, 181). But the materialist side of her Cratylism is an understated aspect in the design of *Rational Meaning*, whereas the Spinozan notion of a complete coextension of language and thought is emphasized, justifying her root belief that language users have an instinctive "disposition to put trust in words as being intrinsically what they are ostensibly," that is, of being "embodiments of meaning" (RM 79). Insofar as her system is based on the consubstantiality of words and things *and* the coextension of language and thought, her critique of Hermogenism is not simply based on a repudiation of its Conventionalism, its belief that words and things are only arbitrarily related, but also on a repudiation of its "mere miracle of inventive cleverness" whereby words mean no more than our own cleverness can provide. In (Riding) Jackson's Spinozan Cratylism, words are not simply proper names for things, but attributes of "the mind-nature of universal being" (LRJR 309); they comprehend reality in the act of naming it,

allowing those who use words well to know more than their own inventions. (Riding) Jackson was vigilant against any kind of concession to Hermogenism, which she considered an ideological and spiritual foe. This set her at odds with nearly every branch of contemporary linguistics and language philosophy. She argued, for example, against the use of sign and symbol as explanations for words—from her vantage point, the two conceptions of language were interchangeable. Thus, in *Rational Meaning*, she writes, "People *do not*, increasingly they do not, use their words as instruments for the direct expression of thought: increasingly, they use them, indeed, as signs, as if they did not have anything with which to *tell* their thought" (RM 120). Words "*tell*" thought because they arise within the mind; are intrinsic to thought. Signs are things established in the world, extrinsic to thought, linked to meaning by mere invention. To speak of a word as a symbol is hardly better:

> "Words are symbols" seems a reasonable utterance only as the meaning-function of words is not clearly comprehended, only where speculation on the nature of words is vague and disorderly. . . . [T]o mean is not to symbolize. . . . A word is . . . a linguistically natural fact. It embodies its function, is a meaning-process in which sound and meaning are inseparably joined. There is no room for symbolization. (RM 210)

What post-Saussurean theory calls the arbitrariness of the sign, meaning conceptualized as "a loose occurrence in which uttered sound and some material of thought are associatively linked," constitutes in (Riding) Jackson's eyes a wedge driving words apart from their source in thought (RM 119). By and large, *Rational Meaning* deemphasizes sound, but insofar as "the fact of word-sound is not to be disregarded," it functions as a material instance of thought's unity in language (RM 208). "The part of sound in a word harks back to its origin," she declares, though only when "the thought-content is incisive enough to constitute a meaning," one that "extends its energy into the sound" (RM 208–9). One implication of this formulation is that not all thought rises to the level of meaning and not all sounded thought to the level of words.

Words, then, form a special category in *Rational Meaning*, one that excludes many forms of language that fail to meet (Riding) Jackson's Cratylic criteria. In the system she develops, words are carefully distinguished from terms, names, and vocables. Though names are the privileged examples of words in the *Cratylus* dialogue, for (Riding) Jackson they are held in lower regard even than terms:

> [W]ords (what we have called the "true" words as distinct units of intelligent thought of a distinct expressibility and recognizability) are the main

> sustenance of a communication or declaration marked by truth. . . . But terms are also words, vocables that have physical belonging to the language, and intellectual belonging as units of particularized perceptions individually denotable. . . . Terms supply the circumstantial bearings of the true words. (RM 367–68)

This hierarchy (true words, terms, names, vocables) does not map onto the conventional division of words into parts of speech, and yet it is clear that among those parts nouns are the words held in highest regard. There are long stretches of *Rational Meaning* taken up with minute considerations of particular words and their definitions—much as the Cratylus is taken up with the etymologies of names—and in these cases verbs, adjectives, and adverbs are examined along with nouns. Nouns, however, are given special distinction even when they are philologically the derivative forms. In her analysis of "structure" and "construction," for example, (Riding) Jackson notes that "the definitional pattern in each case would be a type of possible noun-form variation of the verb's meaning that served as a standard for a certain kind of noun-extension of verb-meaning found throughout the language" (RM 317), and yet she speaks only a few pages later of the parallel examples "building," "frame," "fashion," and "edifice" as a "concourse or words that gather from outlying verbal quarters" (RM 319). The noun-extension has become a noun-center. Likewise, in her "definitional treatment" of "true," she writes that the word "has tended . . . to exist in usage in meaning-detachment from 'truth,'" and asserts that this adjective "cannot be restored to clarity of meaning without a reconceiving of the meaning of [the noun]" (RM 364–65). In a later note, she is quite clear about the hierarchies involved in this analysis: "The choice of the noun 'truth' as the definitional base, rather than the adjective 'true' is to be understood as determined by the greater concentration in the noun of meaning-connections with the dominant proposition of sure character of that which is said," a concentration "that cannot be found in the adjectival original, which has become a number of different-meaning adjectives" (RM 467–68). To put it more simply: although the adjective is more original, the noun better retains the "sure character" of the original. Without ever saying that nouns are truer words than verbs or adjectives, (Riding) Jackson makes the point that they are truer sources of understanding what words are and what they can accomplish. "It will be found, we think, that noun-form will tend to serve best for the characterization of the logical point of the word, regardless of the particular grammatical use for which the word is designed" (RM 185).

The privilege of the noun with regard to other parts of speech is nonetheless less important in (Riding) Jackson's system than the distinction

between words (or "true words") and terms, names, and vocables. Words are distinguished by their naturalness and by their intellectual substance. Each one expresses an intrinsic relationship to a single meaning, and since meaning "belongs integrally to thought, is rationally concentrated thought," "word-meanings are individualized forms of thought" (RM 121). Hence, (Riding) Jackson speaks of meaning as "the peculiar logical unit of thought the word injects into a sentence when used in it" (RM 183); words, she declares, are "the agents of the language's rationality" and language "a natural self-regulating systematization of words on rational principles" (RM 184, 193). It is with this definition in mind that (Riding) Jackson treats elements of language that are not natural and not concentrated forms of thought as inferior to words (the degree to which they are then elements of language remains an open question). The hierarchy she establishes is justified by her consideration that, apart from its sharing of rational meaning, language signifies, identifies, and resounds. Terms behave *like* words, but they are merely factual instead of meaningful. "A term specifies, presents something factual to the mind, or supposable or imaginable as such, rather than a distinction of thought. . . . [T]erms . . . signify rather than mean, have significations rather than meanings" (RM 244). She does not explain how a user might distinguish words from terms, but she does give a tantalizing example of such distinction when she notes, in the course of her aforementioned analysis of words related to "structure," that "make," "create," "produce," and "fabricate" are words, whereas "manufacture" and "forge" are subordinate terms.

Names are even less like words than terms. Where terms signify, names merely identify. Terms "are the language's rationally weaker components" (RM 247); names, by contrast, have "no rational, only associative, force, existing non-linguistically, disconnectedly" (RM 213). Strictly speaking, names do not have meanings. They serve "a practical purpose of identification, or address," but their use "is an act of memory-association, not, as is the use of a word, an intellectual act" (RM 213). This is why (Riding) Jackson says, "a language does not have names in its vocabulary" (RM 247). Nor are they "wholly natural," since they are subject to change and often conferred, if not invented, by their users—unlike words, which, with their singular meanings, belong intrinsically and unchangingly to their objects (RM 459). (Here *Rational Meaning* avoids the trap Cratylus falls into in Plato's dialogue by treating nouns and names as one and the same thing.) The unnaturalness of names and their lack of intellectual substance shows most strongly in their "often . . . obtrusive play with sound," which lacks the discretion that in words indicates a perfect fusion with meaning (RM 459). "The sound of a name can have a strong associative resonance, but cannot be vibrantly

reflective of ratiocinative activity. . . . Name-sound . . . is blank sound; word-sound has . . . the potential of expressiveness: meaning can resound in it" (RM 216). Vocables are instead all sound; they neither signify like terms nor identify like names. "Of a vocable," we are told, "there is little to know: one does nothing with it except to sound it" (RM 217). No concrete examples of vocables are given in *Rational Meaning*. (Riding) Jackson seems to use the word when she wants to exclude from her system of language phenomena that other accounts not only allow but emphasize. Thus she writes:

> The fallacious conception "words are symbols" could be purged from the curriculum of linguistic theory if "vocables" were used where sound was the word-property especially thought of. Such a declaration as "Vocables are symbols" would show the underlying inappropriateness of the association of the idea of symbols with words. (RM 209–10)

She also employs vocable to exclude the possibility of words with multiple meanings, a point Charles Bernstein underscores in his introduction. "Vocable," she writes, "could be used with salutary effect where a single word is thought of as having plural meanings—which is, as we have explained, a linguistic impossibility" (RM 210). If there are multiple meanings, then there are by definition multiple words. The fact that those words share a single sound changes nothing; "sound and meaning are in each instance joined under the identity of a different word" (RM 210). A different word, but a single vocable.

Even as (Riding) Jackson becomes engrossed in making categorical distinctions and in working out particular definitions, she remains aware of the larger goal, reminding her readers of the need to restore a proper understanding and proper use of language. Thus, in presenting her "radical division in kind between the verbal entities that make up language" (RM 243), she takes pains to explain her broader intention:

> We mean, here, not just to argue for lexicographical changes, but to present a new view of lexicographical principles, and to inject into the general field of language-opinion something that may weaken the spell of what has come to prevail as enlightened linguistic thinking, and to open the way thus for a rebeginning, by the general users and the scholars of words together, in the knowledge of language. (RM 245)

And in outlining her principles of definition she writes, "Ideally, we ought to be our own dictionaries, our own linguistic teachers, mutually, as full-functioning human beings" (RM 227). Her aim is to satisfy "an urgent

readiness for words, a rudimentary consciousness of the need of words," that "has travelled along with human beings from language's earliest time" (RM 79–80). In direct opposition to the lexicographical, linguistic, and philosophical studies she critiques, (Riding) Jackson takes the readiness and need for words as intrinsic to human experience. As a consequence, her most technical discussions acquire a moral dimension. This is why, in assigning "terms" their proper though subordinate place in language, she adopts a tone closer to homily than guide to usage: "There is no question of the need to be on guard 'against' terms. They go with the language, a language, they are for its service, and as they are put to good service, partake of its virtues. A morality of terms is integral with a morality of language" (RM 247). Central, then, to (Riding) Jackson's Cratylism is her belief that humans have "natural dispositions" to "trust words to contain meaning, to be substantial with meaning," and that this trust derives from an equally natural "sense of obligation to words"; without these natural dispositions, "the human bond with language would be continually at the mercy of human caprices, subject to a process of spasmodic breakage and repair" (RM 78–79). *Rational Meaning* is in fact offered as a counterforce to this process. In a complete "inversion of the linguistic nature of things," language users have come to forget and even unlearn the "inner rationality" of language (RM 49).

Notwithstanding this disorderly state of affairs, a moral use of language can be restored by learning how to use language rationally, attending with exactitude to the univocal, intrinsic meanings of words in what (Riding) Jackson calls "a new conception of literateness" (RM 239). Exactitude I have already touched upon in my introductory chapter. (Riding) Jackson's repudiation of the study of synonyms is a corollary of this emphasis on precision, since, in her view, "books of synonyms are made up of little islands of words loosely identified with one another in meaning, and tentatively differentiated" (RM 267). Synonymy turns attention away from the singular, inherent meanings of individual words; exactitude, then, is a virtue that assures attention to what is most important about language:

> The element of distinction in the meaning of a word is the central element of its actuality, the radical of its identity as a word; any treatment of this element as other than the major concern in the knowledge of the word's meaning diverts the mind from serious acquaintance with the word in its full meaning-strength. (RM 278)

No less problematic than synonymy, which treats multiple words as having the same meaning, is the inverse tendency to treat single words as having multiple meanings. Any "theory of variable meaning," she observes,

"derives from unhappy linguistic conditions, not from the actual nature of words. . . . Word-meaning is naturally constant, not variable" (RM 178). Although she concedes that "[w]ord-use *is* variable in that words are used in ever-differing contexts," she is quick to qualify this concession by advising her readers that "[d]ependence on contextual clues to meaning is not linguistically normal" (RM 178, 188). There is no contradiction here: a word has multiple uses but not multiple meanings, like a hammer that only hammers but can be used to hammer many different kinds of object. At the same time, each word needs to be understood in relation to all the others. So far as meaning is concerned, the only context that matters is that of language itself, "a structure of rationally integrated words" (RM 236). Indeed, "[t]he meanings of the words of a language *are* the language's system" (RM 237). Exactitude is what guarantees the working of the system:

> In principle, language admits of no compromise: nothing in *it* countenances vagueness adulterating distinctness of thought, or confusion adulterating unity of thought. The distinctness of meaning possessed by every word of a language reinforces and is reinforced by the unity of meaning of which its words are capable in their whole variable potential of joined use. (RM 166)

The actualization of this potential is the new conception of literateness advocated in *Rational Meaning*, although it is new only insofar as it counteracts "a decline of that instinctive understanding in people of the linguistic working of their language" that, "accompanied by generous self-identification with others in the possession of it, . . . makes for a natural literateness" (RM 229). "Such observance," (Riding) Jackson proclaims, "is the proper linguistic business of every human being: it is the discipline of truth under which every human being ought to operate, in the use of words" (RM 57).

Natural literateness has social implications, and (Riding) Jackson identifies these in terms that immediately recall Whitman. A stratified society maintains its social distinctions linguistically, using schools, style manuals, dictionaries, and so forth to predicate certain practices of language as preferred. But these preferences have nothing to do with the good usage of natural literateness, and for this reason the historical progress of democracy is an aid in the realization of language's full potential, since it at least has the virtue of sweeping away harmful, artificial practices, even if it does not automatically establish natural ones:

> The prevailing standards of what constitutes literateness are social: that is linguistically respectable which meets reigning criteria of social

> respectability in the treatment of matters of word-meaning, by people, in their use of words. As democratization overtakes the verbal processes of social custom, the conception of the social respectable in them broadens towards the gradual elimination of the aspect of class-status in the way of managing words: the convention-line between what is "done" and what is "not done," verbally, grows fainter and fainter. Since the application of criteria of social respectability to lexicographical problems neither introduces order to the field of word-meaning nor reveals what order may naturally obtain there, the fading out of socially oriented notions of literateness makes no marked difference in the lexicographical scene—or in the scene of usage. . . . It will take a new conception of literateness, one dissociated from existing lexicographical conceptions of it and also from the conceptions on which the books of synonyms are based (all of which make the knowledge of language the knowledge of usage rather than the knowledge of words, and deal with words, thus, with more social than linguistic emphasis on considerations of verbal correctness), to open the English language to direct view. (RM 238–39)

The English language in this conception "maps a world of human comprehensiveness, rather than a particular human locale," as (Riding) Jackson puts it in a 1984 essay (Is There 14), and here she marks her difference from Whitman, whose "gigantic democratic vision of the sublime, wreathed in redundant clouds of fellowship-transcending fellowship," she could respect only in part in her second phase (LRJR 299). The democratization that exposes the artificiality of *preferred* usage is a historical phenomenon providing a glimpse of and preparation for the true renewal of society a *proper* use of language alone makes possible. Yet even as she advocates for a universal good of language, a language of truth unrestricted by national experience or nationalist aspiration, she evokes the Declaration of Independence, affirming herself an American Cratylist in the terms I set forth in my introduction:

> To conceive of words as importantly related to human happiness is no new thing. People can be moved to rapt joy by religious or poetic utterances, and can feel sharp delight in a telling phrase or a word that rings so right that it seems that nothing more need be said. . . . The happiness we have in mind is—would be, could only be—a constant condition of happy success in speaking. The idea of it comprises the idea of a common way of speaking . . . fulfilling every requisite from small to large of goodness of words. . . . The relation between truth and happiness . . . is a primary one: we see the consciousness that one is speaking at every word with truth,

> and the companion consciousness of being so spoken to, as the assurance, and beginning, of human happiness. . . . To pursue such happiness is a humanly universal predisposition—which Americans . . . ought . . . to be among the first to discover in themselves. (RM 54, 60)

The Americanness so prominent in Whitman's project becomes attenuated in (Riding) Jackson's, while retaining its rhetorical force as a reminder of the desire for a more perfect society. To achieve this society no longer requires a specifically American language, but language is still the essential element, as it is for Olson. Though far more engaged than she with Americanist materials, Olson shared with (Riding) Jackson a belief that language is not an expression of national character, but of human capacity. As I will show in my next chapter, the American Cratylus acquires with Olson a historical dimension absent in Whitman and (Riding) Jackson, but like those two predecessors his orientation is emphatically prospective.

CHAPTER 4

A State Destroys a Noun: Charles Olson and Objectism

> *Socrates*: And speech is a kind of action?
> *Hermogenes*: True.
> *Socrates*: And will a man speak correctly who speaks as he pleases? Will not the successful speaker rather be he who speaks in the natural way of speaking, and as things ought to be spoken, and with the natural instrument? Any other mode of speaking will result in error and failure.
>
> Plato, *Cratylus*, 387b–c

> [B]y going in further to the word as meaning and thing, and, mixing the governing human title and experience (which prompts him to bother with words at all), his effect is the equivalent of his act: the power . . . suddenly moves as one has known it does of its own nature, without using any means or matter other than those local and implicit to it. It is molecular, how this power is, why it all multiplies from itself and from the element proper to its being. We are in the presence of the only truth which the real can have.
>
> Charles Olson, "Quantity in Verse, and Shakespeare's Late Plays"

In an unpublished prose typescript from 1963 (figure 2), drawing on a footnote in Eric A. Havelock's *Preface to Plato*, Charles Olson made the following cryptic observation regarding the ill effects of abstract reasoning on language:

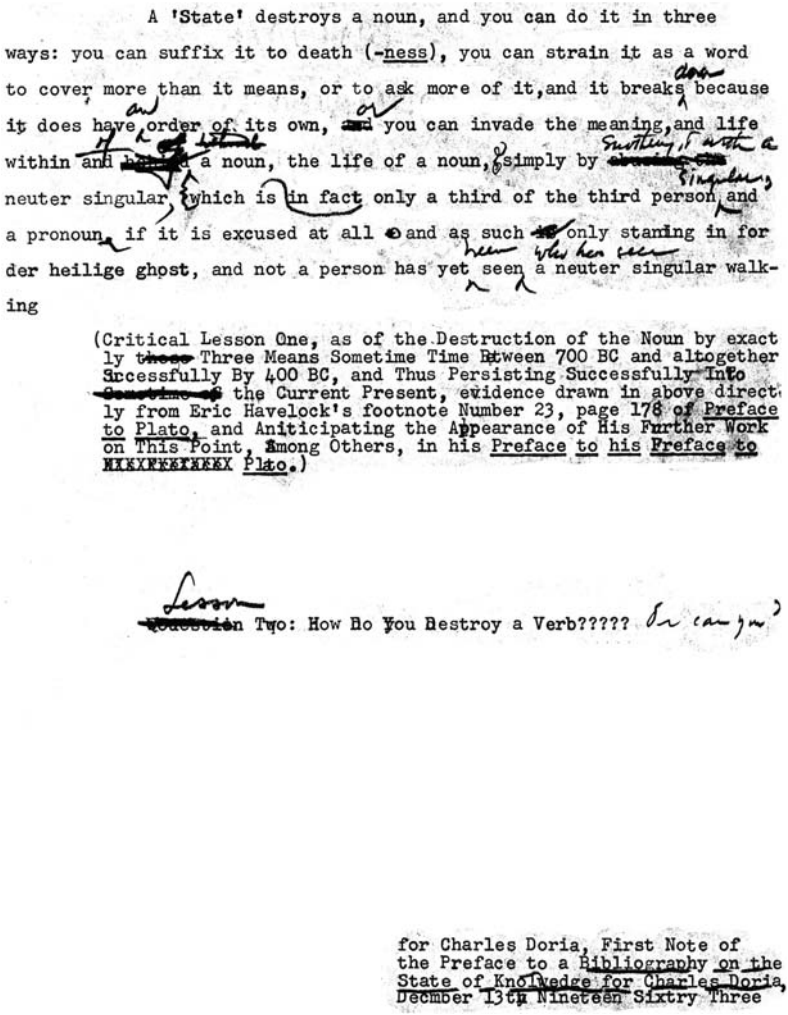
> A "State" destroys a noun, and you can do it in three ways: you can suffix it to death (*-ness*), you can strain it as a word to cover more

> than it means, or to ask more of it, and it breaks down because it does have an order of its own, or you can invade the meaning, and life within and *of* a noun, the life of a noun, simply by smothering it with a neuter singular, which in fact is only a third of the third person singular, and a pronoun if it is excused at all and as such only standing in for der heilige ghost, and not a person has yet been seen who has seen a neuter singular walking
>
> (Critical Lesson One, as of the Destruction of the Noun by exactly Three Means Sometime Between 700 BC and altogether Successfully by 400 BC, and Thus Persisting Successfully into the Present, evidence drawn in above directly from Eric Havelock's footnote Number 23, page 178 of *Preface to Plato*, and Anticipating of His Further Work on This Point....) (Storrs, "A 'State' Destroys a Noun")

Turning to Olson's source in Havelock helps to clarify this passage, but only somewhat. The footnote (misidentified by Olson) occurs in a paragraph that begins, "we can be misled by some of Homer's vocabulary into thinking that he can manage an abstraction. We draw this conclusion, however, only if we ignore syntactical context and concentrate on the word itself" (188–89). Havelock's concern is Plato's attack on poetry and the shift in Greek thought from "imagination" to "intellect" (as Olson described it with the help of a quote from R. G. Collingwood [see CPr 356]).[1] Havelock traces this shift through changes in the Greek language. In the passage quoted above, for example, he asserts that abstraction "is not really achieved until [topical groups and categories] ... are ... identified and named by the use of the impersonal neuter singular" (189). The seeming abstraction of Homer's vocabulary, he writes, "is exceptional, a sign-post pointing forward to a diction and a syntax which would destroy poetry altogether" (189). Olson followed this analysis closely and was drawn in particular to Havelock's amplification in a footnote on the neuter singular, which asserts amongst other things:

> This is an oversimplification of a complex process, one fundamental aspect of which has been well denominated by Diels [quoted in Holt, p. 109]: "[...] Language proceeds from the perceptual to the conceptual. [...] In the course of this gradual advance of the substantival usage, as it supplants the verbal, prose emerges from poetry." I would add for a good measure that even the noun, as it "emerges" is still often more of a gerund, a doing or a happening, than a phenomenon or thing. Abstraction is a mental process not available to examination except as we infer it from changing linguistic behaviour. Its linguistic tools include the coinage of new nouns (e.g.[,] the "action" noun in —— [...]), the "stretching" of

old ones [. . .], and finally the attempt to "destroy" the noun altogether via the neuter singular (Snell, *Discovery*, cap. 10). These procedures as they occurred between Homer and Plato I hope to illustrate in a later volume. (Havelock 193 n. 31, ellipses in brackets added)



A 'State' destroys a noun, and you can do it in three ways: you can suffix it to death (-ness), you can strain it as a word to cover more than it means, or to ask more of it, and it breaks because it does have order of its own, and you can invade the meaning, and life within a noun, the life of a noun, simply by neuter singular, which is in fact only a third of the third person and a pronoun, if it is excused at all and as such only staning in for der heilige ghost, and not a person has yet seen a neuter singular walking

(Critical Lesson One, as of the Destruction of the Noun by exactly Three Means Sometime Time Between 700 BC and altogether Successfully By 400 BC, and Thus Persisting Successfully Into the Current Present, evidence drawn in above directly from Eric Havelock's footnote Number 23, page 178 of Preface to Plato, and Aniticipating the Appearance of His Further Work on This Point, among Others, in his Preface to his Preface to Plato.)

Lesson Two: How Do You Destroy a Verb?????

for Charles Doria, First Note of the Preface to a Bibliography on the State of Knowledge for Charles Doria, December 13th Nineteen Sixtry Three

Figure 2 Typescript of "A 'State' Destroys a Noun," 1963, Box 36. Charles Olson Papers. Archives and Special Collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut Libraries. Used with permission.

The passage has much of the flavor of Olson's own prose, including the deployment of nested authorities through quotations (and one of those authorities, Bruno Snell, was a favorite of the poet); Olson's gloss needed little embellishment. Apart from his addition of the holy ghost, his principal changes were to substitute "suffix it to death" for "coinage of new nouns" and to make clear that all three forms of abstraction are means of destruction (a point that is only implicit in Havelock). Olson's gloss also shifts emphasis away from the Greek past. Although he acknowledges that the three forms of abstraction had done their worst by 400 B.C., he treats them as ongoing dangers.

One reason Havelock's analysis required so little embellishment is that it confirmed arguments Olson had been making for over a decade. As I will show in this chapter, Olson's identification of nouns with poetry long preceded the publication of *Preface to Plato*. Prior to that book's appearance Olson had also identified language and its developments with the development of society, a point Havelock makes by showing that noun-language (that is, poetry) had no place in the State outlined by Plato. Olson's note makes this latter point wittily in the double meaning of the one word he places within quotation marks: the "State" that destroys a noun is first of all the state of abstraction, but also, and not less importantly, the State in its political manifestation.

In his polemics against abstraction, Olson identifies himself as a Cratylist. This Cratylism appears even in his most famous essay, "Projective Verse," where Olson coins the word *objectism* to stand for a form of composition that does not describe but instead enacts the real, that is, "for the kind of relation of man to experience which a poet might state as the necessity of a line or a work to be as clean as wood is, as it issues from the hand of nature" (CPr 247). Olson's views on reading are likewise Cratylist in their rejection of abstraction, following as they do from a conception of meaning confirmed for him in the opening sentence of *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, "That which exists through itself is called Meaning (Tao)" (Wilhelm 23).[2] Drawing on this definition of meaning, Stephen Fredman summarizes Olson's project in terms pertinent to my own reading: "Within each name, as within each thing, resides the bottomless power that makes it meaningful: to recognize meaning, we should not seek to compare things to one another, but rather to penetrate deeply enough into things that we find the unending Tao within it" (64). Although Fredman ties this summary to the Tao, his specific reference to names and things, to words that are substantial, makes clear the Cratylist dimension in Olson's resistance to comparison, the very essence of abstraction in Greek thought.[3] For Olson, Cratylism is not simply a theory of language, but the basis for a poetic practice in which cultural resistance,

political opposition, and social renewal are tightly connected to the fate of words.

In the pages that follow I will explore Olson's Cratylism in just those terms, as a theory and practice with broad implications for understanding his poetics and social vision. The chapter is divided into four sections. The first, "A Difference of Discourse," presents Olson's critique of *logos* as abstraction and sketches out his attempt to create a praxis of writing equal to the problem. The second section, "The Step Back and Olson's Construction of a Cratylic Poetics," examines his efforts to restore to poetry the power of speech, a power lost through the mechanization of language represented for Olson by the development of writing systems and print technologies. I argue that this work of restoration is not a retreat from the present, but a tactical maneuver in Olson's overall project of cultural resistance. The third section, "Objectism," considers Olson's critique of the lyric subject as an aspect of his Cratylism, an attempt to locate the user of language in a concrete world where words *are* their meanings—where words are not descriptions of reality, but stonelike substances in a field of force. The final section, "Knowing Your Own Name," takes up the burden of Olson's speculations on language: the self-knowledge and knowledge of the world necessary for a transformation of society. Olson's thinking about language is remarkably consistent over the course of his career; what changes over time and between texts is terminology and perspective. My chapter looks at Olson's Cratylism from several perspectives, working through a number of key terms in his poetics (*speech*, *glyph*, *objectism*, *etymology*, *logogaphy*, etc.), with the aim of demonstrating that those distinct theoretical moments are held together by an enduring concern for the practice of writing as disclosure of experience and redemption of history.

A Difference of Discourse

One of my principal claims in the present reading of Olson is that we are apt to misunderstand his project if we do not assume an essential link between his views on language (in particular his belief that abstractions misrepresent and separate us from experience) and his views on politics and community (in particular his belief that citizens have steadily lost ground as active participants in the making of society).[4] Thus, in "Human Universe," he writes on the one hand that "we do not find ways to hew to experience as it is, in our definition and expression of it, in other words, find ways to . . . not be led to partition reality at any point, in any way" (CPr 157), and, on the other hand, notes that "[s]pectatorism crowds out participation as the condition of culture," that "[p]assivity conquers all" (CPr 159–60). Both lines of thought

developed over the course of his life in response to a wide range of studies, but were founded, appropriately enough, in Olson's experience. Trained as an orator in his youth, Olson's earliest intuition about language was that speech is the source of its strength—the notion that a written text can be scored speech was perhaps the most influential insight in his most famous essay, "Projective Verse." There Olson referred to speech as a "solid" (CPr 244), linking it to the equally concrete language of carved writing in the ancient world and among the Maya, which he had been reading about while writing the essay and soon after examined onsite in the Yucatan. Olson's language studies then and after included works by Ernest Fenollosa, I. J. Gelb, Roman Jakobson, Otto Jespersen, Alfred Korzybski, Edward Sapir, and Benjamin Lee Whorf, among others. He was, like Whitman and (Riding) Jackson, a voracious reader of dictionaries.[5] With regard to politics, Olson's readings included (in addition to his historical readings on colonial America, which necessarily touched on its political life) Henry Adams, Louis Brandeis, John Kenneth Galbraith, Machiavelli, Mao Tse Tung, Oswald Spengler, Tocqueville, and Thorstein Veblein, among others.[6] Olson also knew politics at first hand, learning about unions and the civil service from his father's embittering experience as a postman and later learning about electioneering and the government from his own work for the Democratic Party and from his involvement in the Roosevelt administration as assistant chief of the foreign language section of the Office of War Information. Recalling these and other political experiences in 1967, Olson noted that he had lived in four politically active periods and that these had shaped his views of the world. The first period was the 1930s, which he remembered for the Moscow trials and Spanish Civil War. The next was the Second World War and the postwar chance it offered "to change the world by astounding American ability and wealth—TVA on the Danube or in China, or on the Jordan," a chance "destroyed and defeated by policy" (Storrs, Notebook No. 109). The third was the aftermath of the dropping of the Atomic Age, and the fourth was the present, "the revolt, the total revolt against goods and hierarchies in favor of the individual & a community fit to his . . . nature" (Storrs, Notebook No. 109).

Olson's political experience was the spur to his becoming a poet and provided the key to his critique of abstraction. After his career in the government came to an abrupt end (in consequence of a dispute over censorship of his news releases), he became disenchanted with public service and party politics, and began work on his abandoned study of Herman Melville, which would come to be his first published book, *Call Me Ishmael*. Olson also began writing his mature poetry at that time, famously declaring in "The K" that "[t]he affairs of men remain a chief concern" (CP 14). At this crucial

point in his life (he was already in his mid-thirties) he had come to believe that the conjunction of capitalist and political interests had thwarted the democratic promise of the country and brought its cultural life into a state of decline. Thus, in *Call Me Ishmael*, he writes that "Americans still fancy themselves such democrats. But their triumphs are of the machine. . . . We act big, misuse our land, ourselves. We lose our primary" (CPr 17, 18). The machine mentality had become synonymous with the "AMERICAN WAY," so that, as he commented "[O]ur power is simply QUANTITY. Without considering purpose" (CPr 63). A decade later, in another study of Melville, Olson would reiterate the point, that modern America had become "nothing but the Supermarket—the exact death quantity does offer, if it is numbers, and extension, and the appetite of matter, especially in human being" (CPr 121). As he makes clear elsewhere, the epistemological basis for this culture of quantity, mechanization, industrialization, and capitalist expansion was the Platonic and Aristotelian systematization of thought, which, by means of language, makes possible the abstraction, classification, and rationalization without which modernity would not be possible. In several key texts he associates this epistemological turn and the culture it produced with the term *logos*, and throughout his life writes in the conviction that only a renewal of language of the kind required for poetry could create the favorable conditions for and sustain a renewal of intellectual, social, and political life in America and in the West more generally.[7]

For Olson, the language of poetry was properly Cratylic, composed with a strong sense of the bond that naturally holds between words and things (but which is often broken in modern languages and modern societies). This compositional Cratylism is evident, for example, in his well-known "*principle*" from "Projective Verse," "FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT," taken from Robert Creeley to say that the shape of a poem and its meaning should be one (CPr 240). That that oneness is an aspect of the natural bond in Cratylism between words and things is made more explicit in an unpublished sequel to the essay through the metaphor of a tree: "This is my thought: that form as an extension of content will only get far if we recognize, and then investigate, how much language is the root and branch of content as well as it is patently the leaf that form is" (Storrs, "Projective Verse II" [1956]). In Olson's poetics words are physical objects, "hard substances w/meaning," as he noted in another unpublished prose piece (Storrs, "A New Short Ars Poetica, A Litle Boke"). As in Whitman and (Riding) Jackson, nouns are the words that best preserve the often lost sense that language, if it is to work properly, must be related univocally to the things it names. Nouns, Olson wrote in *Proprioception*, are "*fundamentals of any new discourse*," an alternative to the *logos* of Plato and Aristotle (CPr 185). As he noted in "Projective

Verse," "If logos is word as thought," poetry is "word as noun" (CPr 244). This alternative to the *logos* is not the irrational opposite of rational discourse, but a "difference of discourse," to borrow a fine discrimination Olson makes in yet another unpublished piece, "The Bezel": "The opposite of rational forms is not irrational but a difference of discourse" (Storrs). In "Postscript to Proprioception and Logography," the difference is grounded in a language proper to the person who uses it as well as to its content. Thus:

> The *other* knowing is NOUN, proper (proprius) noun—that which belongs to the self (CPr 185)

Verbs too could be considered as a kind of noun.[8] In *Maximus*, for example, Olson expresses his wish for a linguistic ideal whereby

> There may be no more names than there are objects
> There can be no more verbs than there are actions (Max 40)

In this way, Olson's argument against the abstraction that had, since Plato, placed poetry in a subsidiary role leads him to insist upon the "identity of a person and his expression"; as he explains in a letter to Cid Corman, "getting to grips with how that identity is now [to be] accomplished" is the only way to understand and participate in his poetic "revolution" (COCC 1:276).

Olson's "difference of discourse" is concretized politically in the *polis,* Greek for city, hence the *Maximus* poems take as their recurrent subject the city of Gloucester, though any polity that provides resistance or can provide resistance to the forces of abstraction serves the purpose. The *polis*, in Olson's understanding, is a local community, a physically located "State" that does not "destroy a noun," but, on the contrary, safeguards it. Olson alludes to this safeguarding through the double meaning of the "ward" in a later *Maximus* poem that sets the local against the false humanism of the *logos* and the deteriorating life of consumer society:

> I am a ward
> and precinct
> The Big False Humanism man myself and hate
> Now on←→universalization, believe
> it only feeds into a class of deteriorated
> personal lives anyway, giving them
> what they can buy, a cheap belief. (Max 379)

Olson's denunciation of *logos*, then, is a civic responsibility as well as a poetic one. To act on this responsibility required a praxis coordinating Olson's

theoretical work (teachings and writings that integrated ideas drawn from the social and natural sciences as well as myth and literature) and the practice of poetry understood as *dromenon*, a Greek word that Olson took from Jane Ellen Harrison. In *Call Me Ishmael*, *dromenon* (referring there specifically to revolution) is the second fact, following the first fact of space.[9] The relevant passage in Harrison, given by the editors of Olson's *Collected Prose*, reads:

> The Greek word for a *rite*... is *dromenon*, "a thing done"—and the word is full of instruction. The Greek had realized that to perform a rite you *do* something, that is, you must not only feel something but express it in action.... It is a fact of cardinal importance that their word for theatrical representation, *drama*, is own cousin to their word for rite, *dromenon*; *drama* also means "things done." (cited with ellipses in CPr 389)[10]

The distinction between theory and practice should not be taken as a matter of genre, first of all because genre distinctions increasingly break down in Olson's work (itself a sign of his rejection of a rigorously divided theory and practice), but second because his prose works often incorporate ideas expressed in an action even as his poems incorporate didactic statements. In "Human Universe," for example, Olson opens his essay theoretically to declare his fear that the cultural apparatus of the West, put in place by "[l]ogos, or discourse" (CPr 155), will not easily be dislodged, but must nevertheless be countered, for its effects continue to be detrimental to life in the United States and for human life at large. The essay continues along this thread, weaving round it Olson's narrative of his life among the descendents of the Maya, preparing the way for the poetic act that concludes the essay, a *dromenon* that presents a Mayan myth as proof of "the proposition... that man at his peril breaks the full circuit of object, image, action at any point" (CPr 162). The total effect is of a layered articulation of a counterposition to the old discourse, to *logos*, a way of getting to "the other side of despair" (as Olson puts it in his *Bibliography on America*), "THE ONLY MORAL ACT WHICH CAN POSSIBLY CORRECT THE WEST, AS EITHER GREEK OR U.S." (CPr 298–99).

Western thought for Olson is nothing but a "bad discourse system" (Muth 1:31). It favors generalized, impersonal abstractions over the immediate, particular knowledge that individuals gain of themselves and their environment, and it devalues speech, which, because it is embodied, resists better than writing the means and ends of rationalization. Over time, the "bad discourse" has come to acquire a façade of universal truth, the concerted fictionality of which has had an unfavorable and disorienting

impact. In the first place, it has disempowered us, rendering us unable to act for ourselves; in the second place, its systematic "readiness to generalize" has alienated us from the immediate understanding of ourselves and of the world around us (CPr 156). We have become passive consumers of predigested knowledge and have forgotten that "we are ourselves both the instrument of discovery and the instrument of definition" of our own experiences (CPr 155). At the same time, we have gained a false sense of mastery and a wastefully dangerous technological control over our surroundings. In other words, we have traded life for death, thinking, like Faust, that we have gained knowledge. The ecological disasters caused by aggressive industrialization and the widespread devastations of the Second World War all prove that, historical occurrences Olson witnessed and denounced. We are "kept captives," he pleads in the unpublished essay "Propositions," by the lies continually created by "[W]estern pejerocracy" and the "old humanisms" (Storrs), and this captivity does not allow us to see that what we live and experience has little to do with Plato's abstract "world of ideas, of forms extricable from content" (CPr 156), but comes to us instead in concrete and discrete particularities, in forms that *cannot* be extricated from their contents. Our captivity by *logos* is the product of a vast collective delusion since we have been socialized so as not to see or consider the fact that the epistemological foundations of our lives alienate us from our own experience:

> For it bears in on me more & more that just this fact—that the tremendous knowledge of the present state of knowledge has not yet been tallied—keeps men from the revolution which they are already the possessors of, keeps them captives of the successive counter-revolutions which press from all sides on them in these days of the decay of the old learning, the old systems[.] (Storrs, "Propositions")

Imprisoned in a "UNIVERSE of discourse," we have become forgetful of the immediate and of the concrete, what Olson qualifies in "Human Universe" as "the only two universes which count, the two phenomenal ones, the two a man has need to bear on because they bear so on him: that of himself, as organism, and that of his environment" (CPr 156). Setting himself in opposition to later Greek philosophy, Olson hopes to make his readers realize that "logos, and the reason necessary to it, are only a stage . . . and not what they are taken to be, final discipline. . . . The harmony of the universe, and I include man, is not logical, or better, is post-logical, as is the order of any created thing" (CPr 156). This realization is preparatory to the work of bringing forth the cultural conditions for a radical change of discourse,

work Olson conceived of as the finding of "a way which bears *in* instead of away, which meets heads on what goes on each split second, a way which does not—in order to define—prevent, deter, distract, and so cease the act of, discovering" (CPr 158).

In "The Principal Extrications & New Coordinates Now Called For," a prose piece primarily concerned with what the magic and animist thought of prehistoric cultures can teach today, Olson argues for "*return to the force of object*" using "language . . . as a *plastic* weapon both of *the resistance of the object* (its particularity) and of the act of invocation necessary if *participation* . . . is what is wanted" (Storrs). A trouble he saw for the realization of this project was that, because so much historical recuperation is needed, it is "damned difficult for any living person to get the knowledge of what has been under his belt in order to break through to what now needs to be investigated" (Storrs). But even granting the acquisition of the needed knowledge—and Olson himself worked hard to get it "under his belt"—there remained the problem of transforming language into "a *plastic* weapon." The problem was made more difficult by the fact that writing, as Olson himself had come to realize in his studies, had historically been instrumental in the deployment of *logos*, and yet was necessary for the realization of his own projects and for the same reasons it had proven so useful for the forces of rationalization: its abstraction from the body made possible a communication of meaning far and wide. Olson's attitude toward writing is therefore quite ambivalent. On the one hand, he presents new ways of conceptualizing writing and of turning it toward his own purposes (I will discuss these in the following section). On the other hand, he strives to distance himself from writing as ordinarily practiced, from what he famously describes (with specific reference to poetry) as "*that verse which print bred*" (CPr 239).

Olson's most sustained and explicit critique of writing is given in his uncollected essay "The Law," sent in a letter to Robert Creeley. There he begins by asserting "that sometime quite recently a door went bang shut, and a 'box' of history can be seen as such, and put away—say, the BOX 500 BC–1950 AD" (CORC 7:234). The after-time is the "post-modern, or the post-West" (7:241), whose task is to recover an ancient possibility of art as "*wholly* active" (7:237), but not by ignoring those "'modern' gains [which] are no more than extensions of that which marked Greece 500 BC on" (7:235). Rather, the modern has to be understood in terms of what it displaced. The essay concludes by privileging the performing arts (not surprising in light of the importance of *dromenon*), and by emphasizing "the importance of RHYTHM to any act, including the act of knowledge" (7:242). Olson's principal example of how the mechanization of experience, "the

great issue of the West," "can be made to yield *methodologies*... which can in themselves restore organic action" (7:240), is writing. Olson, in other words, critiques writing in order to transform it. He presents his critique in the form of a narrative. Before writing took over, Olson explains, "a man's own organism was text and library: the tablets... were the brains of each of us, the minds. The consumers were themselves—had to be—ACTIVE" (7:236). The advent of writing, a technology ("For the 'book' is, is it not, the first MACHINE" [7:236]) continuous with such later developments as "print, then telephone-telegraph, radio, television" (7:235), and, at last, "the stupidities & dangers of 'Cybernetics'" (7:234), has brought about a "displacement of the oral" (7:235) and a new kind of knowledge that has "started to displace the ear and memory" (7:236). Echoing the rhetorical structure of *Call Me Ishmael*, he declares that the written text was "FIRST DIVISIVE FACT," a machine that produced knowledge without the involvement of or any essential connection to the human body (7:236). The redemption of writing depends, then, upon its obedience to "the law of rhythm" (7:243), which for Olson is coeval with "organic action" (7:240), hence his two examples of good writing at the end of the modern era are D. H. Lawrence and Ezra Pound, whom he praises "precisely on the point of the phallic" (7:241), having noted earlier that "it is exactly the sexual act where man takes up rhythm in its most elementary expression from nature" (7:240). In this formulation, of course, Olson himself falls prey to *logos*, universalizing male experience and abstracting from it laws applicable to all forms of art or action. But setting aside the inconsistency (and sexual politics) of this passage, what matters most in it is Olson's belief that an active reevaluation of the body's perceptual knowledge and of the body's means of expression (gesture, sound, rhythm), if incorporated into verse practice, can transform writing into a means of countering the negative effects of text and *logos*.[11] Moreover, so far as verse in particular is concerned, "THE VOICE, as prime" (7:342), conveys the body and its knowledge into language more directly and more completely than sexuality does, at least in Olson's account. The human voice carries "projection, intensity," he writes in "Rhapsodia—to sew song together (which is to compose)," an unpublished prose piece written while Olson was drafting both "Projective Verse" and "Human Universe." The "value of the voice," in Olson's view, is threefold: "(1) it is of the organism, non-mechanical, and hears itself... (2)... it communicates without intervention organism to organism... (3) [s]tays verbal, is thus of the mind not as the mind is abstract" (Storrs, "Rhapsodia"). The poetics here are very close to Whitman's, and Olson in fact writes in this piece, "Whitman had a voice the resonance of which was his flesh" (Storrs).

It is important to note that, throughout his essays, Olson does not consistently treat writing as the other of speech. Rather, he presents the opposition between speech and writing as one manifestation of a more general distinction between abstraction and concreteness, "language exactly in its double sense of discrimination (logos) and of shout (tongue)" (CPr 155).[12] Thus, while he always identifies speech (and values it highly) as "language's other function," writing is often but not exclusively associated with the function language has primarily had since Plato, "[l]ogos, or discourse" (CPr 155). This difference between speech and *logos* is outlined in an aside in "Human Universe," where Olson specifies that "[t]he distinction here is between language as the act of the instant and language as the act of thought about the instant" (CPr 156). Speech, in Olson's assessment, is the unreflective "act of the instant," whereas *logos* (and, often, writing) is the reflective and abstract "act of thought about the instant." Speech and *logos* are thus metonymies in Olson's critical terminology, extending the ordinary meanings of the words to address aspects of experience and knowledge that may not bear any obvious or immediate connection to language. We are used to thinking of *logos* in this way, but "speech" as a general term for discussing the body and embodied knowledge is less familiar and has led to a mischaracterization of Olson's speech-based poetics as purely performance oriented. More to the point, recognizing the enlarged meaning of "speech" in Olson's poetics and its true opposite as abstraction makes it possible to appreciate how writing in a wholly embodied (that is, Cratylic) form can be subsumed under the category "speech," and not simply as a score for performance. In "Projective Verse," for example, Olson considers the stringing together of words within a sentence as "a first act of nature, as lightning, as passage of force from subject to object" (CPr 244), and he sees the organization of sentences within a poem as, potentially, "a high-energy construct," a system of "energy-discharge" of objectual forces (CPr 240). Writing conceived in this way is not a score for performance, but itself the performance of what speech in the strict sense communicates by voice. This recuperation of writing was important. Carrying forward his project of actualizing a "difference of discourse," Olson needed, because of his historical location, a practice of writing that could not be appropriated by the *episteme* of the *logos*. Olson's theorization of this practice is the subject of my next section.

The Step Back and Olson's Construction of a Cratylic Poetics

In "Human Universe," Olson defends Pound's choice of going "back to hieroglyphs or ideograms" so as "to right the balance" between speech and

logos (CPr 156). On first consideration it might seem strange to reempower speech by turning to a form of writing in which sound (that is, phonetic alphabet) is not primary, but if we understand speech as a metonymy for the body and embodied knowledge, then hieroglyphs, ideograms, and other nonalphabetic writing systems are eminently speechlike in their solidity and concreteness, especially when carved into stone as in Mayan writing. Olson, in other words, framed hieroglyphs and other pictoforms as the ideal form of writing for a poetics founded on voice: a form of writing that is "non-mechanical," that "communicates without intervention," and that "is thus of the mind not as the mind is abstract" (Storrs, "Rhapsodia"). The design of Olson's recuperation of writing was counterintuitive: made destitute by *logos*-as-writing, speech is restored to prominence by way of pictographic writing, and in particular by examples of glyphic writing no longer in active use. This restoration occurs theoretically in his essays through the presentation of glyphic writing as the language of a culture that does not divide person from expression or abstract knowledge from experience. Thus, in "The Gate and the Center," Olson defines Fenollosa's ideograms as "resistant primes in our speech" and characterizes glyphic writing more generally—including that which was produced by now-dead civilizations—"as living oral law to be discovered in speech as directly as it is in our mouths" (CPr 169). Olson, of course, was aware of the fact that ideograms and the like are complex signs belonging to highly conventionalized writing systems, but he used etymology to argue that all writing systems are related so as to argue that "both the phonetic and ideographic is still present and available for use as impetus and explosion in our alphabetic speech" (CPr 169).[13] This is a revelatory turn in Olson's theorizing, for in proposing the idea of "ideographic" language as a living oral law and in asserting it to be available for use by alphabetic languages, he was drawing attention to the constructedness of his Cratylic poetics; that is, he was drawing attention to the fact that a natural language was not already available for use, but needed to be developed with the use of already available materials.

Olson's attempt to construct a Cratylist poetics that could safeguard the concrete immediacy of speech over the abstractions of writing is particularly evident in "Projective Verse," where he proposes a modality of poetic writing that is the immediate record of live speech, a language obedient to the breath rather than to logic. In order to accomplish this task, however, breath must be transformed into printed matter, into text. In other words, speech must come to terms with the technology of alphabetic writing, which has historically been the domain of *logos*. To guarantee the preservation of speech's integrity, Olson recommends a "step back," a movement of return to "the elements and minims of language," where language is "least logical" (CPr

241). This movement, he believes, will hold in check the abstractions of *logos* while preserving the "freshness" of speech (CPr 244). Returned to writing under these premises, speech becomes "the 'solid' of verse . . . the secret of a poem's energy," while the entire compositional field of the poem partakes of this "solid" energy (CPr 244). Thus, Olson writes, "because, now, a poem has, by speech, solidity, everything in it can now be treated as solids, objects, things . . . all parts of speech suddenly . . . are fresh for both sound and percussive use" (CPr 244). Because of speech, written language is endowed with the solidity of natural things and the rhythm of life. The step back of the poet into what Olson calls in "The Gate and the Center" the "resistant primes" of speech—syllables, glyphs, any unit of language that carries meaning prior to its abstraction from the body or experience—makes possible a step forward into writing that is not subservient to *logos* (CPr 169).[14] "[T]he conventions which logic has forced on syntax must be broken open," writes Olson, "merely to get things started" (CPr 244). Olson's "LAW OF THE LINE," his post-logical syntax (syntax broken open to start anew), is a rhythm of nouns, as in Hart Crane. "What strikes me in him is the singleness of the push to the nominative, his push along that one arc of freshness, the attempt to get back to word as handle" (CPr 244). This redemption of writing and restoral of the natural power of speech through a "push to the nominative" is precisely a Cratylist poetics.

With Olson's recuperation of writing there arises the necessity of distinguishing writing-as-*logos* from writing-as-speech. The former is a divisive, lifeless technique obedient to the forces of abstraction and rationalization; the latter, a projective gesture, an utterance internally animated by breath and obedient to the living oral law.[15] This distinction mirrors, in its basic tendency, Emerson's implied opposition between "bad" and "good" writing, recorded in his journals but cited by Olson's teacher F. O. Matthiessen in *American Renaissance*.[16] In a section of the book titled "The Word One with the Thing," Matthiessen writes, "The epitome of Emerson's belief is that 'in good writing, words become one with things.' He reached that formulation as early as 1831, in a passage in his journal" (30). This tendency of thought is not particular to Emerson, of course, but develops (as noted by Derrida) out of Platonism:

> According to a pattern that will dominate all of Western philosophy, good writing (natural, living, knowledgeable, intelligible, internal, speaking) is opposed to bad writing (a moribund, ignorant, external, mute, artifice of the senses). . . . And if the network of opposing predicates that link one type of writing to the other contains in its meshes all the conceptual oppositions of "Platonism"—here considered the dominant structure of the

> history of metaphysics—then it can be said that philosophy is played out in the play between two kinds of writing. Whereas all it wanted to do was to distinguish between writing and speech. (*Dissemination* 149)

This passage is obviously pertinent to Olson's project, although his opposition to the *logos* is different in aim from Derrida's deconstruction since it is not the metaphysics of presence (to use Derrida's terminology) that Olson critiques, but the *abstraction* from presence that, in Derrida's account, is intrinsic to language as such.[17] More pertinent to my present concerns, however, is Derrida's final remark in the passage cited above, for it highlights the shrewdness of Olson's approach to this longstanding set of philosophical distinctions. Reading through Olson's writings on language and poetry we see that he is fully aware of the aporias Derrida describes; that is, Olson insists on the opposition between writing and speech, but is not so naïve as to think that this is anything other than a distinction between two kinds of writing.

It is, in any case, on the grounds opened by the possibility of "good" writing that Olson tries to realize his difference of discourse. The procedure involved in composing this "good" writing is, surprisingly, a machine: the typewriter. Although Olson will condemn *bad* writing precisely as a mechanization of language ("TEXT," he will write, is the "FIRST DIVISIVE FACT" and "first MACHINE" [OCRC 7:236]), in "Projective Verse" he affirms—without failing to notice the irony of his stance—that the typewriter is the vehicle that best allows his Cratylic poetics to come to life on the page. The irony becomes especially pronounced when we recall that projective verse is presented in the opening lines of the essay as the opposite of the "NON-projective," "'*closed' verse . . . which print bred*" (CPr 239). Olson, then, is engaged in a reappropriation of the machine as well as of writing. As he writes:

> What we have suffered from, is manuscript, press, the removal of verse from its producer and its reproducer, the voice . . . The irony is, from the machine has come one gain not yet sufficiently observed or used, but which leads directly on toward projective verse and its consequences. It is the advantage of the typewriter that, due to its rigidity and its space precisions, it can, for a poet, indicate exactly the breath, the pauses, the suspensions even of syllables . . . which he intends. For the first time the poet has the stave and the bar a musician has had. . . . [The typewriter is] a scoring to his composing, . . . a script to its vocalization. (CPr 245)

In another unpublished prose piece, "Notes on Type-Face," written shortly after the publication of "Projective Verse," Olson extends these considerations from the typewriter to the printing press:

> Am now convinced type-face . . . should shift according as the range of the poem is different . . . there should be tensions, most of the times, between type and the tone of the verse . . . if I am right in the argument about what the typewriter has offered . . . then it seems to follow that in printing a language which is projective, there ought also to be a convention on type-face equally accepted by the reader. (Storrs)

These were not simply theoretical concerns, as a reading of Olson's early letters to Cid Corman concerning the printing of *Origin* shows. Olson's anxieties about the then-new phototypesetting technology of Varitype touch on the social pressures shaping the forms of textuality:

> [I] think, (though I certainly grant the necessities of cost any man printing today faces) that you ought to take further steps to exhaust the possibility of type before you go into that modern monster, varitype. For this battle too is a part of the battle of culture now (in fact, that ugly thing, modern economy, is precisely squeezing you when it pushes you away from type to a machine which, was invented is advertized and exists only by the inexcusable uses it offers to BUSINESS) (COCC 1:99–100)

He was, in fact, quite satisfied with the result, in particular because "the *speed* of it, is damned wonderful . . . damned good for my kind of language" (COCC 1:127). The typewriter, however (and also, presumably, the Varitype machine), is not *naturalized* in Olson's recuperation, but *domesticated*, made to serve the poet's needs and so wrested from the *logos* (from business in the case of Varitype). As domestic machines, the typewriter and its related text-technologies become familiar accompaniment to poetic practice, but his feelings about them remain ambivalent—as perhaps do his feelings about domesticity in general. Thus, in "Letter 9" of *Maximus*, the machine, introduced at the very end of the poem, is included in the writing process and suppressed from it in the very gesture of its acknowledgment:

> I measure my song,
> measure the sources of my song,
> measure me, measure
> my forces
>
> (And I buzz,
> as the bee does,

who's missed
the plum tree,
and gone and got himself caught
in my window

And the whirring of whose wings
blots out the rattle of
my machine). (Max 48)

Measuring his song and its sources and measuring himself and his forces, the poet becomes imprisoned by the demands of his craft much as the bee becomes trapped in the poet's domestic space. The poem, named a letter and not a song, is the transcription of this scene by the machine whose rattling is nonetheless blotted out by the combined sounds of the whirring of the bee and the buzzing of the poet. The poem, then, presents the scene of writing and situates the typewriter within it but shows Olson's ambivalence toward both by having the poet's beelike (hence natural) song win out over the mechanical sound of the writing-machine. The difference between good and bad writing is measured out in this poem as the difference between buzzing and rattling. Mechanization is accepted with only the faintest of regrets, but made subservient to the older and more natural powers of song.

Olson's "step back" in "Projective Verse," then, is not simply a defensive move, but the first half of a revolutionary gesture, a return to primary elements of language meant to undo in the end the work of the *logos*. The concept comes from *The Revolt of the Masses*, first published in English in 1932. As Olson explains in *Call Me Ishmael*, "Ortega y Gasset puts it that the man of antiquity, before he did anything, took a step like the bullfighter who leaps back in order to deliver the mortal thrust" (CPr 19).[18] The poetic step back to the "resistant primes in our speech" (CPr 169) has its scholarly counterpart in Olson's historical interest in the archaic and in his close attention to etymology (to "*roots*," as he puts it in a letter to Larry Eigner, "so one can feel that far back along the line of the word to its first users—what they meant" [SL 237]). Toward the end of his life, Olson borrowed the term "*ta'wil*" from the philosopher Avicenna to define this scholarly step back as a methodology. According to Olson's source, Henry Corbin, "*Ta'wil* is, etymologically . . . , to *cause to return*, to lead back, to restore to one's origin and to the place where one comes home, consequently to return to the true and original meaning of a text" (cited in CPr 460). In Olson's case, where the "text" is the individual word, the exegetical movement is etymological, a recovery of the "true and original meaning" that brings the language user "home" as well. This is the essence of Olson's Cratylic poetics—that a proper use of language will make possible a proper inhabitation of one's

community, just as an improper use of language will make the community uninhabitable. As Olson writes in "Letter 3" of *Maximus*:

> Let those who use words cheap, who use us cheap
> take themselves out of the way
> Let them not talk of what is good for the city
> …
> Let them cease putting out words in the public print
> so that any of us have to leave…
> …
> …leave Gloucester
> in the present shame of,
> the wondership stolen by,
> ownership
> …
> Only a man or girl who hear a word
> and that word meant to mean not a single thing the least more than
> what it does mean (not at all to sell any one anything…
> …
> Root person in root place, hear one tansy-covered boy
> tell you
> what any knowing man of your city might, a letter carrier, say,
> or that doctor—if they dared afford to take the risk (Max 13–16)

The "[r]oot person in root place" takes the risk of a step back into proper use of language in order to step forward into a conflict with business. The conflict with business is one aspect of the larger struggle with *logos*.

In substituting etymology for exegesis, Olson is taking a step back from textuality in the modern sense (500 B.C.–1950 A.D. in his chronology) in order to strike back at the *logos* through a Cratylic form of reading adequate to his Cratylic writing, which he proposed to compose from the "resistant primes" of speech. As Michael Davidson has noted, Olson's interest in etymology, like that of other poets of his time, "is buttressed by a theory of language that treats words as extensions of physical and biological life"; adds Davidson, "[t]his emphasis on physiological roots for language is part of the more general postmodern rejection of poetic diction and verbal artifice" (*Ghostlier* 108–9). In Olson's case, I would argue, the rejection goes further, at least in theory, to encompass all forms of textuality that engage the reader as an interpreter. Though Olson is hardly consistent on this point (a great deal of interpretive labor goes on in his writing and is in turn required by his readers), he nonetheless makes a strategic argument against reading and even against literacy. As he remarked to a small

gathering in 1963, in order to approach his poetry it would be "better to be, really, illiterate. In fact, it's very crucial today . . . to be sure that you stay illiterate simply because literacy is wholly dangerous, so dangerous that I'm involved, every time I read poetry, in the fact that I'm reading to people who are literate—and they are *not* hearing. They may be listening with all their minds, but they don't hear" (Muth 1:54). Literate minds cannot hear because they do not abandon their "bad discourse system" (Muth 1:31). Olson's "difference of discourse" requires instead what Thomas F. Merrill calls "the grammar of *illiteracy*," a complex of approaches to art and life that involve direct experience and immersion in process (45, emphasis added).[19] Writes Merrill:

> The grammar of literacy, as Olson sees it, fails because it is merely *about* experience. The grammar of illiteracy succeeds because it is *of* it. "If anybody wants forever never to enjoy language," Olson once counseled (resolutely practicing what he preached), "they will remember grammar as it was taught by those abhorrent Alexandrians down to probably every poor school kid right now." (45, quoting from "A New Short Ars Poetica, A Litle Boke" [unpublished prose piece])[20]

In Cratylism, because meaning is exact and unwavering, it has to be safeguarded against multiplicity, a multiplicity codified pedagogically in grammar and rhetoric. Rhetoric, of course, has been philosophy's rival since "their mutual origin in Greece," as Rodolphe Gasché notes in his extensive study of how that rivalry is reproduced in contemporary thought (91). Looked at in these terms, Olson is emphatically a philosopher. As he wrote at Black Mountain College, "I believe that there is truth. To be accurate, I believe there is *a* truth" (OJ 10:105). Olson's truth is always singular in manifestation; its transmission has to be conveyed univocally, in consequence of the fact that its content and form are one. Projective verse is not so much *read*, then, as *absorbed*, is not so much *interpreted* as *internalized*. Composed so as to preserve the life force of the poem in its wholeness and entirety ("A poem is energy transferred . . . to, all the way over to, the reader" [CPr 240]), projective verse would discourage an analytical approach, bordering on a condition of concrete poetry, preserving the poem's meaning from "the sieve" of natural energies that "phonetic words have become" (CPr 163). As Christian Moraru notes, the substantiality of the resulting text "motivates the . . . expression, fulfilling the secret, Cratylian dream of artists . . . : representing or rather presenting the referent by referential means, using the referent's material body to make 'referential statements' " (259–60). I would

add to this that the "expression" is not simply discursive, but aims to express energy, life-force, as well. Ideally for Olson, language does not represent or, better, *reproduce* life, but is itself produced by it, so that reading and living become the same activity. As he wrote in a letter to John Clarke (one that he prefaced with the directive "Don't read this as a letter : read it as though I were—as in fact etc[.]—*Paleolithic* !"), "It's almost like poetry. In fact it *is* poetry, Pleistocene, in that simplest *alphabetic* sense, that you can learn the language of being alive . . . —as though you were learning to read and to write for the first time" (SL 332–33).

Good writing for Olson obstructs reading and so, despite the emphasis on energy transfer in "Projective Verse," its graphic presence and rocklike substantiality are essential to its purpose. Mayan language provides a model for this, "a system of written record, now called hieroglyphs, which, on its very face, is verse, [because] the signs were so clearly and densely chosen that, cut in stone, they retain the power of the objects of which they are the images" (CPr 159). It is precisely in this sense that good writing should be understood as stone-writing, a solid and powerful language that requires a new practice of reading adequate to the new practice of writing called projective verse, a practice that relies upon Olson's new stance toward reality, which he calls *objectism*.

Objectism

Before turning to a close examination of Olson's "objectism," I must advance a brief notation regarding the *ethos* of his project.[21] While not immediately Cratylic in appearance, Olson's systematic alignments of speech and pictographs, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, *logos* and phonetic writing restates in linguistic terms the opposition between nature and culture that frames Plato's *Cratylus* dialogue. This framing is not casual, but rhetorical, for it indicates the particular *ethos* (character, habit of thought, belief) of each of the participants. In the opening scene, I would recall, Cratylus and Hermogenes, walking on a country path, encounter Socrates, who has just left the city. In the last scene Cratylus, holding on to his archaic faith in language as an unchangeable fact of nature, goes back to the country (accompanied part way by Hermogenes, who falls silent midway through the dialogue), while Socrates, the modern philosopher who regards language as a changeable cultural construct to be ordered by rational acts of perfecting mimesis, returns to the city. In affirming that the shift from oral to written civilization has brought about a loss of freshness and vitality, as well as a sense of right action, Olson, himself Heraclitean, takes the side of Cratylus, and does so with a direct and vigorous sense of his mission,

that of restoring through the act of speech the natural harmony of the human universe, which he distinguishes from the abstracted universe of discourse.[22] In advancing this belief he programmatically redefines the human as object rather than subject, the "body intact and fought for, the absolute of [the] organism," "a point of resistance" to modernity's "intolerable way" (CPr 174). Subjectivity is distinct from physicality in Western thought and so cuts the human away from the very ground that must be defended. The destructiveness and ugliness of contemporary society is for Olson a form of moral decline caused by humankind's self-separation from nature, which causes the power of the natural to leak away in ignorance. The loss is a historical fact:

> It is unbearable what knowledge of the past has been allowed to become, what function of human memory has been dribbled out in to the hands of these learned monsters whom people are led to think "know." They . . . do not know how to pass over to us the energy implicit in any high work of the past because they purposely destroy that energy as dangerous to the states for which they work—which it is, for any concrete thing is a danger to rhetoricians and politicians . . . . And the more I live the more I am tempted to think that the ultimate reason why man departs from nature and thus departs from his own chance is that he is part of a herd which wants to do the very thing which nature disallows—that energy can be lost. When I look at the filth and lumber man is led by, I see man's greatest achievement in this childish accomplishment—that he damn well can, and does, destroy destroy destroy energy everyday. . . . Man has made himself an ugliness and a bore. (CPr 163–64)

The concept of person that developed in the "culture of logos" (to borrow Bram's term [32]) is endowed with a knowledge and power that is finally false because wasteful and, at last, destructive. To propose an alternative concept is an ethical act as well as a political one, is, recalling Olson's words, "THE ONLY MORAL ACT WHICH CAN POSSIBLY CORRECT THE WEST" (CPr 298–99).

In opposition to normative definitions of subjectivity Olson sets forth objectism, which he defines in "Projective Verse" as "the getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego, of the 'subject' and his soul, that peculiar presumption by which [W]estern man has interposed himself between what he is as a creature of nature . . . and those other creations of nature which we may, with no derogation, call objects. For a man is himself an object." (CPr 247). The interference is "lyrical" because the subjectivity in question is "*the Egotistical Sublime*" of Wordsworth (CPr 239), which

Olson—aligning himself with Keats—rejects for his own version of negative capability:

> It comes to this: the use of a man, by himself and thus by others, lies in how he conceives his relation to nature, that force to which he owes his somewhat small existence. If he sprawls, he shall find very little to sing but himself, and shall sing, nature has such paradoxical ways, by way of artificial forms outside himself. But if he stays inside himself, if he is contained within his nature as he is participant in the larger force, he will be able to listen, and this hearing through himself will give him secrets objects share. . . . It is in this sense that the projective act, which is the artist's act in the larger field of objects, leads to dimensions larger than man. (CPr 247)

The term "objectism" does not recur in Olson's work, but the ethical and poetic stance it names remains central. I have already discussed the ethical dimension. As a poetics, objectism entails the belief that "*words* (vocabulary and all that) . . . are 'hard' substances with meaning, sound, pitch, tone, and 'color' or whatever it is you want to call those accretions, common and particular, that we call denotations" (Storrs, "A New Short Ars Poetica, A Litle Boke"). The passage is especially noteworthy because the "meanings" that words as "'hard' substances" *have* become by the end of the sentence substances themselves, "accretions . . . that we call denotations." Objectism, then, is another name for the "Substance Logic" of Cratylism (to recall Zemach's term). The poet, Olson demands, must have "care of the substance, the physical object, to have it right . . . [t]o see it substantively" (Storrs, "The Place & the Thing & the Act, of the Action").

Although Olson took pains to distinguish his objectism from Objectivism (which he cites in "Projective Verse" as a "movement" in which "Pound and Williams both were involved variously" [CPr 247]), two of Olson's ideas parallel if they do not in fact descend from Louis Zukofsky's poetics. First of all, Zukofsky's interest in "[t]he object unrelated to palpable or predatory intent," the object as "a manifestation making the mind more temperate" (*Prepositions* 210)—his answer to subjectivism—parallels Olson's belief that the poet, "if he is contained within his nature[,] . . . will be able to listen, and his hearing . . . will give him secrets objects share" (CPr 247).[23] Olson, of course, unlike Zukofsky, conceives of the poet, not as a mind, but as itself an object "caring for the substance" of things with the *ethos* of self-care. There is no predation (which, for Olson, is "interpretation, explanation, evaluation") because the poet is not simply objective in the phenomenological sense ("viz, *to get it down as it is*"), but "an objectivist" in the Cratylic sense, writing so as "to render all abstractions by way of object, to make words, for example, as if they had their

being…as wood has" (Storrs, "Credo"). Here, writing before the completion of "Projective Verse," Olson uses Zukofsky's term precisely to talk about poetic form, and this is where we find the second parallel between the two poets. In 1932, Zukofsky wrote, "Typography—certainly—if print and the arrangement of it will help tell how the voice should sound. It is questionable on the other hand whether the letters of the alphabet can be felt as the Chinese feel the written characters" (*Prepositions* 211). Olson's comments on the typewriter are clearly an elaboration of this idea (which Olson cites as "the fruits of the experiments of Cummings, Pound, Williams, each of whom has, after his way, already used the machine as a scoring to his composing" [CPr 245]). More striking, however, is the parallel between Olson's concern to adapt to alphabetic writing the power of the ideogram as presented by Fenollosa and Zukofsky's doubt that letters could have such impact. One important difference between objectism and Objectivism, then, is Olson's redefinition of ideograms and other forms of pictographs as a "living oral law" (CPr 169) recuperated for poetry by way of the syllable. "Force, momentum and speed work right in the midst of the syllable," he records in a note on prosody. "Before any rational or perceptive or emotional organization of words, language holds this in itself like power in water" (Storrs, "Nudae Quantitates").

Equating the concreteness of words with the tangible experience of things, Olson treats poetic practice as a form of sculpting. "The act of writing," he declares, "is the act of the object: to make the discontinuous concrete…to create, by form, the object" (Storrs, "Poetry and Criticism"). Prose too falls under the sway of this poetics. Not surprisingly, then, one of the forms Olson's objectism comes to take is the graphically structured, resolutely material, and, in the sense discussed above, unreadable essays known as *Proprioception*, which Olson himself described in his *Reading at Berkeley* as "incongestable" (Muth 1:133). At Berkeley he also said, presumably thinking of the archeological discoveries that inspired him (and which were often carved with pictographs), "If they're interesting, they can be dug up as signs" (Muth 1:133). With this comment in mind, I would propose that Olson's graphically structured texts, especially those that deemphasize logical development in favor of lists and clusters of phrases, be understood as *stone-writing*. Like Whitman's Cratylic dream of "substantial words," set forth by him in his "Song of the Rolling Earth" (LG 219), Olson's stone-writing expresses the belief (which Olson calls in a late essay "the doctrine of the earth") that one can write "as though each word is physical," that "the archeological discoveries of the past century have supplied, directly from the ground, substantive and narrative physicality to previously discursive language and thought" (CPr 353–54).

Olson's interest in stones as the material and historical foundation for his project of resistance in language, culture, and politics is first showcased in his "*Anti-Wasteland*," "The Kingfishers" (cited in Maud, *What Does Not*

Change 31). Olson begins the final section of that poem with the line, "I am no Greek, hath not th' advantage," presumably identifying himself as an American, and then concludes:

> It works out this way, despite the disadvantage.
> I offer, in explanation, a quote:
> si j'ai du goût, ce n'est guères
> que pour la terre et les pierres.
> . . .
> I pose you a question:
> shall you uncover honey / where maggots are?
> I hunt among stones (CP 92–93)

The French couplet, untranslated in oblique Poundian fashion, comes from *A Season in Hell*, and reads in English, "If I have any taste, it is only / For the earth and stones" (*Rimbaud* 197). Olson aligns himself with this position. Although one might expect him to associate the Greek past with stone ruins (evoked earlier in the poem with the "E on the stone" of Delphi [CP 87]) and the American present with living flesh, he twists that expected distinction and associates the Greek-advantaged West with *decayed* flesh and sets himself among the New World ruins of the people laid to waste by the West. At the time of the poem's composition, Olson's own taste for stones was being fed by his researches into Mayan hieroglyphs, which he would soon be examining on site in the Yucatan. As he wrote to Robert Creeley from Lerma, in Campeche, "Christ, these hieroglyphs. Here is the most abstract and formal deal of all the things these people dealt out—and yet, *to my taste*, it is precisely as intimate as verse is. Is, in fact, verse. Is their verse. And comes into existence, obeys the same laws that, the coming into existence, the persisting of verse, does" (CORC 5:85). At about the same time, he considered the possibility (first proposed by Cid Corman) of launching Corman's magazine *Origin* with a Boston show of hieroglyphs, to be represented by drawings by the Yucatecan artist Hippolito Sanchez. The director of the Campeche Museum declined to give permission for the loan of the drawings and the project never came off, but while Olson was waiting to learn this he began enthusiastically plotting out the details, suggesting to Corman that the exhibit should be supplemented with "photographs of the stones in situ . . . which could be . . . interspersed with the drawings as a constant reminder to the looker-on that, it is STONE, that is being demonstrated, as an ART" (COCC 1:116).

Olson's reflections to Creeley and Corman became the basis of a book project for which Olson wrote a research proposal to the Viking Fund &

Wenner-Gren Foundation.[24] Entitled "The Art of the Language of Mayan Glyphs," the proposal presented Olson's view that each glyph is an art object, "a design or composition which stands in its own space and exists . . . both by the act of the plastic imagination which led to its invention in the first place and by the act of its presentation" (AMG 95). Olson is also cognizant, of course, that the glyphs are language. "[E]ach of these glyphs," he writes, "has meanings arbitrarily assigned to it, denotations and connotations" (AMG 96). This notation on the semantic "arbitrariness" of the glyphs, a revealing Hermogenist moment, is swiftly pushed aside, however, as Olson begins to insist on taking a perspective that links the plasticity of the glyphs to the solidity (as he understood it) of speech:

> [O]ne must be on constant guard not to be "linguistic" about this language, not to confuse whatever "syntax" is here with what we are used to in the writing of phonetic language, in fact to stay as "plastic" throughout the examination as the Maya were in its making and to let this language itself—not even any other hieroglyphic system—declare what, for itself, are its own laws. . . . In his "A Tractate on Education" Milton puts what I have elsewhere called "the objectism of language" in these sharp words: he says, that though a linguist have all the tongues of the world, he would not be as wise as a yeoman or a tradesman if he did not have what they have from their dialects, the use of the "solid things" of speech "as well as the Words & Lexicon"! (AMG 96)

The injunction to read the glyphs in a "plastic," not "linguistic," manner does not draw Olson away from language, but rather leads him to seek the "laws" of this particular language in the "objectism" of "Projective Verse," an essay in which "the 'solids things' of speech" are one of the privileged secrets that objects can share. The citation of Milton will seem strange to anyone who recalls that Olson names Milton at the very beginning of "Projective Verse" as one of his examples of the *non*-projective, but Milton's "sharp words" (taken from the epigraph to J. Eric S. Thompson's Mayan glossary) provided Olson with a seal of authority for his injunction to "be on constant guard not to be 'linguistic.'" At stake in this injunction is his safeguarding of a Cratylic reading of the glyphs from the alternative (that is, Hermogenist) approach. In the process, he identifies two scales of attention pertinent to the Cratylist poetics of his own stone-writing, the word as object and the arrangement of words on the page as object. Writes Olson:

> My emphasis is on the live stone . . . not only the individual glyph and its elements (with the emphasis shifted from too close an attention to its

> denotation as "word" toward more understanding of its connotations, from its force as carved thing) but also that unit which dominates a stone visually and has heretofore received too little attention, the glyph-block, that "square" which might include up to 4 glyphs.... The mechanics of the glyph-block (the way it organizes its glyphs and the way the glyph-blocks are organized to make up the "passage" of the whole stone) is the clue, my studies so far suggest, of the other important element of this art, time... For the demand of my technique is a double one, the double nature of this unusual writing: it is at once object in space (the glyph) and motion on stone in time (the glyph-blocks). (AMG 96)

The "double nature" of the glyphs is in fact a distinction between different units of meaning in their language, one tied to space and the other to time: the glyph is an "object in space"; the glyph-block, an arrangement of glyphs whose "motion" (Olson declines to call it a syntax) carries with it the force of speech. The distinction is on the surface commonplace: the glyph is the word and the glyph-block the text. But Olson's way of making the distinction is important, first, because each is defined in objectual terms, and, second, because it provides a way of conceiving of entire texts as Cratylist in exactly the same way that single words are (a problem for Cratylist poets like Whitman whose noun language is nonetheless dependent on syntax and grammar in order to communicate its full meaning). No loss of meaning occurs in Olson's new concept of text as glyph-block, since, according to Olson, "what has so far come clear is, that in obedience to the phenomenal world, the Mayan imagination did very exactly maintain in the hieroglyphic writing the two things which the art of it seems to have demanded of them: the face and the proportion of nature in the glyph, resistant time in the composition of the glyph, the block and the stone" (AMG 97). The glyphs, in other words, incarnate their meaning; reading means "letting [the stone's] achieved form solely dictate the conclusions" (AMG 97).

The "obedience to the phenomenal world" Olson discovers in the language of the Maya is a crucial element of his own project of resistance to the culture of the *logos*. For Olson, the goal of this resistance is creating a counterculture, a "totally serious art" based on "the apprehension of the absolute condition of present things" (Muth 1:49). This apprehension would draw upon "areas of non-mimetic imagination" (1:47) and so reinvigorate the general state of passivity generated by representational art, a descriptive and discursive art that, in Olson's view, "must be driven out of society because it prevents people from the real" (1:49). "Most human beings," Olson asserts, do not know how to "project," but "live mimetically," copying the directives of others (1:47). Olson's alternative

to representation is language as act; its main impetus is to marshal the force of speech, the force of carving, against the *logos*, allowing the real to present itself without mediation. Narrative becomes an acceptable mode for this because it has motion instead of syntax. "*[T]he act of narrative now—which is the act of language anew*—must restore such *resistances* (such cloggings) in order to allow in the rude force of life which the Greek mythological system obscured" (Storrs, "The Principal Extrications & New Coordinates Now Called For"). Myth is usually a form of narration that Olson embraces; his use of the word "system" here indicates that he is not speaking of myth as *dromenon*, but myth as *logos*. Although, as Olson notes, quoting J. A. K. Thomson, historically "a Muthos was a Logos & a Logos a Muthos," its properties as story admit of other possibilities (OJ 10:63). "What delights me . . . about the mythological is that it states reality in exactly those terms by which a human being experiences reality: *personages*, *event*, & *things*; who what how. It does not explain or compare . . . *it reenacts*" (OJ 10:66).

Olson's attempt to duplicate in his writing the visual appearance of Mayan glyphs carries with it an implied practice of reading. Though written in alphabetic language, Olson's poems and graphically structured prose propose to present their meanings in the fashion of the glyph-block, as a sculptured writing whose "achieved form solely" would "dictate the conclusions" (AMG 97). Even as narrative, interpretation in the ordinary sense would be deemphasized—would be *clogged*, as Olson puts it, to let the motion of the words obey the rude force of life. The double nature of the text (word as object and word-arrangement as motion on object) thus embodies a Cratylist poetics, and in precisely the paradoxical fashion that Socrates critiques in Plato's dialogue. Cratylus, a follower of Heraclitus as well as a believer in a natural language, holds, on the one hand, that all is in flux, and, on the other hand, that words, because univocal with things, have fixed, unchanging meanings. Olson too, as already noted, is Heraclitean, and his Cratylist poetics attempt to resolve this contradiction by perceiving motion in the static and solidity in the moving. This is why he defines speech as a solid and why stone-writing embodies the living oral law. Thus, on the one hand, Olson thinks of projective verse in kinetic terms, as a transfer of energy from writer to reader, and, on the other hand, in terms of resistance, blockage, obstruction. Olson is quite ingenious in his attempts to reconcile these contrasting formulations, but they are undeniably paradoxical when set side by side. The paradoxes, however, are not Olson's alone. Heraclitean Cratylism is caught in the same paradox. A natural language cannot be natural. A language of univocal meanings, identical to things, stands in opposition to the law of incessant change. One is therefore either silent (as the historical Cratylus decided to

be) or embraces a state of contradiction (as Whitman famously did). Olson, for his part, embraced contradiction, although he often attempted to work through it.[25] In his correspondence with Cid Corman, for example, alluding to a previous letter in which he had written "the art of the language of glyphs IS motion in time and stone" (COCC 1:162), he tried to explain the paradox of motion in stone as follows:

> ((((one quick note: motion is *not* time. That is, at each of its extremes, time takes on more the nature of space. You forget they are one: space-time. And that, depending on the position and the mass of either, we read them more one or the other. For example, past time, at its outer limits—or present time, e.g.[,] stretched at night by stars—does not, to our senses, move. The extension is so great that, given the law of our senses, the *effect* is—like a design—instantaneous, and thus, because we take it in at once, is, static—though this is a false word, and if I replace it by plastic, I think you will see more clearly what I intend. . . .
>
> And when I sd motion in time on stone I meant that at this extreme—the instant—time is inseparable from space, and so an individual glyph is seized by the eye in such a small interval of time that one can speak of it as motion inside of time
>
> it is the glyph-block, and whole stone that, like a relief, or a mural, or a Chinese scroll, has to be measured in time—the eye has to move narratively[.] (COCC 1:168–69)

Appealing to Einsteinian ideas, Olson resolves the spatial characteristics of the glyph and the temporal characteristics of narrative in the concept of plasticity (which he may have known from the sciences, where it is often used to describe the movement of rock). Of course, the perspectival difference that allows the same text to be read in each way ought not to obtain simultaneously in any one reading, which is what projective verse seems to require. But setting that problem aside, what is important here is that in each case *logos* is thwarted; reading is a form of experience obedient to essential laws of nature, those of space and time.

Knowing Your Own Name

As noted above, Olson's difference of discourse, his alternative to *logos*, is founded on nominative language, on noun-writing. His interest in Mayan hieroglyphs led him to conceptualize this noun-writing as what I have called stone-writing, a way of distinguishing between the achieved

form of the glyph-block and the abstracted meanings of the alphabet. His project, then, as it developed in the 1950s, was to adapt the strengths of pictographic writing to English, an alphabetic system. The most significant of the texts on this subject that Olson published in his lifetime is *Proprioception*, a collection of nine notational essays printed in small press magazines and then gathered as a pamphlet in the early 1960s. Most commentators treat *Proprioception* as representative of a later stage of Olson's thought than "Projective Verse" and "Human Universe," but the thinking recorded in the later text is often based on research contemporary with and even predating the earlier two essays. Indeed, the key piece in *Proprioception* from my point of view, "Logography," is a rethinking and condensation of two 1952 letters to Robert Creeley; and the piece takes its title (which means "word writing") from I. J. Gelb's *A Study of Writing*, which Olson first read at Black Mountain College.[26] Gelb's book gives a historical account of how writing systems developed, and Olson's initial interest, as detailed in his letters to Creeley, was the technical distinctions it allowed between different terms and the historical narrative it provided, which supported his suspicion of phonetic language. Thus, in the first of the two letters, Olson writes:

> What I wanted to talk about is pictographs—ideographs—phonetics. For I figured out last night that these are the proper progression, and that use of words like hieroglyph and cuneiform are of another order (one is the class who had language in their care, or more, perhaps, the intent of the writing: "sacred carving"; and the other characterizes the tool: "wedge-shaped writing."
>
> . . . What comes out of these vocabulary accuracies is one fact: that Egyptian, Chinese & Maya all kept the vertical axis, & so never went phonetic (properly speaking); while Sumerian & Semite each shifted their axis . . . & so seemed to have more readily went "abstract." (CORC 10:93–94)

In the second letter, he takes up anew the historical development of phonetics and abstraction:

> I have been able to locate some things *behind* the first pictograms—or along-side them.
>
> Certainly the most crucial is this: that the Sumerian sign for sheep was no pictogram at all but an arbitrary sign (like some of the hobo language, that mixture of representation & convention)—a cross inside a circle. (CORC 10:98)

In this early stage of his thinking through of Gelb's work, Olson produces a narrative conventional in its lapsarian logic. The development of phonetic language is not only a fall into abstraction; it is based on a fateful divergence of ideas about language already present in the pictogram. The achieved form of the Mayan language is properly pictorial; Sumerian pictograms are instead arbitrary signs. The first, in other words, is a Cratylist language; the second, Hermogenist. In "Logography" these ideas are reshaped and radicalized so that the lapsarian logic is abandoned in a recuperation of the phonetic that gives hope to users of modern languages. Here the operative distinction is between *logography* and *ideography*, word writing and idea writing, with phonetic forms no longer a heightened form of abstraction but an essential means of recording proper names. To make this point, Olson quotes from Gelb as follows:

> The need for adequate representation of proper names finally led to the development of phonetization. This is concerned by the Aztec and Mayan writings, which employ the phonetic principle only rarely and then almost exclusively in expressing proper names.
>
> The procedure involved may result in a full phonetic transfer, as in a drawing of knees to express the name "Neil" (from "kneel"), of the sun for the word "son," or even together in a drawing of knees plus the sun to express the personal name of "Neilson." (CPr 184; see Gelb 66, 67)

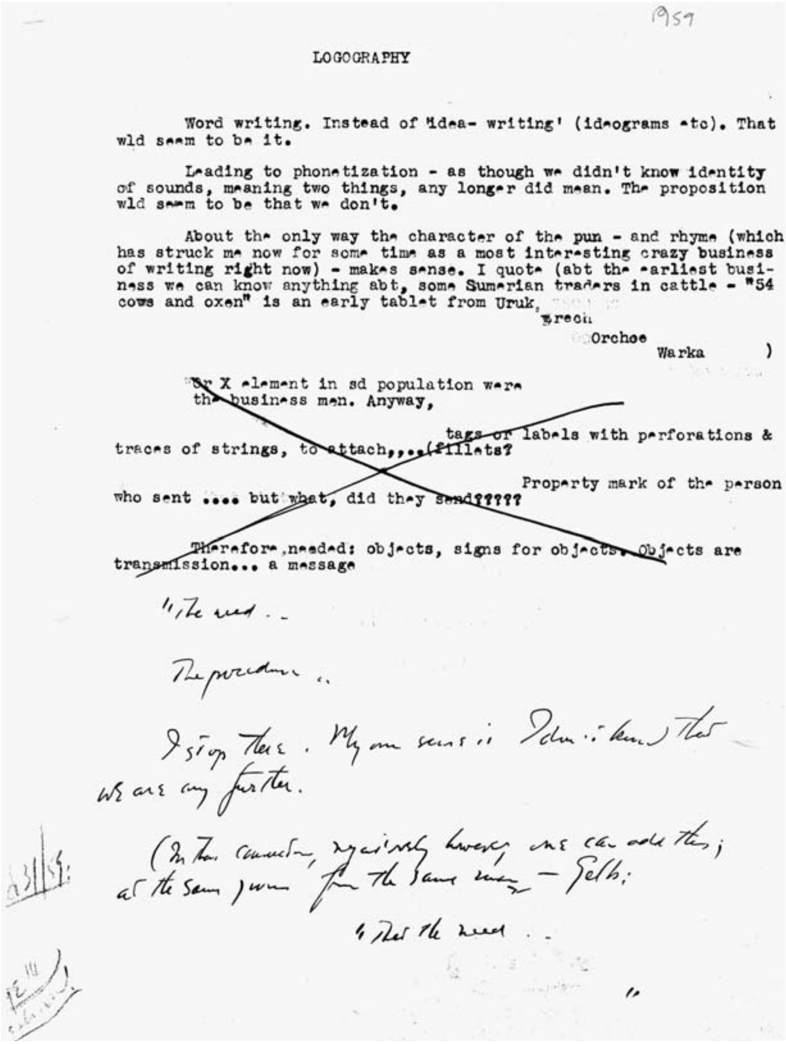
Proper names are, of course, the most basic solution to the problem Olson poses in "Projective Verse," "If logos is word as thought, what is word as noun." The fact that names also provide phonetic writing with a proper historical beginning also supports Olson's early inference that the glyph and the syllable could be conjoined.

Commentators on Olson's interest in the Mayan hieroglyph often blur the glyph together with Fenollosa's ideogram and treat Olson's thinking in this area as one of the points of similarity between "Projective Verse" and the "ideogrammic method."[27] Olson, to be sure, drew inspiration from Fenollosa (and Pound) and early on treated pictographs and ideograms as theoretically interchangeable. From Gelb, however, Olson took the fundamental distinction between *logography* and *ideography*, a distinction that was enormously useful for his poetics since the opposition between pictographic and phonetic writing systems (which his initial reading of Gelb had left intact) left him little basis for enacting a Cratylist poetry using an alphabetic language. Distinguishing between word-writing and idea-writing meant that some forms of pictography would be aligned with abstraction and some forms of phonetization with the concrete. This was hardly a new direction

in Olson's thinking; he had always accorded a significant importance to speech and sound. But logography did allow Olson to work through a significant theoretical impasse, one that was seemingly pushing him to the conclusion that alphabetic writing was unalterably aligned with the forces of abstraction. In word writing, the alphabet could become the instrument of a Cratylist language. Sound for sound's sake and abstraction are a misuse of this instrument. Thus Olson's prescription, "you can't use words as ideas any more than that they can be strung as sounds. They are meanings only and actions of their own sort" (CPr 202). With proper use of language, he adds, "all the World / is redeemed, and history / and all that politics, / and 'State' and Subjection / are for once, done away with" (CPr 202).

It is no accident that Olson's solution to his theoretical impasse came by way of the proper noun. As Susan B. Levin notes, "belief in substantial connections between elements of language and of reality" often fixes on the "ties between names and their bearers" (31); and Levin quotes the anthropologist F. B. Jevons to say that in ancient magical practice "it is not surprising that the name was used for the same purpose as a figurine representing the bearer since 'the name is, if anything, even more intimately identified with the man than any likeness of him can be' " (41). Olson in his "Letter to Elaine Feinstein" speaks to this intimate identification when he defines "the 'right' (wahr-) proper noun" as "onto-genetic," a word that refers to the origins and development of the individual as distinct from the species (CPr 252). (In the letter he also writes, "You wld know already I'm buggy on say the Proper Noun" [CPr 252].) Names are close to figurines because of their substantiality. Thus, for instance, in the poem "The Connection," Olson writes, "Crump's Landing and Pittsburgh / Landing / Even the names / keep the weight / of the goods / . . . / to be unloaded" (CP 253). These nouns have the heft of stones, and Olson indeed describes the noun-writing both advocated and exemplified by "Logography" and the other pieces in *Proprioception* as if they were stone tablets from the ancient world.[28] This is made clear in a deleted sentence from the typescript of "Logography" (figure 3), a call for direct communication by object: "Therefore needed: objects, signs for objects. Objects are transmission . . . a message" (Storrs, ellipses in original).

In Cratylist doctrine, proper names communicate completely and without distortion what people are because they function, to borrow Saul Kripke's expression, as "fixed designators," immutable signs (cited in Prendergast 80–81). In Plato's dialogue, this position is associated with the country, not the city, and Gelb seems to provide historical support for that association when he notes that in "large urban centres like those in Sumer . . . people do not know each other and many different persons bear the same names" (66)—a passage that Olson marked in his own copy of Gelb's book. Where


1959

LOGOGRAPHY

Word writing. Instead of 'idea- writing' (ideograms etc). That wld seem to be it.

Leading to phonetization - as though we didn't know identity of sounds, meaning two things, any longer did mean. The proposition wld seem to be that we don't.

About the only way the character of the pun - and rhyme (which has struck me now for some time as a most interesting crazy business of writing right now) - makes sense. I quote (abt the earliest business we can know anything abt, some Sumerian traders in cattle - "54 cows and oxen" is an early tablet from Uruk, Erech Orchoe Warka)

Or X element in sd population were the business men. Anyway,

tags or labels with perforations & traces of strings, to attach,,..(fillets?

Property mark of the person who sent .... but what, did they send?????

Therefore,needed: objects, signs for objects. Objects are transmission... a message

Figure 3 Typescript of "Logography," ca. 1959, Box/Folder 32:1613. Charles Olson Papers. Archives and Special Collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut Libraries. Used with permission.

many people share the same name, the proper noun threatens to blur the onto- and phylogenetic together. But Gelb, as already noted, also provides the historical solution to this problem: "the development of phonetization," which widens the possibilities for individualizing (66; see CPr 184).

Alphabetic writing, if tied to nomination, thus provides a means of implementing Cratylism in the polis. Common nouns (which are phylogenetic) can share in this activity, but proper nouns are the necessary starting point. As Olson declared at Black Mountain College:

> Where Pound & [Alfred] Korzybski would start with a common noun, say, "red," I insist the place to start is where so much of the magic of names has sat on us—with the proper noun, with that act of nomination, simply that it is there that the nominative comes most home to us, simply, that, we too are each a proper noun, are involved with filling out that thing, our name
>
> (there is no simpler paradigm of the whole problem than any one of us: that we are both proper & common, both Charles Olson at the same time "a man," a little bit red but too little red to satisfy himself) (OJ 10:82)

Proper and common nouns define us and allow us to know ourselves, but we are most fully and most substantially known and knowable by the former; no better proof can be found of this than the fact that we make good on ourselves precisely by "filling out" our names, as the colloquial expression *to make a name for oneself* so abundantly shows. It is, then, by rectifying names that we rectify society, and not simply by discovering or adopting new words. It is ourselves that language must help us discover and change, as Olson makes clear:

> Will you follow me then in this assault upon history—to throw down the names of all events & personages not at all to rid ourselves of those persons & events but to discover that they are founded as we are, not at all in our names, but in ourselves—that the complexity of the common & the proper lies behind everything in the palpable & essential thing we call experience or life.
>
> And that it must be cut back to—all names must be refreshed—or we shall stay victims.... (OJ 10:82).

The refreshing of names might seem to indicate the need for creating new language, and Olson himself in *The Special View of History* writes, "I am suggesting that a period has closed in which any known previous vocabulary applies" (SV 48), but he is more often suspicious of invention (denouncing the *logos* of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle as "an invented *episteme*, an invented noun" [CPr 358]), and historical recovery of old meanings by way of etymology is his preferred method of "[driving] all nouns, the abstract most of all, back to process—to act" (CPr 263).

As noted before, there is a close connection between etymology and Cratylism. In Steve McCaffery's summary, "Cratylean words . . . are self-statemental, a kind of 'micro-argument' upon themselves, . . . whose originary correctness is revealed through the agency of etymological analysis" (*North of Intention* 71). For Olson, of course, "originary correctness" would be insufficient, since the world is subject to change. Etymology helps to track those changes, providing the knowledge necessary for acts of cultural resistance. "I couldn't stress enough . . . the pay off in *traction*," he tells Elaine Feinstein, "that a . . . constant daily experience of tracking *any* word, practically, one finds oneself using, back along its line of force to Anglo-Saxon, Latin, Greek, and out to Sanskrit" (CPr 250).

The renewal of society that Olson calls for in his discourse on proper and common nouns begins in self-knowledge, out of which all other knowledge and all other action proceeds; this is why the proper noun (and his chief example of proper noun is one's own name) is, he insists, the necessary starting point. More than a decade after his call for an assault upon history by way of the name, Olson would write in an unpublished improvisation that builds upon his memory of a vivid dream, "Once you know your own name you can recognize anyone and any thing for what in turn they are. Or do. Or have. Or can" (Storrs, "Once You Know Your Own Name . . ."). Cratylism of this sort is not simply a language of substantial words univocal in meaning; it is a language whose meanings bring onto- and phylogenetic knowledge, an "*other* knowing" (CPr 185). There is a mystical aspect to this other knowing, one that sometimes obscures Olson's project of cultural resistance and social renewal. In the improvisation cited above, for example, Olson goes on to say

> if there is any point to any possible *influence* one might conceivably have on someone else (other than this one of knowing one's own *name* . . .) the only useful possibility is to propose to another person or to event itself literally [public *power*] the 'value' of and in NAME [identity: *SOUL*—the intuition of who, and what you are to be
>
> that which exists, through itself
> is what is called the Meaning
>
> And that follows from the experience of possessing one's own name. It is not being 'alive' . . . alone. It is also this old 'mystical' business of 'seeking' & coming to possess one's own soul, one's own intuition—intuition in fact is the 'lead' given 'to lead one toward one's soul: to lead one to continue on the road (Storrs, "Once You Know Your Own Name . . .")

According to Olson, a person is the meaning of his or her own name, and the process of discovering that meaning is both the act of taking possession of language and the act of living understood as a spiritual journey led by intuition. There is, however, an explicit social dimension in this "old 'mystical' business of 'seeking' & coming to possess one's own soul," and not only because the name can be received in this account through the institutional office of "confirmation [or baptism, if you wish to put it back there on the clerical or legal" (Storrs); there is "public *power*" and "*influence*" to be gained by espousing the value of names.

Olson's project of renewing society through Cratylist language practices variously described in terms of speech, glyph, noun, name, illiteracy, logography, and so on, persists through all phases of his career notwithstanding a suspicion of the concept of society as used in the social sciences. In *A Bibliography on America for Ed Dorn*, Olson opens with two assumptions: (1) "that *politics & economics*... are like love (can only be individual experience) and therefore, as they have been presented, are not much use"; and (2) "that *sociology*, without exception, is a lot of shit" (CP4 297). His alternative term in that text is *quantity*, which he describes as "[w]hat used to be called ENVIRONMENT (?) or SOCIETY (?)" (CPr 305). *A Special View of History*, from the same period, is equally emphatic:

> I take it that these two planks of the old humanism—the Individual and Society as you would hear it shouted from the soapboxes, wherever you still turn; this is the garbage you are asked to listen to. Neither of these two planks are anything but stereos and rigidities, which, if you think of it, your experience contradicts every instant. (SV 38)

Here Olson's alternative term to *society* is not *quantity* but *plural*, as in the following astute passage:

> It is only where decisions of the plural are made that the majority can affect you. And does. Don't let any anarchist fool you, that you won't die because of majority decisions of the state is wished away. It ain't that simple; the majority factory, for example, has done away with a lot of species of nature's own creation by failure of majority decisions to cope adequately with environment. One can hear the echo of species going crashing down. (SV 38)

But Olson's most noteworthy alternative to *society* is introduced in his "Letter to Elaine Feinstein," noteworthy because it indicates that his mystical aspect is not a retreat inward but an expansion outward. There he writes, "the Proper Noun...is the connection, in each of us, to Cosmos"; and "if this sounds

'mystical' I plead so. Wahreit: I find the contemporary substitution of society for the cosmos captive and deathly" (CPr 252). Though Olson is not dogmatic on this point (*Proprioception* includes a text entitled "Theory of Society" [CPr 186–87]), the general trend of his thought is to bring his Cratylist practices to bear on the culture of *logos* by situating citizen and polis within the cosmos (or universe) at large. The establishment of that culture by Greek philosophy was a revolutionary act and its dislodgment requires an act of equal ambition:

> [W]e don't even know what it does mean to change society comparably to how they did engage to do it, so much of our own discourse is in fact theirs. Thus social change in the present is boringly social and unequally revolutionary to theirs. . . . One wants therefore to enter this ring on a different footing: it isn't true, and has left the universe out, substituting for it a prune or wrinkled grape, the social. (CPr 357–58)

The different footing Olson desired was what an early text called "THE AREA, and the DISCIPLINE of TOTALITY" (OJ 10:95).

Already in *Special View* Olson had made reference to the concept of *cosmos*, spelling it in that context, as Whitman does, with a *k*. "By nature . . . the order which used to be called Kosmos can now be stated: . . . kosmos is history . . . ; man is no trope of himself as synechdoche of his species, but is, as actual determinant, each one of us, a conceivable creator . . . (. . . ontogeny *creates* phylogeny)" (SV 48–49). The idea here is more succinctly stated in the dedication page to *Maximus*, where Olson writes "*All my life I've heard / one makes many*," a couplet that George F. Butterick glosses with a passage from Olson's autobiographical essay "The Present Is Prologue," "in the human universe is the discharge of the many (the multiple) by the one (yrself done right, whatever you are, in whatever job . . .)" (*Guide* 4; see CPr 205). The sentiment here is in fact very close to that expressed by Whitman in *Leaves of Grass* in the famous passage where he describes himself as "Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs, a kosmos, / Disorderly fleshy and sensual . . . eating drinking and breeding" (LGVar 1:31). According to David S. Reynolds, Whitman picked up the word *kosmos* from Alexander von Humboldt, whose *Cosmos: A Sketch of a Physical Description of the Universe* (1845) was a text that Olson also happened to know (see, e.g., Maud, *Charles Olson's Reading* 306 n. 15). Writes Reynolds, "For Whitman as for Humboldt 'cosmos' signified both the order of nature and the centrality of human beings" (244–45). Adds Robert J. Scholnick:

> Implicit in this view is the idea that it is not the poet alone or the scientist alone who is capable of articulating the meaning of the natural world.

> Each of us, in becoming a "kosmos," takes on that function and "out of the theory of the earth and of his or her body understands by subtle analogies all other theories, / The theory of a city, a poem, and of the large politics of these States." (LeMaster and Kummings 619, quoting LG 392–93)

For Olson, of course, the single person does not become but rather produces the *kosmos*. Yet Olson certainly shares with Whitman the aim of extending to all members of the body politic the power of articulating the meaning of that *kosmos*. And words are naturally central to that task. In *Poetry and Truth*, Olson tells his audience, "I'm trying to give you your language" (Muth 2:36). In giving that language, Olson is giving his audience their world—a world that can be made inhabitable only by those who take a stand against "[t]he whole slip to discourse" (CPr 358). Taking such a stand was the basis for Olson's class at Black Mountain College "The Act of Writing in the Context of Post-Modern Man," which he described in the *College Bulletin* as follows (and with a gender sensitivity unusual for Olson):

> The effort is definitely non-literary. Neither is the reading in "literature," like they say, nor is the writing "composition." . . . The idea is to enable the person to achieve the beginnings of a disposition toward reality now, by which he or she can bring himself or herself to bear as value.
>
> The proposition is the simplest: to release the person's energy wordwise. . . . The engagement of each class, therefore, is the search for a methodology by which each person in the class, by acts of writing and critique on others' acts of writing, may more and more find the kinetics of experience disclosed. . . . (OJ 2:28)

What Olson here presents as pedagogy, when actualized by all users of language in their daily activities, would bring about a transformation of society, redeeming history and making the substance of life equally available to all.

CODA

Language Poetry and Neo-Cratylism

> *Cratylus*: Very good, Socrates. I hope, however, that you will continue to think about these things yourself.
>
> Plato, *Cratylus* 440e

> What if life remains to be discovered? What if language still could be used to wrest "objects" from "experience" towards reality in the literal strata of the words?
>
> Robert Grenier, *Attention*

> We need a rewriting of the language . . . so it's not just another confinement, another structuralist closure. CIVIL TONGUE. Politics = language (so you economic determinists can just go to hell). All of life would be government, constitution. Freedom! . . . I'd like that hope in writing.
>
> Bruce Andrews, *Paradise & Method*

> The trend of my theory may sometimes run utopianward in reality.
>
> Lyn Hejinian, *My Life*

Whenever linguisticity and social vision are conjoined in poetry—whenever "a more than ordinary consciousness of how to do things with words" takes the world as well as language as its object (Kramer 14)—impulses toward Cratylism will inevitably arise. These impulses may be resisted, they may be entertained playfully as tropes, they may become temptations difficult to avoid, but the very fact that they arise

will in itself be noteworthy, an indication of the poet's desire to act on the world by acting on language. Not all poets whose projects would impinge on the social experience these impulses. Those who conceive of poems as tools to be wielded in the ordinary course of fulfilling their responsibilities as citizens, who conceive of poetry as exhortation, denunciation, testimony, or document, will not feel the need for a perfect or more natural language in order to complete their work (though the fantasy of such a language will often be expressed even then, as in Adrienne Rich's "Cartography of Silence," which begins with "lies" but concludes with "these words, . . . / from which time after time the truth breaks moist and green" [16, 20]). But those who demand more of their poems, who look to poetic language as in itself transformative, will find Cratylic formulations immensely attractive. Even where dreams of social renewal are not explicit, the desire to make writing a meaningful act in its own right will reveal itself to be implicitly utopian—a desire for plenitude in language that slides easily into a desire for plenitude in everyday life.

The most significant and also most surprising reassertion of the American Cratylus since the death of Olson can be found in the work of the Language poets. Significant because these writers, now in their fourth decade of activity, represent the primary example in poetry of the linguistic turn that so transformed the humanities and social sciences in the 1960s and 1970s.[1] Surprising because these writers have long been associated with structuralist models of language, in particular the extreme Conventionalism of Saussurian linguistics. And yet one need not look far to discover countercurrents within the movement. The emphasis on the materiality of language and the object-status of words, while free of any belief that particular meanings are intrinsic to that materiality or that words as objects are produced by nature, leads in some cases to a practice of writing in which meaning is imagined as unmediated by representation or rhetoric or even by grammar in any ordinary sense—a word-writing that makes the poem an arrangement of objects in the world rather than a picture of that arrangement or a statement about it. Similarly, the emphasis on language as a system of differential relations and poetic texts as an arrangement of materials governed by that system's rules, while free of any belief in the intrinsic meanings of individual words or any one-to-one correspondence between text and reality, leads in some cases to a new form of realism in which language as a whole becomes the substance of thought and as such the very essence of the real. I therefore consider the work of the Language poets to be a kind of neo-Cratylism insofar as it seeks to capture or act on reality without mediation, although it does so without renouncing any Hermogenist precepts.[2]

A full elaboration of this reading of Language writing lies beyond the scope of the present book, but for this Coda, in order to indicate the persistence of Cratylism in American poetry and some of the ways it is transformed when arising as a contrary impulse within determinedly Hermogenist projects, I want to look very briefly at the poetics of Robert Grenier, Bruce Andrews, and Lyn Hejinian, touching in passing on exemplary moments in the work of other Language poets.[3] Grenier, of all these writers, is least conflicted about the appeal of Cratylism, and it is his career that the distinct projects of Whitman, (Riding) Jackson, and Olson best illuminate. Andrews and Hejinian, instead, demonstrate the transformations of Cratylism that can occur within otherwise Hermogenist projects. The poetics of Andrews exemplifies the neo-Cratylist belief that language, embodying ideology and constituting social relations, defines writing as direct political practice. With Hejinian we find the fullest articulation of the neo-Cratylist belief that language instantiates the real.

In his introduction to *In the American Tree: Language, Realism, Poetry*, Ron Silliman quotes Grenier from 1971 announcing "'PROJECTIVE VERSE' IS *PIECES* ON" (xvii)—a formulation that predicts remarkably well Grenier's project of reconceiving Olson's Cratylism by attending closely to the writing of words on the page. In *Pieces*, Robert Creeley had turned momentarily away from the lyricism of his earlier work to produce what he himself called "*scribbling*," "writing for the immediacy of the pleasure and without having to pay attention to some final code of significance" (*Collected Essays* 535). Reading "Projective Verse" through *Pieces*, then, allowed Grenier to radicalize Olson's call for a work "as clean as wood is, as it issues from the hand of nature" (CPr 247) by eschewing description and even statement to focus on words in themselves. Though Olson had warned that "descriptive functions . . . have to be watched, every second," and though he praised Hart Crane for "the push to the nominative, . . . that one arc of freshness, the attempt to get back to word as handle," Olson's own work was never as suspicious of description or as focused on the nominative as the *Pieces*-inspired writing produced by Grenier (CPr 243, 244). In *Series: Poems 1967–1971*, for example, we find poems that read in their entirety "WRITING // error // space," and "WOOD // stoves," and, more wittily still (since it calls attention to the difference between word as sign and word as thing), "no signs / of things" (n.p.). For Grenier, the word is emphatically a thing, a point made again and again in the attention to individual letters in his major early work *Sentences* (1978), a box of five hundred typed poems on index cards. In some cases, attention to letters shows in the spacing or lineation ("dream / y belly"), in others, through juxtaposition of similar-looking words ("whistle / whiten"); but Grenier's favorite method

of attending to letters is counting, as in "Twelve Vowels," whose six words (including the title) comprise twelve vowels (including the *y* in *sky*):

TWELVE VOWELS

breakfast

the sky flurries (n.p.)

At the time of its publication, Barrett Watten described *Sentences* as "a distillation of six years' close attention to 'everything going on all the time,' " but qualified the inference of a representational aim by adding, "The composite world-picture is at the mercy of the word. . . . Voice invested with power to make real (symbolism) is finally undermined" ("Robert Grenier, *Sentences*" 235–36). In some ways, Watten's comment recalls Olson's denigration of the "suck of symbol" (CPr 161), but Olson was in fact quite concerned with the voice's power to make real, and so too was Grenier. In fact, Grenier in several essays recuperated the word *symbolism*, but did so by redefining it in explicitly Cratylist terms. Referring to Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons*, for example, he writes: "Symbolism, here, not referential signification, but structural identity, not relation but a circle of correspondence: *x is x*, the word *is* the thing of which it speaks. E.g.[,] 'Dining is west.' How so" ("Notes on Coolidge" 507).[4]

There are, of course, many Grenier poems that describe scenes and make statements, but the intention in those works is not representational or rhetorical; it would be more accurate to say that Grenier's focus on language as instantiation of the real often includes acts of transcription. His often cited declaration "I HATE SPEECH" is partly an anti-mimetic stance, a rejection of the *imitation* of speech, partly a stance in favor of direct transcription of thought, a rejection of sound as mediation:

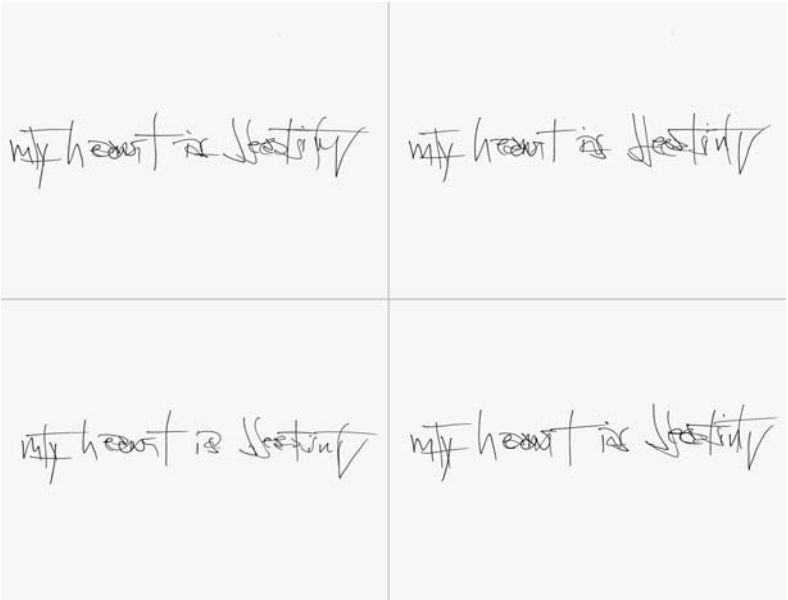
> Why imitate "speech"? . . .
> First question: where are the words most themselves? . . . how may they best be spread abroad without distortion, so that the known world can be shared?
> I want writing what *is* thought/where *feeling* is/*words are born*.
> ("On Speech" 477)

The desire for an undistorted transcription of thought even leads Grenier to consider "telepathy, i.e.[,] dispersing of notion of form altogether," a repudiation of the sensual qualities of language that recalls the earlier repudiation

of rhythm and exaggerated sound by Laura (Riding) Jackson ("Notes on Coolidge" 511). By and large, however, Grenier is fascinated with form, witness his scrupulous attention to the form speech takes when he prepares his own talks and interviews for print. Here for example is an exchange with Ron Silliman from the 1982 talk "Language / Site / World":

> *Silliman*: Did you have a real strong sense about prepositions & nouns . . . when you were writing this piece?
> *Grenier*: Oh, yeah, the prepositions, especially . . . were very literal, & you could . . . prepositions, a . . . you could visualize, you could enact, as operations . . . a, so . . .
> *Silliman*: Their operations are very much like verbs, right?
> *Grenier*: Yah . . . they're really, they're real 'connectives' . . . they, a . . . they go to their objects . . . really . . . directly . . . although, it can go through . . . various constructions . . . those are really, yah, they're more 'verbal' than probably any other, a—is that true? . . . yah—articles have a little snap. . . . (244–45)

Declining to clean up the transcript for the sake of clarity or to mask the inarticulateness of his original exchange with Silliman, Grenier presents the text with all the yahs and pauses. Verbatim transcription of another sort would later inspire Grenier to abandon the typewriter—whose even spacing of letters had been instrumental in the composition of *Sentences*—for handwriting. This later phase of his work was first presented in *What I Believe Transpiration/Transpiring Minnesota* (1991), a collection published, like *Sentences*, as a box. Many of the handwritten poems in *What I Believe* are functionally identical to the typewritten poems that had come before (and the recollection of *Sentences* emphasizes this), but two characteristics emerge that will become prominent in Grenier's subsequent work: overwriting, and retranscribing. The overwriting is a new compositional possibility enabled by the turn to handwriting; it creates striking visual effects, but at sacrifice of legibility.[5] The retranscribing is an old compositional possibility (i.e., repetition) that acquires new meaning with the abandonment of the typewriter. Because no two words can truly be the same when written by hand, the rewriting of a single poem becomes in each case a *new* poem—as if the poet were trying again and again to get the transcription right. Both of these characteristics are evident in four different poems from *What I Believe*, each consisting of the "same" superimposed words: "my heart is beating" and "I am a beast" (figures 4–7)—poems that would realize in human language what Whitman called "substantial words" (LG 219). For Grenier, the poems both *state* and *are* the animateness of matter,



Figures 4–7 Four handwritten poems by Robert Grenier, from *What I Believe Transpiration/Transpiring Minnesota* (1991). The text consists in each case of the same superimposed lines: "my heart is beating" and "I am a beast."

resembling in their script "some kind of a graph of a heart beating" while exemplifying in their fourfold retranscription the singularity of seemingly identical moments in lived time ("Realizing Things" n.p.). Although there is no explicit social vision in these poems, the plenitude of language toward which they strive implicitly accommodates one insofar as the transcriptions and retranscriptions are not simply mimetic of but engagements with reality. As Grenier says of these poems, "instead of writing 'my heart is beating,' you had to make the heart beat in words, in order to have a hope of engaging the condition of which you speak & toward which words move" ("Realizing Things" n.p.).

When Silliman placed "Realism" in his subtitle for *In the American Tree*, he surely had in mind projects like Grenier's that express an abiding concern with "[t]he substantiality of language" (xx).[6] This claim for realism has never caught on with Language poetry's readers, but the realist design was certainly crucial for the poets themselves, providing a basis for their early assertions that the work involved a radical social critique—that it

engaged what a symposium edited by Steve McCaffery called "The Politics of the Referent."[7] In his own contribution to the symposium, McCaffery wrote, "Freed . . . from the enforced communality that is grammar, the word approaches its own totalization and we are forced to encounter the word frontally as an absolute property" ("The Death of the Subject" n.p.). The logic here is analogical: language is understood on the model of society, with words freed from grammar no longer alienated by the "labour" of "discourse" and so able to preserve their "processual, non-commodity nature" (n.p.). But the politics of the referent McCaffery describes would not have any impact on social relations if the equation of language and society were not literal, and since Grenier's unabashedly Cratylist claim for language as embodiment of the real ("*x is x*, the word *is* the thing of which it speaks") was unsuitable for coordination with a theoretical vocabulary derived from Marxist theory and structuralism, some alternative was needed. It is in the context of this need for a literal equation of language and society that the realist aspect of Language writing took shape as a kind of neo-Cratylism, not a language of natural words consubstantial with things, but a system independent of nature that in its entirety constitutes reality as lived, as what Althusser in his well-known definition of ideology calls "*a 'Represention' of the Imaginary Relationship of Individuals to their Real Conditions of Existence*" (162). Within this neo-Cratylist logic of the politics of the referent, dismantling language as ordinarily practiced would expose those real conditions and, more potently still, dismantle the social order that masks them. The program is put forward most strongly by Andrews: "To oppose the structural underpinnings by an anti-systemic detonation—. . . by a blowing up of all settled relations. . . . So that the relational system that seems to underlie the very possibility of signifying would be exploded" (*Paradise & Method* 25). The same logic is articulated with particular clarity by P. Inman, who asserts that "free language exists in a critical relation viz. capitalist superstructures" and calls for "[a] language of the word instead of the worded" ("Writing and Politics" 154). Word here has the role of subject in Althusser's theory of ideology, interpellated (that is, "worded") by the rules of grammar, by the logic of representation, and by narrative. "A personal name," writes Inman, "delineates one's space from that of the others'. My name marks my spot on the assembly line off from yours, though our jobs may well be interchangeable" ("One To One" 221). Rae Armantrout brings an equivalent argument to the distinction between metaphor and metonymy. In response to a poem by Sharon Olds, she writes, "What the poem seems to imply is that people and things are serviceable, interchangeable, ready to be pressed into the service of metaphor. . . . I am repelled as by a presumptuous intrusion. . . . There is no outside to this metaphoric system. . . . It is imperialistic" (10). She finds

a very different political meaning in metonymic work by Hejinian and Lorine Niedecker:

> Their poems may not be as easily readable as those of Olds . . . but clarity need not be equivalent to readability. How readable is the world? There is another kind of clarity that does not have to do with control, but with attention, one in which the sensorium of the world can enter as it presents itself. (10)[8]

For Charles Bernstein this presentation of "the sensorium of the world" is restorative:

> The promise of the return of the world can (& has always been) fulfilled by poetry. Even before the process of class struggle is complete. Poetry, centered on the condition of its wordness—words of a language not out there but in here, language the place of our commonness—is a momentary restoration of ourselves to ourselves. (29–30)

Realism, then, in the neo-Cratylist sense, is utopian by definition, which might seem oxymoronic without the prior examples of Whitman, (Riding) Jackson, and Olson.

As noted above, neo-Cratylism as a political program is put forward most exuberantly by Andrews, whose critical writings also exemplify the coexistence of that program with Hermogenist precepts. While affirming consistently that language is not natural but socially constructed, that meaning is not inherent to words but the function of a rule-governed system, that language refers to an external reality by convention, and that the relationship between language and social order is indirect, Andrews again and again expresses a Cratylist desire for a form of writing that can engage language prior to social construction, for a nonsyntactical writing of meaning-embodied words, for an instantiation of the real within writing, and for a direct effect on the social order through poetic practice. The coordination of these seemingly incompatible precepts and desires generally occurs by presenting the latter as utopian: what poetic practice would accomplish is set in opposition to language as presently used. As a consequence, Hermogenism is both embraced and discarded—embraced because it exposes the social order presently constituted by language as nonnatural and so susceptible of change; discarded because the utopia that Language writing would establish will be a reassertion of plenitude and embodiment. Andrews is explicit about the developmental narrative implied by this shifting status of Hermogenism: "Here

are three points on a multidimensional spectrum: (1) Writing as representation; (2) Writing as a subversion of a linguistic system; (3) Writing as a reconstitution of meaning-value-and-the body" (*Paradise & Method* 20–21). In places, Andrews presents his neo-Cratylist stance tentatively, as a working hypothesis. In one essay, for example, he writes, "I want to draw an analogy . . . between language and society" (33). Elsewhere, however, the acknowledgment of an analogical relationship is elided—even as Hermogenism is affirmed. "The coherence between signifier & signified is conventional, after all—rather than skate pass this fact, writing can rebel against it by breaking down that coherence, by negating the system itself" (17). Having announced this rebellion against coherence (against "a coercive organization of grammar, rhetoric, technical format, & ideological symbols . . . imposed in everyday life" [18]), the distinction between language and society effectively disappears; poetic practice, operating on "[w]ord matter" that "exists relationally within an overall sign system" (17), becomes *social* practice, "allowing bodily contact to be made with an apparently absent system" (81). Significantly, what draws Andrews away from Hermogenism toward Cratylism is not any difference in his understanding of language, but a desire for "a conception of writing *as* politics, not writing *about* politics" (50). At moments, in pursuing his politics, he becomes as Cratylist as Grenier ("Grammar as constraining rules; meaning as constitutive rules—yet these latter are not imposed as a prior dictate. They issue forth instead from the inward shape of the language" [8]). More often, however, we see him negotiating a complex relationship between Hermogenism and Cratylism. For example, having stated in one essay that "[m]eaning isn't proper and isn't inner" (135), he proposes in another that the "improper" be taken "as a blueprint," asking, "Meaning in escrow? Counterhegemony begins with a single word" (148). This counterpositioning of statements is illuminating of the neo-Cratylist program more generally: Cratylist desires founded on Hermogenist precepts, aiming to tear down Hermogenist structures:

> We want the biggest possible verb—to take on the machine and remake it. . . . This restores Writing to word-dom, as a social all-over with width and scale of making sense as its trajectory. Implicated this way, Language would be collective governance, perhaps participatory enough to undermine some of the bright lights/big city of commodity alienation and spectacle. (149)

Andrews, then, is always most Hermogenist when discussing the status quo ("The process by which sense occurs . . . is *socially ruled*—staged into

discourse & harnessed into ideology" [53]), and most Cratylist when presenting his utopian alternatives ("Stay inside. It is all here. The non-imperial state: . . . a non-imperial or language-centered writing" [13]).

Hejinian might seem a strange poet for inclusion in this lineage since she is both less concerned than Grenier with language as instantiation of the real and less committed than Andrews to poetry as political practice. She is also more given to hypotheses than pronouncements, which means that the utopian element is muted in her work; and despite her occasional gestures toward Cratylism, she tends to be more insistent than the other Language poets on the fact of mediation, perhaps because so much of her writing develops intertextually, in relation to a wide range of readings. Yet no Language poet has better articulated the realist stance essential for linking poetic and political practice than Hejinian; her philosophical meditations on description provide the most coherent account of the particular form of thingness that distinguishes neo-Cratylism from Cratylism. Even her emphasis on mediation proves relevant, since the space of mediation acquires in her work much of the utopian potential that other Language poets have claimed in their imagination of a language free from mediation (i.e., fragmentary texts that disrupt syntax and eschew representation, narrative, etc.). As she writes in a retrospective note about an essay on this topic, "I hoped that by insisting on [description's] contingent relation to both 'art and reality, or intentionality and circumstance'—that is, by positioning description in and as the intermediary zone between them—I could open a space through which a person might step. In or out" (*Language of Inquiry* 200). Description in this utopian construal is not transcription but creation, "is not definitive but transformative"; and yet the merely contingent relationship to reality on which it is based, which Hejinian elsewhere terms a metonymic relationship, through a neo-Cratylist logic makes her mediating language *more* real than mere representation. The latter type of realism "seem[s] generally *not* to have taken on the question of what constitutes the realness of reality—what gives things realness" (86), unlike Hejinian's poetics of description, which discovers in the indirect (that is to say, metonymic) relationship between reality and language a paradoxically direct relationship between the realness of things and the utopian possibilities of writing. "Metonymy," she writes, "moves attention from thing to thing; its principle is combination"; it "maintains the intactness and discreteness of particulars"; it "conserves perception of the world of objects, conserves their quiddity, their particular precisions" (148, 151). At the same time, because metonymy is a principle of combination, its contingent relation to reality is also a contingent relationship to art. This is why Hejinian declares her practice of description transformative rather than definitive, "a method of

invention and of composition" (138). Unlike representation, which aims for sameness, description, she argues, makes space for difference, and does so precisely because "an initial, essential recognition of difference—of strangeness—develops only with attention to single objects while others are temporarily held in abeyance" (157). Strangeness, indeed, is a more acute term than difference in this neo-Cratylist poetics since it is the estrangement of things from the totality of their codified relationships that would make this writing a political act:

> When the term *realism* is applied to poetry, it is apt to upset our sense of reality. But it is exactly the strangeness that results from a description of the world given in the terms "there it is," "there it is," "there it is" that restores realness to the things in the world and separates things from ideology. (158)

As with Andrews, what draws Hejinian toward Cratylism is not a commitment to natural language, but a desire to make language the agent of social change. "But am I, in my sentences, . . . in pursuit of change? Do I want to improve the world? Of course," she remarks in an interview, adding that the change she seeks "will have to be *in* sentences, not by them" (196). It is in declarations like these that Hejinian demonstrates her place in the lineage my book describes, for when change occurs *in* language, the mediating aspect of language—so important for her work overall—is set aside.

In my introduction I spoke of the Cratylic dream of plenitude as a dream in Plato's sense, a way of treating things "*as if* they were true or real, without knowing whether they actually are" (Sedley 165). Dreams of this sort—glimpses of possibility—are how the utopian dimension of Language poetry manifests itself.[9] As Bernstein writes in his aptly titled *Content's Dream*:

> The promise of the return of the world can (& has always been) fulfilled by poetry. . . . Poetry, centered on the condition of its wordness—words of a language not out there but in here, language the place of our commonness—is a momentary restoration of ourselves to ourselves. . . . [A]esthetic consciousness and political consciousness are [not] essentially different, quite the opposite . . . : the power of poetry is, indeed, to bridge this gap [between art and politics]—for a moment—by providing instances of actualization. [I]t is a glimpse. (29–31)

Andrews likewise, although he is inclined to present his political program as immediately achievable, perceives that the plenitude for which he strives is graspable only in imaginative speculation. "To imagine the limits of

language," he writes, "is also to imagine the limits of a whole form of social life" (*Paradise & Method* 39). Once we arrive at those limits, all of language's potential—and thus all the potential of social life—will become available, "a total repertoire of possibilities" that Andrews equates with "Paradise" (268). For Hejinian, too, paradise is a matter of plenitude, and poetic practice is its principal—if not only—means of achievement. "[T]he conjunction of *form* with radical *openness*," she writes, "may be what can offer a version of the 'paradise' for which writers often yearn—a flowering focus on a distinct infinity" (*Language of Inquiry* 42). With Grenier, instead, the Cratylic dream of plenitude is a promise of the "new world," a conscious recollection of the democratic vistas of Whitman, whose "catalogues of the different conditions of the American experience" serve for Grenier as a confirmation of his own utopian tendencies ("Realizing Things" n.p.). "[T]he task, for me," he declares, "has been to try to find some way in which 'letters,' meaning 'literature,' can be the equal—at least the equal, & possibly the agency & apparition—of what is, in writing, such that 'the new world' might come to appear, for a 'moment' " ("Realizing Things" n.p.). Plenitude, then, is a possibility for these poets, not a fact, but a possibility that invests their poetry with a promise of social renewal. For the American Cratylus, that promise of renewal is inevitably a temptation away from fact, but it also lends grandeur to their failures and inspires their perseverance. When Cratylus says to Socrates at the end of Plato's dialogue, "I hope . . . that you will continue to think about these things," he speaks for all the poets I have discussed in this book, who understood well that their projects could only be completed if readers joined them in their dreaming.

Notes

Preface

1. Born Laura Reichenthal, Laura (Riding) Jackson published the majority of her early writings under the name Laura Riding (she also used a small number of pseudonyms for individual texts). After her second marriage, to Schuyler B. Jackson, she began to publish under the name Laura (Riding) Jackson. Unfortunately, there is not yet a convention in place for referring to Riding/(Riding) Jackson by name when discussing all phases of her career. This poses particular problems for bibliographic citation, as reprint editions often carry both names. To avoid clumsiness and painstaking distinctions that are often unnecessary, I will use (Riding) Jackson throughout this study except when the anachronism of that name would introduce confusion. For ease of reference, the Works Cited section collates all of her publications under "(Riding) Jackson" instead of "Jackson" so that all entries appear in close proximity to one another.

1 The True Forms of Things: Cratylism and American Poetry

1. All quotations from the *Cratylus* come from Benjamin Jowett's translation, published in *The Collected Dialogues*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns. As in that edition, "references to the text are given by means of marginal sigla derived from the pagination and page divisions of the 1578 edition of Plato by Henri Estienne (Stephanus), which is conveniently used for references to the text of Plato" (1609). I also consulted the more recent translation of C. D. C. Reeve.
2. The phrase "intentional fallacy" is, of course, W. K. Wimsatt's formulation; see, e.g., *The Verbal Icon*, the classic theoretical justification for New Critical methodology.
3. I would note, however, that (Riding) Jackson's post-poetic prose writings give in to fantasies of accomplishment just as much as the poetic writings of Whitman and Olson.
4. Whitman made many general references to Plato, and read at least some of the Bohn edition of Plato's works in the 1850s (see, e.g., NUPM 5:1881–83). An

indirect but earlier source of information on Plato was the Quaker minister Elias Hicks, whom Whitman considered his spiritual guide, and to whom he dedicated a profile in *November Boughs* (PW 1892 2:626–53). Hicks, as Whitman reports, placed Plato's works among the highest forms of thought in literature and philosophy. (Riding) Jackson was more secretive about her studies, but she was well read in philosophy and in the classics, as documented in Elizabeth Friedmann's authorized biography. While an undergraduate at Cornell, (Riding) Jackson studied with Lane Cooper, a classicist whose "remarkable erudition" she found "exhilarating" (Friedmann 20). She also shared readings and intellectual interests with Louis Gottschalk, a graduate teaching assistant in Ancient History whom she later married. More importantly, in *Rational Meaning*, she makes a distinction between her own ideas about language and truth and Plato's doctrine of Forms, demonstrating a direct and accurate knowledge of the Greek philosopher (see, e.g., RM 122, 490). Olson's graduate reading at Wesleyan and Harvard, documented with painstaking precision by Ralph Maud in *Charles Olson's Reading*, included Plato's dialogues. Olson, notoriously, attacked Plato as complicit in the pervasive state of alienation of modern thought. Although, as Maud points out, "Olson's library contained no Plato at the end," he had several books on Greek thought that he "heavily marked" (Maud 283 n. 22), most notably Eric A. Havelock's *Preface to Plato*. Olson first read and reviewed Havelock in 1963, and the book soon became for him a "standard text" of reference until his death in 1970 (Maud 167, 198, 205). The last chapter of *Preface to Plato*, "Origin of the Theory of Forms," makes specific reference to the *Cratylus*.

5. The exceptions occur in Chapters 10 and 11, which take up the link between "the genius of natural language" and "*the genius of national characters*" (Genette 188). I explore this link in my discussion of the "linguisticity" of Whitman's poetic project.
6. Gadamer discusses the import of "effective historicity" throughout the second part of *Truth and Method*. See in particular Section 2 of Part 2 (on "Elements of a Theory of Hermeneutic Experience"), 265–379.
7. Stein articulates her Cratylist poetics in *Lectures in America*. There, placing herself in a lineage that includes Whitman, she defines poetry as "a state of knowing and feeling a name" (328), then speaks of her discovery of poetry after writing *The Making of Americans*:

> And then, something happened and I began to discover the names of things, that is not discover the names but discover the things the things to see the things to look at and in so doing I had of course to name them not to give them new names but to see that I could find out how to know that they were there by their names. . . . I remember in writing An Acquaintance With Description looking at anything until something that was not the name of that thing but in a way that actual thing would come to be written. (329–30)

For Williams, as for (Riding) Jackson, "meanings have been dulled, then lost, then perverted by their connotations (which have grown over them) until their

effect on the mind is no longer what it was when they were fresh, but grows rotten" (*Selected Essays* 89–90). The solution is a poetry in which words are used in "their exact significances" (*Collected Poems* 2:54). His famous description of the poem as a machine made of words does not take away, then, from the fact that words themselves are natural phenomena. "Writing is made of words," he writes, "of nothing else. These have a contour and complexion imposed upon them by the weather, by the shapes of men's lives in places" (*Selected Essays* 132). Pound, in *ABC of Reading*, distinguishes between spoken and written language, but in terms that reprise the conflict between Hermogenism and Cratylism. According to Pound, spoken language operates by "more or less approximate agreement" (28), but written language, although it incorporates an element of transcription, "starts out by being a picture" (28) and so retains an element of "hard, cut-off meanings" (37), that is, of communication free from approximation and independent of agreement. His "ideogrammic method," inspired in equal measure by Ernest Fenollosa and Louis Aggasiz (that is, by the Chinese ideogram and taxonomic methodology), is an attempt to recapture for literature the capacity for communication only possible in a language in which each word "*means* the thing or the action or situation, or quality germane to the several things that it pictures" (21). The correlation of language theory and vision of society is most pronounced, of course, in Pound.

8. Olson (taken up in chapter 4) is the preeminent example among the New American Poets, but the magic thinking of Beat and San Francisco Renaissance writing often turns in a Cratylist direction as well. See, e.g., Allen Ginsberg's "Wichita Vortex Sutra," in which the poet (specifically invoking Pound's conception of picture writing) blames the Vietnam War on "language abused" (401). By Objectivism I mean above all Louis Zukofsky, whose Cratylism has often been discussed, but as a form of Jewish mysticism. The compressed noun-language of *80 Flowers*, which all but does away with conventional syntax, is perhaps the most perfectly realized model of Cratylist poetry in American literature. George Oppen too pays homage to the Cratylic when he notes, e.g., "A ferocious mumbling, in public / Of rootless speech" (173), or when he dreams, in one of his last poems, of "the word opening / and opening" with "the magic / infants speak" (276). Cratylist traces in Language writing are taken up in my "Coda."
9. In distinguishing different degrees of commitment to a Cratylic project I would first note different degrees of Cratylism and then different degrees of belief in or willingness to think through that Cratylism. In regard to the first point, I would make a distinction between the pure Cratylism of a perfect, natural language univocal in meaning and consubstantial with things (what Genette calls "primary Cratylism," as I shall explain later in this chapter) and the modified Cratylism of those forms of mimesis that imagine an imperfect language that nonetheless has a semblance of univocality and consubstantiality as its goal (Genette's "secondary Cratylism"). Two fainter forms of Cratylism related to the second category bear notice: Platonic conceptions of language in which words correspond to ideal forms rather than things; and organicist conceptions of language in which language is taken to be a system of meanings (an anti-Cratylic idea), but the

system as a whole is taken to be consubstantial with reality. If organicism abandons key elements of Cratylism, it nonetheless holds true to the underlying desire for univocality and consubstantiality (I discuss this desire in my Coda under the rubric of "neo-Cratylism"). In regard to the second point (the different degrees of belief in Cratylism or different degrees of intellectual commitment to Cratylism as a program), I would mark out a continuum stretching from, at one end, the profound belief and commitment of Whitman, (Riding) Jackson, and Olson, to, at the other end, the playful adoption of Cratylism as trope and/or momentary nostalgic reveries of wholly anti-Cratylic poets such as Emily Dickinson, Wallace Stevens, and A. R. Ammons. I attach importance to this taxonomy and see value in placing poets within it because, first, it establishes a literary-historical and intellectual context for the projects of the poets I discuss in this book, and, second, it helps to organize and so make intelligible aspects of poets' projects that would otherwise seem idiosyncratic or aberrational (this is especially true for certain intellectually capacious modernists such as Stein, Williams, and Pound).

10. As Kramer explains, after F. O. Matthiessen, every major critic of classic American literature, from Charles Fiedelson (*Symbolism and American Literature*, 1953) to Richard Poirier (*A World Elsewhere*, 1966), John Irwin (*American Hieroglyphics*, 1980), and Michael Davitt Bell (*The Development of American Romance*, 1981), "considered linguisticity . . . a defining feature of the American Renaissance"; though lacking a common term, each critic described it according to his own theoretical interests, i.e., as "symbolism, ambiguity, word-play, narrative unreliability—anything that would indicate a more than ordinary consciousness of how to do things with words" (14).
11. This included a selection of stories from the Bible and a translation into BASIC of a section of Joyce's *Ulysses*.
12. For an annotated bibliography of articles on (and against) BASIC, updated as of 1990, see W. Terrence Gordon's excellent bio-bibliographic study of Ogden. For a sustained critique of BASIC as a concerted episode of cultural imperialism, see Robert Phillipson, *Linguistic Imperialism*. More recently, Barrett Watten has critiqued BASIC as "a vehicle . . . for . . . social control and imperial politics" . . . aimed at "restrict[ing] language to an optical economy and transparency in order to simplify and clarify meanings" (*Constructivist Moment* 5–6).
13. Ogden's "domestic front," his hope to eliminate "the majority of idiomatic overgrowth" through BASIC, recalls Henry James's far more virulent denunciation of the proliferation of idiomatic forms of spoken English among new European immigrants in America advanced by James in *The Question of Our Speech*. For a discussion of James's linguistic nativism, see Quartermain 9–10.
14. On universal languages and the Renaissance see Paulo Rossi's *Logic and the Art of Memory*.
15. As in the 1950s science fiction movie *The Next Voice You Hear*, in which God speaks to humankind over the radio, each individual hearing the message in his

or her own language, the perfect language of Cratylism, at least in the modern era, is not necessarily unique. Though each "thing" in Cratylism has a correct name, that name need not be the same in each language; all that matters is that the names be univocal in reference. When this is the case, translation is no longer a matter of approximation, but of identity, a harmony of differences in which all meanings are exact and nothing is lost in the movement from one language to another. (Riding) Jackson was the most explicit on this point. As she writes in *Rational Meaning*: "The mode of common human knowledge varies from one site to another of human association formed around a sense of existence in a world: language varies—is, languages. Language is everywhere and in all times the general pattern of human knowledge, the way the human mind deals with experience as a whole. However much languages vary in internal composition, they conform in their constitutional character" (RM 207).

16. F. O. Matthiessen and John T. Irwin, most notably, overlap the Cratylic with the Adamic; curiously enough, Reeve does also in his introduction to his translation of the dialogue.
17. Pertinent here is Paul A. Bové's rejoinder to R. W. B. Lewis's reading of Whitman and the tradition of American literary scholarship that follows Lewis in its readings of subsequent poets. "Charles Olson's poetry and prose works insist upon a relationship to the past which denies the Adamic myth. His concern for 'origins,' like Whitman's, is not a desire to return to some timeless moment out of the world, in which the poet's ability to create poems independently of history and place is possible" (Bové 228).
18. The condensation of God and Adam into a single figure is evident, e.g., in Lewis's description of Whitman in *The American Adam*: "This new Adam is both maker and namer; his innocent pleasure, untouched by humility, is colored by the pride of one who looks on his work and finds it good. The things that are named seem to spring into being at the sound of the word. It was through the poetic act that Whitman articulated the dominant metaphysical illusion of his day and became the creator of his own world" (51).
19. Here it should be noted that mystical traditions in Judaism and Christianity, often influenced by Greek thought, reinterpret God's acts of creation and Adam's acts of naming by introducing Cratylic ideas. See, e.g., the Kabbalah as described by Umberto Eco in *The Search for the Perfect Language*.
20. Zemach's notion of "Substance Logic" is further developed in a number of other publications, but the definition and basic intention remains the same.
21. The literature on the *Cratylus* is small only in comparison to that which concerns Plato's other dialogues. My own reading was shaped in particular by J. L. Ackrill, *Essays on Plato and Aristotle*; Rachel Barney, *Names and Nature in Plato's* Cratylus; Timothy M. S. Baxter, *The Cratylus: Plato's Critique of Naming*; Gérard Genette, *Mimologics*; T. P. Kasulis, "Reference and Symbol in Plato's *Cratylus*"; C. D. C. Reeve, "Introduction"; David Sedley, *Plato's Cratylus*; Allan Silverman, "The End of the *Cratylus*: Limning the World"; and Bernard Williams, "Cratylus' Theory of Names and Its Refutation." On Plato and language more generally, I found especially helpful David Bostock,

"Plato on Understanding Language," and Susan B. Levin, *The Ancient Quarrel between Philosophy and Poetry Revisited*. Eric A. Havelock's *Preface to Plato*—an important text for Charles Olson—contextualizes the dialogue admirably. I also draw extensively on Stephen Halliwell's important work on the broader issue of Mimetism, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis*.

22. According to some scholars, Plato continued to revise the dialogue well into his late years. As Sedley remarks, "The *Cratylus* is a possibly unique hybrid, a product of more than one phase of Plato's thought. . . . Although it reads and feels like a middle-period dialogue, no single sentence or passage in it . . . can be guaranteed not to represent a late revision of the text" (16). For a different point of view, see Baxter 3.
23. The old view (shared by Genette) that Socrates's relentless exposition of Cratylus's beliefs amounts to a mild ridiculing has come under criticism from recent scholars, who suggest that Socrates is in fact fascinated by those beliefs, although well aware of their shortcomings and philosophical limitations. It is not by chance, these scholars suggest, that Hermogenes comes to value mimesis over the course of that exposition. There is no question, however, that Socrates has a little fun with Cratylus along the way.
24. In Stephen Halliwell's account, never before the *Cratylus* had Plato attempted to write a dialogue that "broache[d] overarching philosophical questions about the relationship between human understanding (language and thought) and reality (*ta onta*: everything that is the case . . . independently of human thought)" (44). On this point, see also Barney, Reeve, and Sedley.
25. On Plato's intimation of his theory of Forms, see Sedley 6 (and n. 10 for reference to a counterview).
26. Sedley calls Cratylus "maddeningly secretive" (23). Barney contends that "Socrates's exposition of the Cratylian" doctrine is so careful and comprehensive that "Cratylus finds he has nothing to add to it" (56). Barney adds that Socrates's "rational reconstruction" of Cratylus's doctrine "is an emblem of Plato's own practice as a writer of dialogues," a practice based on "the sympathetic presentation of views which, though incorrect or incomplete, are in some way important or helpful" (56).
27. According to Bernard Williams, the *Cratylus*, a "brilliant, tough-minded and still underestimated dialogue[,] does not only show that the idea of language's having mimetic powers could not explain what language is; it leaves the belief in such powers looking like what it is, a belief in magic" (36). On the magic or prephilosophical components of Cratylism, see also T. P. Kasulis, "Reference and Symbol in Plato's *Cratylus*."
28. See Sedley 16, citing Aristotle's *Metaphysics* A 6, 987a32–b7. Thus it can be said that Hermogenes (i.e., Protagoras) and Cratylus (i.e., Heraclitus) were in conversation long before Socrates appeared on Plato's horizon. The dialogue, Sedley argues, represents Plato's "graduation from the Cratylan . . . perspective" (23). Baxter has a detailed comparison of the historical Cratylus and his fictional counterpart in the dialogue; see 26–29.

29. See, e.g., *Cratylus* 366, etc.
30. See Genette13–15 and Baxter 56–65 for a discussion of Socrates's etymological procedures.
31. See, e.g., *Cratylus* 425a–b. On the expertise of the dialectician, see Sedley 43–46.
32. See, e.g., *Cratylus* 438–440.
33. "Mimology" and its cognates ("mimologism," "mimologic," etc.) are Genette's terms for mimesis in language.
34. Discussion of Hermogenes's name occurs at *Cratylus* 384c-d, 408b, and 429b-e.
35. See, e.g., *Cratylus* 437a–e.
36. As I show in chapter three, (Riding) Jackson's view of human beings as destined to be "articulate residents of reality" (RM 110) is inspired in part by Spinoza, who, she writes, "[tells] of a universe of being in which its inhabiting speaking minds have not yet or yet or yet achieved an intelligible consciousness or occupation of it" (LRJR 309).
37. (Riding) Jackson counted Shelley as an important early influence, but in matters of language her adjudications were not conceived of as the privilege of a special kind of knowledge but as rational distinctions accessible to all.
38. The American Cratylus as *nomothete* resembles Socrates's depiction of the dialectician, the user of language who is able to distinguish proper from improper, not in absolute terms, but in a compromise with the empirical fact of how language is used in everyday life. The legislator is instead an absolutist. It should be noted, however, that Whitman—and (Riding) Jackson while she was still writing poetry—instrumentally occupied the role of dialectician while claiming for themselves the capacity of legislator.
39. (Riding) Jackson began work on the book that became *Rational Meaning* in Majorca in the 1930s before she had even met Jackson, and she continued work on the manuscript even after his death in 1968 (the published version begins with a foreword and three prefaces composed after that date). The book, credited to both, was certainly a collaborative effort, and I mean no minimizing of Schuyler B. Jackson's contribution when I refer to it in my chapter on (Riding) Jackson as her work. Citing both names in each instance would be cumbersome, and my reading of the book emphasizes its culminating place in her career. As a rule, in referring to works (Riding) Jackson wrote in collaboration, I mention her collaborator only when the work is first cited. For (Riding) Jackson's own account of the composition of *Rational Meaning*, see RM 14–16.
40. Bernstein cites Deborah Baker, who argues for a direct birth of *Rational Meaning* out of the dictionary work of the mid-1930s, but (Riding) Jackson scholars have not reached consensus on the precise relationship between the two projects. Elizabeth Friedmann, most notably, traces a more arduous path.
41. The relationship between Olson's work on Mayan language and his poetics overall is developed by Nathaniel Mackey in *Discrepant Engagement*. For other discussions see n. 4 in chapter 4.

42. The entire essay, entitled "Projective Verse II," remains unpublished. I quote this passage from the notes to "Projective Verse" in *Collected Prose*.
43. Blood's alphabet also includes a Rabelaisian fable involving "the absurd genius of u flat":

> *U*, guttural, or flat, is a humorous savage, best described in his own words: a huge, lubberly, blundering dunderhead, a blubbering numskull and a dunce, ugly, sullen, dull, clumsy, rugged, gullible, glum, dumpish, lugubrious—a stumbler, mumbler, bungler, grumbler, jumbler—a grunter, thumper, tumbler, stunner—a drudge, a trudge; he lugs, tugs, sucks, juggles, and is up to all manner of bulls—a musty, fussy, crusty, disgusting brute, whose head is his mug, his nose is a snub, or a pug, his ears are lugs, his breasts dugs, his bowels guts, his victuals grub, his garments duds, his hat a plug, his child a cub…; he is…a "tough cuss" all around; he has some humor, more crudity, but no delicacy; of all nationalities you would take him for a Dutchman. (Rasula and McCaffrey 414–15)

2 Substantial Words: Walt Whitman and the Power of Names

1. *An American Primer* is Horace Traubel's edited version of Whitman's "Primer on Words" (DBN 3:728–57). The quoted lines come from Traubel's foreword; to the best of my knowledge they do not appear in the recorded conversations of *With Walt Whitman in Camden*.
2. Among the early works of Whitman criticism that prepared the way for my reading of Whitman as Cratylist, the most important for my work have been Leon Howard's early essay "Walt Whitman and the American Language" and the Whitman section of F. O. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance*. Crucial also have been a number of significant monographs from the last two decades that focus on language, beginning with James Perrin Warren, *Walt Whitman's Language Experiment*, and continuing with Mark Bauerlein, *Whitman and the American Idiom*, Tenney Nathanson, *Whitman's Presence*, Ed Folsom, *Walt Whitman's Native Representations*, Erik Ingvar Thurin, *Whitman between Expressionism and Impressionism*, and Andrew Lawson, *Whitman and the Class Struggle*. Warren and Nathanson elaborate Whitman's project in fine detail, the former discovering coherence, the latter tracing out ambivalences. Bauerlein, focusing on the problem (as it was for Whitman) of language as mediation identifies the desire for inherent meaning that I treat here as Cratylism. Thurin situates Whitman's "nominal writing" (89) in relation to the European avant-garde. Folsom's examination of dictionaries and Lawson's look at language as the site of class struggle are exemplary instances of historical analysis. My understanding of Whitman's historical situation also draws on Philip F. Gura, *The Wisdom of Words*, David Simpson, *The Politics of American English*, Kenneth Cmiel, "A Broad Fluid Language of Democracy," Michael P. Kramer, *Imagining*

Language in America, and Jill Lapore, *A Is for American*. Most of those language studies (Kramer in particular) touch on Whitman. Apart from the works mentioned above I have also benefited from R W. B. Lewis, *The American Adam*, Rohn S. Friedman, "A Whitman Primer" (1975), Carrol C. Hollis, *Language and Style in Leaves of Grass*, Kerry C. Larson, *Whitman's Drama of Consensus*, Betsy Erkkila, *Whitman: The Political Poet*, Jay Grossman, *Reconstituting the American Renaissance*, Heidi Kathleen Kim, "From Language to Empire," and George B. Handley, *New World Poetics*. For reasons of space I exclude mention of the wealth of Whitman scholarship touching on issues other than language; some of those works are cited elsewhere in the text.

3. A good instance of Whitman's nonchalance regarding scholarly niceties is his comment on the word "Yonnondio" in conversation with Traubel: " 'You notice that name? They printed it in The Critic first, and The Critic fellows objected to it that my use of the word was not correct, not justified. . . . I make it mean lament and so forth: they say, no, that it is not: Yonnondio signifies governors—was an Indian name given to the French governors sent over to this continent in colonial times. No doubt there's considerable to warrant their argument, but'—putting his forefinger down on the poem and looking at me waggishly—'I had already committed myself to my own meaning—written the poem: so here it stands, for right or wrong' " (WWWC 2:269).
4. On Locke's influence on American cultural life, see, most recently, Brown.
5. John B. Wilson points out (at 237) that Peabody makes explicit reference to the *Cratylus* in her 1849 essay "Language."
6. On Whitman's appropriation of Hegelian philosophy after the Civil War, see in particular Lindberg, "Whitman's 'Convertible Terms.' "
7. Whitman's own favored borrowings came from France, a nation with its own revolutionary culture; see on this point Roger Asselineau's entry on "Foreign Language Borrowings" in *Walt Whitman: An Encyclopedia* (LeMaster and Kummings 226–29).
8. See Stewart 311. Nor was Whitman capricious in his comment on Idaho. That name lost out to Colorado late in the process, then gained second life in a new territory (see, e.g., Stewart 303, 305). Whitman devotes two full pages to the names of states in DBN 3:705–6.
9. "America's Mightiest Inheritance" originally appeared in *Life Illustrated*, 12 April 1856. There are also references to Anglo-Saxon as the foundation of American English in William Swinton's *Rambles among Words* (1864), a pamphlet that many scholars now accept as written in collaboration with Whitman (see, e.g., Hollis, "Whitman and William Swinton"; and Warren, "Whitman as Ghostwriter"), and in Whitman's notebooks; see NUPM 5:1654 and DBN 3:816 (as well as the clippings at DBN 3:667–68 and 3:679). In "From Language to Empire," Kim points out that Whitman's Anglo-Saxonism is particular to the antebellum period, but points to a text from 1883, "The Spanish Element in Our Nationality" (PW 2:552–54), to indicate how Whitman's altered "language politics" remains linked to race (Kim 11).

10. Humboldt's sentence appears as an epigraph to one of the sections of *Rambles among Words*.
11. See, in addition to Kim, "From Language to Empire," the discussions by Kramer in *Imagining Language in America* (96–106), and Lawson in *Walt Whitman and the Class Struggle* (72–76 and 131–32 nn. 69–70).
12. Is diversity in fact natural? This is the problem posed in Plato's dialogue, where Socrates sees a contradiction between Cratylus's belief in a language of nature and his adherence to the Heraclitean doctrine *all is flux*. Organicist language theory—which, as I noted in my introduction, supports what Genette calls secondary Cratylism—attempts to reconcile the two by defining nature as a principle first and set of objects second.
13. Allen Grossman elaborates on this point in conversation with Mark Halliday; see *Sighted Singer* 54.
14. Emerson addresses the correlation of matter and spirit as a philosophical problem in "Nominalist and Realist," although there framed as the relationship between the particular and general. See *Essays: Second Series* 133–45.
15. Emerson's formulation in *Nature* is not contradicted, only rephrased with a different sense of the status of human intellect, when he writes in *Essays: Second Series*, "Man is fallen; nature is erect, and serves as a differential thermometer, detecting the presence or absence of the divine sentiment in man" (104).
16. Emerson makes the point again, without sarcasm, in his later essay "Poetry and Imagination":

    > When people tell me they do not relish poetry, and bring me Shelley, or Aikin's Poets, or I know not what volumes of rhymed English verse, to show that it has no charm, I am quite of their mind. But this dislike of the books only proves their liking of poetry. . . . They like to . . . name the stars; they like to talk and hear of Jove, Apollo, Minerva, Venus and the Nine. See how tenacious we are of the old names. They like poetry without knowing it as such. (*Letters and Social Aims* 25)

17. Linking this poem to a broader account of Whitman's treatment of voiced words, Tenney Nathanson reports, "Whitman asserts that sound reveals the essential natures of the things from which it emanates" (224); he also points out that "the poem appears [in the 1856 *Leaves of Grass*] under the awkward but revelatory title 'Poem of the Sayers of The Words of The Earth' " (271 n. 21).
18. For a catalogue of Whitman's writings on language, including references to language in *Leaves of Grass*, see Southard, "Whitman and Language." The pieces I mention can be found as follows: "America's Mightiest Inheritance" (NYD 51–65, 209–13), "Slang in America" (PW 2:572–77), *Rambles among Words* (excerpts in NUPM 5:1624–62), "The Primer of Words" (DBN 3:728–57), "Words" (DBN 3:664–727), "Other Notebooks, &c. on Words" (DBN 3:759–825), prose fragments on "Language" and "Words" (NUPM 5:1616–18, 5:1622–23, 5:1663–1709), prose fragments on "Oratory" (NUPM 6:2222–44).
19. Warren argues that Whitman also owed "an unstated intellectual debt to Richard Chevenix Trench, *English Past and Present*" (46 n. 6); Hollis outlines

the texts and notions that Whitman might have picked up from his friend William Swinton; Cmiel gives an account of the books on language published in America during the 1850s, the period of Whitman's greatest attention to the topic. The clippings in Whitman's notebooks also point to other readings (e.g., there are two extended passages from John Pickering, Noah Webster's antagonist). On Whitman and dictionaries, see Foster 12–26, 179.

20. Aarsleff ties von Humboldt to Locke, but by way of Herder and Condillac; see, e.g., 335–55.
21. Kramer quotes Webster from a text Whitman knew, the introduction to the 1847 dictionary: "numerous local causes, such as a new country, new associations of people, new combinations of ideas in arts and sciences, and some intercourse with tribes wholly unknown in Europe, will introduce new words into the American tongue" (cited in Kramer 55). Notes Simpson, in the midst of a fine chapter on Webster, "Although Webster is thought to have himself coined only one word, the verb *to demoralize*, and although he argues *against* many grammatical and syntactic innovations that have since become part of American English . . . , there is yet no doubt that Webster is in favor of words existing in America that did not exist in Britain" (80, citation elided). Simpson also says of Jefferson that he favored " 'neology' (itself a new word) because the diversity and novelty of American geography and culture must 'call for new words, new phrases, and the transfer of old words to new objects' " (32). Whitman's own fondness for neologisms is evident in his repeated expression to Horace Traubel of a desire to see his own coinage "Presidentiad" included in the Century Dictionary, then appearing in installments. "W. said: 'I have almost been disposed to write to . . . one of the fellows myself, cautioning them not to omit my word 'Presidentiad.' Oh! That is eminently a word to be cherished—adopted. Its allusion, the four years of the Presidency: its origin that of the Olympiad—but as I flatter myself, bravely appropriate, where not another one word, signifying the same thing, exists!' " (WWWC 5:194).
22. See, e.g., DBN 3:717.
23. Thus, with specific regard to translation, Whitman once made a note to himself to leave "a passage in some poem to the effect of denouncing and threatening whoever translates my poems into any other tongue without translating every line and doing it all without increase or diminution" (NUPM 1:326).
24. The words and phrases in this last sentence come from "A Song of the Rolling Earth" (LG 219–20), "Starting from Paumanok" (LG 18), "Song of the Redwood-Tree" (LG 206, 210), and "Thou Mother with Thy Equal Brood" (LG 458).

3 The Linguistic Ultimate: Laura (Riding) Jackson and the Language of Truth

1. Although (Riding) Jackson scholarship is not extensive, she has been the beneficiary of two fine biographies (by Deborah Baker and Elizabeth Friedmann), and two excellent monographs (by Joyce Piell Wexler and Barbara Adams) that

provide judicious surveys of the entire career despite lack of access to *Rational Meaning*, which had not yet been published. Subsequent scholars have not filled this gap. Apart from Charles Bernstein's introduction to the book, the one significant account of *Rational Meaning* is given by Jennifer Ashton, who is largely concerned with the generative misrecognition of (Riding) Jackson by postmodern poets and critics seeking to produce a counternarrative of modernism. There are no general accounts of (Riding) Jackson and language equivalent to the historically sensitive, linguistically sophisticated studies of Whitman and language that I was able to rely on in the previous chapter, but I have found much to assist me in essays and chapters from the past two decades or so that treat the relationship between language and poetry. See, in particular, Michael A. Masopust, "Laura Riding's Quarrel with Poetry"; Jerome McGann, *Black Riders* and "The Grand Heretics"; Daniela Ciani, "Laura Riding's Truthfulness"; Lisa Samuels, "Creating Criticism"; and John Nolan, "Editor's Introduction: Poetry, Language, Truth-Speaking." Almost all of the remaining scholarship focuses on issues of gender (see, e.g., Susan Schultz, "Laura Riding's Essentialism"; Jo-Ann Wallace, "Laura Riding and the Politics of Decanonization"; Jeanne Heuving, "Laura (Riding) Jackson's 'Really New' Poem"; and Seija Paddon, "The Diversity of Performance/Performance as Diversity") and/or modernist aesthetics (Steven Meyer, "An Ill-Matched Correspondence"; Barrett Watten, *The Constructivist Moment*; and Ella Zohar Ophir, 'The Laura Riding Question" and "Toward a Pitiless Fiction").

2. Throughout this chapter I will cite (Riding) Jackson alone as author when quoting from *Rational Meaning*. No slighting of Schuyler B. Jackson's contribution is meant by this: my focus here is (Riding) Jackson's work as a whole, and citing both authors in every instance would be burdensome and confusing. A reading of *Rational Meaning* in the context of Schuyler B. Jackson's work as a whole and an assessment of his influence on the book and (Riding) Jackson herself remains needed.
3. The significant dates and facts are as follows: In 1938, Riding published her *Collected Poems* and *The World and Ourselves*. The latter (where Riding first set down what was in effect a Cratylist position, emphasizing the need for correct practice instead of wholesale improvement of language itself) was fourth and last volume of *Epilogue*, a journal founded in 1935 with Robert Graves, although Graves did not take part in the editorial work for the last volume. In 1939, Riding published two books in which she named herself "Laura Riding" for the last time: *Lives of Wives* and *The Left Heresy in Literature and Life* (this last coauthored with Harry Kemp). In 1941, she married Schuyler B. Jackson, and took her husband's name. In 1942, she composed a text for the *Biographic Dictionary of Modern Literature* (where she was still named "Laura Riding") in which she wrote, "Together my husband and I are at work on A Working English Dictionary and Thesaurus. Our object is to give each of the 30,000-odd words dealt with a distinct definition or set of definitions, and also to arrange words according to their meanings in small homogeneous groups" (Bio1 1173). She also published an article in *The Wilson Library Bulletin* credited to "Schuyler and Laura Jackson" (see Alan J. Clark 164). In 1955, after a long public silence, (Riding) Jackson composed an entry for

the first supplement to the *Biographic Dictionary* of 1942. She is there cited as "Laura (Riding) Jackson," although the editors note that "she asked to be styled Laura Jackson" (Bio2 482). The parenthetical "Riding" is given by way of cross-reference to the earlier volume. In her long entry, she dated her renunciation of poetry to 1942 and described, without naming it as such, the project of *Rational Meaning*. In 1963, she first adopted the name of "Laura (Riding) Jackson" for publication in Italy in *Civiltá delle macchine* (see Friedmann 402). Piecing together exactly what happened over this period is extremely difficult, especially for the years between the two biographical dictionary entries, since, as Friedmann points out in her biography, (Riding) Jackson continued to write poems and seek their publication after 1942. Friedmann gives 1948 as the turning point in (Riding) Jackson's attitude toward poetry, citing a 1948 letter in which poetic language is clearly found to be incompatible with truth-telling, and she dates the beginning of *Rational Meaning* to 1950. Deborah Baker sees a smoother continuity between (Riding) Jackson's earlier work on the dictionary project and *Rational Meaning*. For my point of view, what matters is not the exact starting point of *Rational Meaning* but the increasing intensity of (Riding) Jackson's focus on language.

4. The list of poets who have written on (Riding) Jackson is extensive and includes John Ashbery, Charles Bernstein, Benjamin Friedlander, Jeanne Heuving, Jed Rasula, Lisa Samuels, Susan Schultz, Chris Stroffolino, and Barrett Watten.
5. Let me emphasize here that (Riding) Jackson never uses the word Cratylism to characterize her philosophical outlook, speaking only of "the *natural* in language" (PLR xxxiii).
6. (Riding) Jackson writes about Empson's use of her work in "Correspondence: On Ambiguity," an article in letter form published in *Modern Language Quarterly*. For a fine discussion of *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* and (Riding) Jackson's relationship to and strong differences with the New Criticism, see Jennifer Ashton, *From Modernism to Postmodernism*.
7. Quoted in Friedmann at 198.
8. Quoted in Friedmann at 200.
9. The 1942 and 1943 changes of the book title were an answer to the publication of Webster's new *Dictionary of Synonyms*, a publication the Jacksons perceived as in direct competition with their own book project. In her letter to her American publisher, (Riding) Jackson explained that the objective of their now retitled work was to prove "a sense of linguistic discovery" lacking in the *Dictionary of Synonyms*, which was, in her views, a "museum and a mausoleum" of language (quoted in Friedmann at 368–69).
10. The essays on language published in *Chelsea* 35 (1976), a special issue exclusively dedicated to (Riding) Jackson's work, include: "Habits of Linguistic Curtailment," "Toward the Creation of a Consciousness of the Linguistic Ineptitude of Certain Uses of 'Create,'" and "The Matter of Metaphor." This last also appears in the appendix of *Rational Meaning*. Essays on language featured in *The Failure of Poetry, The Promise of Language* include: "The Failure of Poetry," "Then, And Now," and "The Otherwise of Words." The first two of these essays use poetry as a foil for (Riding) Jackson's argument on the perfect

state of natural language and the misleading craft of poetry. The book also takes up topics other than language.

11. These essays appear in *Under the Mind's Watch*, in a robust opening section on "Language" which also includes: "Freedom of Tongue," "Terms and Error," "A Linguistic Note on the Philosophical Labors of Susan K. Langer," "The Nature of 'Prose,'" "The Nature of Sanity," "Another Language Expert (George Steiner)," "The Same Language?," "Anti-Language Sentiment in Contemporary Literary Attitudes," and the manifesto "Under the Mind's Watch." Pertinent essays on language appear in the other two sections of the book (respectively titled "Literature" and "Life"): "The New Immorality," "Language in the Mind" (from "Literature"); "Bertrand Russell, And Others: The Idea of the Master-Mind," and "Signs" (from "Life").
12. "American sociality," writes (Riding) Jackson in "The Word 'Human,'" "is the only one that has no spiritual culture to offer: it has not yet arrived at one. All the other human socialities have made their spiritual definition, and these have variously failed. . . . America could be capable of a spirituality . . . that could be translatable into a world polity" (UMW 385–86).
13. Thus she writes, at the end of an essay on Gertrude Stein, "And so it is that the charge that falls upon Americans, . . . the charge of defining the human being, has not yet had any fulfillment in them but a diminutive truncated version of it" (UMW 208).
14. Jerome McGann pays tribute to the painstaking nature of (Riding) Jackson's development when he declares, "Her writing executes a standard of self-examination so deep and resolute that it cannot be decently evaded" (*Black Riders* 134).
15. Truth was a term (Riding) Jackson used to indicate the complete apprehension of natural or psychological phenomena throughout her life, and since her earliest days. For discussions of the meaning of truth in (Riding) Jackson, see Wexler, Adams, Masopust, McGann (*Black Riders*), Ciani, and Ophir ("The Laura Riding Question").
16. Because (Riding) Jackson's interest in language as language begins in the 1930s and does not fully develop until after the turn I identify in her conception of language—most likely, her increased focus on language produced this turn—the most precise accounts of her early conception of everyday language are retrospective. Prior to the turn, the clearest articulation of this all-important distinction between everyday and poetic language is given in the poetry, especially in "Hospitality to Words," "Come, Words, Away," "The World and I," and "The Talking World." I look at these poems in the next section of this chapter. In her prose, (Riding) Jackson—then "Laura Riding"—focused on the difference made by poetic language but did not specify what it is different *from* (meaning, here, its linguistic, not its generic, difference). There are exceptions, of course, places where (Riding) Jackson articulates the opposition between what she will retrospectively describe as "the language I heard spoken everywhere—sordidly chaotic to my ears" and the "intonations of truth" that poetry ("the redemption of human life from its deadly disorder by truth")

anticipated for her (Bio2 482). The most significant of these early accounts of her foundational language belief in the first phase is worked out in *Though Gently* (1930), but with an intricacy and idiosyncrasy that does not lend itself to brief excerpts without painstaking framing. See, on this important text, the critical "Responses to *Though Gently*" edited by Jeff Hamilton with a reprint of the original book in the literary journal *Delmar*. (Riding) Jackson makes briefer references to the problem of everyday language in *Anarchism Is Not Enough*. In any event, I take (Riding) Jackson's retrospective comments on her language beliefs as accurate, a clarification that makes explicit what is generally implicit and often obscured in her writings of the 1920s and 1930s.

17. See chapter 2, the section on "Cratylization," 69–71.
18. Spinoza's *Ethic* and Shelley's visionary politics may also explain the social urgency that informed her Idealism and later Cratylism. On the presence of Shelley in (Riding) Jackson's early poetry, see Friedmann. This influence is active through (Riding) Jackson's life, from her earliest poems (gathered in *First Awakenings*) to *Epilogue* and *The Left Heresy*. There is no way of ascertaining when (Riding) Jackson first read Spinoza, but it must have been relatively early, for according to Friedmann, throughout her undergraduate years in Cornell (1919–21) (Riding) Jackson shared her "respect" for Spinoza with one of her closest friends (Friedmann 23). (Riding) Jackson discusses Spinoza at length and always favorably in *The Telling* (see, e.g., 162–65), and in her essays of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s: "Poetry and the Good," (LRJR 208–19), "The Word 'Human,' The Living of Human Life" (UMW 355–91), "Thoughts on Thought (UMW 404–17), and the already-cited "Body & Mind and the Linguistic Ultimate" (LRJR 290–331). In "Poetry and the Good," (Riding) Jackson presents Spinoza as the only philosopher who successfully solved the impasse Plato had brought to poetic and philosophical thinking, thus giving a hint of what caused her decisive turn away from Platonic imprint of her earlier years.
19. "A Prophecy or a Plea" was originally published under the name "Laura (Riding) Gottschalk."
20. See, e.g., FA 278.
21. On (Riding) Jackson's debt to Emerson, see Adams 100 and Schultz, "Laura Riding's Essentialism" 12–13.
22. (Riding) Jackson did not suddenly arrive at this Cratylic formulation of the role of natural language in the reshaping of society. Inklings of her belief in the natural state of being as the only corrective to contemporary societal ills can be found in *Four Unposted Letters for Catherine* (1930), an educative fictional epistolary addressed to Robert Graves's daughter Catherine. In this work "Laura Riding" defends the "straight" moral force of nature against the immoral and artificial ways of society. Nature, she argues, holds the answer to the confusing "muddle" of society, history, and politics; the only possible course of moral conduct must therefore be modeled after what is most natural and "straight" in human life, the cultivation of one's mind. The mind, as she would later elaborate in *The World and Ourselves, The Telling*, and *Rational*

Meaning, naturally knows the way of living correctly and truthfully. The divisive argument between nature and history (and, by extension, politics, religion, and philosophy) reappears in her collection of short stories *Progress of Stories* (1935), whereby "Laura Riding" ridicules the irrational ways of the "historical beings" in the name of the proper natural of story-telling. For a discussion of Riding's antihistorical position in *Four Unposted Letters for Catherine* and *Progress of Stories*, see Billitteri, "Stories, Not History." The opposition between the natural and the artificial developed in *Four Unposted Letters* is at the center of a short preface in verse she contributed to James Reeves's collection of poems *The Natural Need* (1935). With a complex sense of humor, (Riding) Jackson praises the "wisdom-time of nature, / flesh in feeling ripened word-frank" although her preface is written in highly artificial language and consists of an elaborate chain of allegorical images (7). This preface should be taken up in future readings as an example of Laura Riding's ambivalence toward the aesthetic and/or intellectual pleasures of plain language vis-à-vis poetry, an ambivalence foregrounded in her long poem "The Life of the Dead," a darkly humorous sequence of allegorical tales written to celebrate the unnaturality of poetic language. Riding wrote the poem in French, and then translated it into English, so as to augment its linguistic strangeness; in her envoi, she provokingly calls this work "a highly artificial poem" (PLR 417). For discussions of this poem, see McGann, *Black Riders*; and Samuels, "Creating Criticism."

23. The entrenchment of (Riding) Jackson's position in this book reflects her deeply embattled response to the difficult historical and political situation of the late 1930s. For a discussion of the tight interlacement of poetics and politics in (Riding) Jackson's work, see Billitteri, "A Form of Tidiness."
24. As Christopher Norris accurately notes in his harsh critique of *The Telling*, truth for (Riding) Jackson is "the object discoverable by an archeology of language requiring . . . that 'games' of special kinds be constantly criticized" so that "the deepest ground of truth-in-language . . . [can be] discovered" (137).
25. In his analysis of the rhetoric of *The Telling*, James Oldham argues that this text is a prime example of epideictic rhetoric, a mode of address that emphasizes "the moment in which the speaker and audience find themselves joined, a moment for taking stock and celebrating the communal values present in the occasion" (254). The goal of epideictic discourse, much like the goal of *The Telling*, is that of guiding the audience toward the recognition of "our common origin, common being, and common destiny" as the "foundation for all of our discourse" (254).
26. The finest account of (Riding) Jackson's transition from elitism to universalism is Ella Zohar Ophir's in two recent essays, one on the poetry, the other on the fiction. Where most critics, notwithstanding their recognition of a break, treat (Riding) Jackson's career as a coherent whole, emphasizing continuities, Ophir points out significant discontinuities. In her essay on the poetry, she speaks of the early "apocalypticism" as "at its worst . . . self-righteous and intolerant," referring to "Riding's break with poetry" as "a deeply egalitarian gesture" and "move toward inclusiveness" ("The Laura Riding Question" 111–12). In her

essay on the fiction, Ophir characterizes the early social vision as belonging "to the long line of utopian visions that are content to pay their way with human lives," in strong contrast to the stance adopted in *The Telling*, where (Riding) Jackson "subordinates creative and intellectual distinction, and individuality itself, to a greater whole unified being" ("Toward a Pitiless Fiction" 109, 112).

27. In *Rational Meaning*, (Riding) Jackson's Spinoza-inspired reconciliation of Idealism and Cratylism is made plain when she writes, "There is, surely, a shape that consciousness takes to which these words correspond, one that forms part of a number of constant shapes that have gentle presence in the mind. Such an elementary observation may be thought of as part of the permanent substance of intelligence. It can be properly termed a 'notion,' in the sense of 'innate idea' " (RM 223–24). I take the phrase "substance monism" from Laura Byrne, who writes that it "explains the consonance of logic and the fabric of reality. Mind mirrors the physical world. . . . The unity and order of the world can be captured in a unified and ordered system of propositions that have been deduced from first principles because the world it represents is the necessary consequence of God's self-caused nature" (452).
28. "In the early phase of my thinking," (Riding) Jackson writes in her "Afternotes" to "Body & Mind and the Linguistic Ultimate," "I distinguished between 'the human,' as a historically conditioned, still inconclusive quantity, and a 'something else,' which I termed, for a time, 'the non-human.' " After clarifying her use of "human," she writes, "As to 'the non-human,' or the 'something else': this terming had no connotation, for me, of divinity (or animality). It bespoke consciousness of a quality inhering in being-entire" (LRJR 326–27). John Nolan in a strong reading of *Though Gently* cites a reference to the "non-human part of language" from *Epilogue*, usefully commenting, " 'Non-human' needs to be understood in the light of her account in *The Telling* of the change that came about in her understanding of the word 'human': in the later work, but not in the earlier, it is a word of unqualified good import" ("The Place of *Though Gently*" 121, 123, citation omitted).
29. By and large, the view of poetry as a stage in the achievement of truth is presented in the poems themselves while (Riding) Jackson's prose pronouncements about poetry present the poems as the final stage. In support of the former view, however, are key passages in *Anarchism Is Not Enough*. I find it significant that in each genre truth is identified as achievable elsewhere: in the prose it is ascribed to poetry; in the poetry to an "utter telling" beyond poetry (PLR 139). With regard to the argument I am making in this section of my chapter, I would emphasize that (Riding) Jackson in her first phase accommodates a version of the failure she claims in her second phase to have only discovered later.
30. For much of the poem (Riding) Jackson speaks of two signs but at the end she asserts, "The first sign and the second sign are the one sign" (PLR 233).
31. Coming at the poems from a different critical vantage point, Susan Schultz identifies this same emptying, noting: "Riding's triumph is also her shortcoming: her attempt to rid poetry of images is so radical that it threatens to destroy her poems by ridding them of a subject" (14).

32. See e.g., "Sea, False Philosophy" (PLR 105), "By Crude Rotation" (PLR 106–107), "Further Details" (PLR 161–62), and "Intelligent Prayer" (PLR 185).
33. This fragment first appeared by itself in *Though Gently*.

4 A State Destroys a Noun: Charles Olson and Objectism

1. It should be noted that the R. G. Collingwood citation also appears in Havelock's *Preface to Plato* 193 n. 28.
2. Olson cites this definition of meaning in his lectures *Causal Mythology* and *Poetry and Truth* (see, e.g., Muth 1:64 and 2:51). Charles Altieri's discussion of those passages in two early essays is central to his influential distinction between symbolism and immanence in American poetry, fully developed in *Enlarging the Temple*.
3. As Olson writes in "Human Universe," "All that comparison ever does is . . . take one thing and try to understand it by marking its similarities to or differences from another thing. Right here is the trouble. . . . There must be . . . a way which is not divisive as all the tag ends and upendings of the Greek way" (CPr 157–58).
4. My reading of Olson builds on a brief but rich tradition of scholarly effort, much of which disappears into subsequent scholarship because it is focused so scrupulously on making available Olson's own writings and the range of sources from which his writing developed. George F. Butterick's carefully annotated editions of Olson's poetry, prose, recorded lectures, interviews, and correspondence, supplemented by his guide to the *Maximus* poems and his ten volumes of *Olson: The Journal of the Charles Olson Archives*, are the basis for all subsequent readings. Those Traubel-like labors have since been taken up by Ralph Maud, whose many projects include the invaluable study *Charles Olson's Reading*. Among Olson's other editors and annotators, let me cite in particular the work of Donald M. Allen and Benjamin Friedlander in their edition of Olson's *Collected Prose*. My own introduction to this poet's work came from an early essay by the Italian scholar Luciano Anceschi (I have not been able to track this essay down to cite here, but it left a deep impression). My subsequent readings were shaped by four formative monographs that are still the most important studies of Olson's poetics: Robert von Hallberg, *Charles Olson: The Scholar's Art*; Don Byrd, *Charles Olson's Maximus*; Thomas F. Merrill, *Charles Olson: A Primer*; and Stephen Fredman, *Charles Olson and the Grounding of American Poetry*. Although I differ from von Hallberg in my valuation of the late work, his historically acute analysis of the poet's development remains essential reading for any political account of Olson's thought; Byrd's presentation of the work's theoretical design (which, unlike von Hallberg, he sees as continuous and whole) remains unsurpassed for Byrd's ability to elaborate on Olson's most elusive lines of thought and most eclectic conceptual sources; Merrill's careful elucidation of Olson's moral concerns and of the poet's rethinking of classical thought points in directions that still await development; Fredman's situation of Olson in a

literary lineage that looks well beyond the Pound-Williams tradition so as to probe the scope and definition of the American-ness of Olson's project has been a model for my thinking. I have also benefited from numerous shorter studies. In addition to those cited elsewhere in this chapter (see in particular the critiques of Olson's gender politics listed in note 11 below), let me mention Burton Hatlen, "Kinesis and Meaning," which clarifies the implications of Olson's poetics for reading; and Anne Dewey, *Beyond* Maximus, which persuasively shows how Olson appropriates scientific terms as tropes for his social vision. On Olson and scientific language, see also Brian Carpenter's unpublished M.A. thesis, which contextualizes Olson's interest in what I will subsequently call "stone-writing." The conjunction of language theory (as distinct from poetics or style) and social vision so central to my book has not had the same airing in Olson scholarship that it has had in regard to Whitman or (Riding) Jackson. Indeed, with the sole exception of a handful of studies of Olson's work on the Mayan hieroglyphs and his interest in the Pound-Fenollosa notion of the ideogram, Olson's speculative, often technical writings on the subject of language and his extensive readings in linguistics and philology have not received any serious examination at all. On Olson and glyph-writing, the most helpful studies for me have been Laszo Géfin, *Ideogram: History of a Poetic Method*; Steve McCaffrey, *North of Intention* (the Olson portions later consolidated into "Charles Olson's Art of Language"); Nathaniel Mackey, *Discrepant Engagements*; Eleanor Berry, "The Emergence of Charles Olson's Prosody"; and Joon-Hawn Kim, *Out of the "Western Box."* Scholarly attention to Olson's political views has focused almost entirely on the experiential; Olson's theoretical knowledge is long overdue for substantive attention. The best overview remains von Hallberg. Tom Clark's biography provides significant context. On Olson and the cultural front, see Alan Gilbert, "Charles Olson and Empire"; Barrett Watten in *Total Syntax* and Susan Vanderborg in *Paratextual Communities* link Olson's politics to his style and literary technique.

5. I draw this list from Maud, *Charles Olson's Reading*. Because Maud's work is so thorough, I will not provide a representative list of authors and titles. What I would emphasize here is the way these readings are cited within or influenced Olson's own work. The most noteworthy example of this in the present context is his taking over of the term "logography" from I. J. Gelb's *A Study of Writing* (1952), which I discuss in the section "Knowing Your Own Name."
6. The list of authors is again drawn from Maud, *Charles Olson's Reading*.
7. The term *logos* is one of the most complex in Greek thought, as Olson well knew. He uses the term negatively in "Projective Verse," "Human Universe," and *Proprioception* (see, e.g., CPr 244, 155, 196) as a shorthand for abstraction, logic, classification, and discourse as conceived by Plato and Aristotle. Elsewhere, however, Olson uses the term positively, accepting its earlier meaning as given by J. A. K. Thomson: "Logos did not originally mean 'word' or 'reason,' or anything but merely 'what is said.' This meaning it never lost, although in its long strange history it acquired many others. . . . For some reason Homer avoids Logos, preferring Muthos; but Muthos with him means 'what is said' in speech or story exactly like Logos in its primary sense" (17). For simplicity's sake, and

because *logos* has become a shorthand in recent critical theory for language as rationality, I will use it solely in this chapter to refer to Olson's negative sense, as his name for "an enormous fallacy, called discourse, invented by Socrates" (SV 21). In this usage I follow Sherman Paul, Don Byrd, and other critics.

8. This position corroborates Jennifer Ashton's acute discussion of the nominalization of the verb in the Fenollosa-Pound-Williams-Zukofsky line of poetic reflections on language, a line entirely pertinent to Olson's intellectual development. See, e.g., 119–45.
9. The specific reference in *Call Me Ishmael* is to a story of mutiny that influenced Melville's writing of *Moby-Dick*, but as Olson notes in an unpublished prose note quoted by his editors in *Collected Prose*, "Mutiny, translated from the sea, is known on land as revolution" (CPr 389).
10. In lecture notes from Black Mountain College (see, e.g., OJ 10:53), Olson links *drama* etymologically to *dance*, a word he uses in the opening poem of *Maximus* to link art to public life ("I, Maximus / . . . tell you / what is a lance, who obeys the figures of / the present dance" [Max 5]). Here I would note Thomas F. Merrill's description of Olson's poems as "performative moral acts that demand . . . allegiance to the rigid doctrines that support them" (214).
11. In setting aside sexual politics I do not mean to minimize the importance of this question, taken up late in Olson scholarship in the important feminist readings of Philip Kuberski, "Charles Olson and the American Thing"; Robert O'Brien Hokanson, " 'Projecting' Like a Man"; and Rachel Blau DuPlessis, "Manifests." These were followed by the epochal studies of homosociality and masculinity by Libbie Rifkin, *Career Moves*; Michael Davidson, *Guys Like Us*; Andrew Mossin, "In Thicket"; and DuPlessis, "Manhood and Its Poetic Projects." The key point, anticipated by Davidson and articulated succinctly by DuPlessis in her second essay, is that Olson and his male peers "constructed a dissident and analytic subjectivity on the periphery of their culture, including critiques of masculinity, yet simultaneously they claimed the powers and privileges of normative manhood." This speaks directly, as I see it, to the difficulty, or rather to Olson's failure to face the difficulty, of critiquing the *logos* from within the culture it founds.
12. Eleanor Berry in "The Emergence of Charles Olson's Prosody" anticipates my reading here. Olson, she points out, "does not take writing as the opposite of speech, the visual as the opposite of the oral. For him it is discourse, written or oral, that is the opposite of speech—discourse as comparison, analysis, or description that is the opposite of speech as enactment" (52). See, however, Richard Bradford's Derridean reading, "Speech and Writing," which emphasizes the opposition.
13. Olson's recognition that ideograms belong to complex writing systems would soon lead him to distinguish between *ideography* (idea-writing) and *logography* (word writing). I take this up in my fourth section, "Knowing Your Own Name."
14. Steve McCaffery cites Schlegel to the effect that "syllables, and not letters, form the basis of language," commenting that the remark "could have prefaced

any anthology of projective verse" (*North Of Intention* 127). Schlegel's organicism places letters at a later stage of language's evolution—at a point of abstraction, as Olson would have it—and this helps explain why Olson pays no attention to them.

15. The distinction between "bad" and "good" writing derives from Emerson's lectures on "Nature" and "The Poet" (discussed in chapter 1) as well as from Jacques Derrida's reflections in *Of Grammatology* (see, e.g., 16) and *Dissemination* (149–50).
16. Olson, of course, would have known this book well. He is cited several times in the notes for his work tracking down Melville's library (one of Melville's marginal notations becomes an epigraph to Matthiessen's book). See, in particular, *American Renaissance* 457–58 n. 6, which cites Olson's 1938 essay "*Lear* and *Moby-Dick*," originally written for Matthiessen's seminar and later absorbed into *Call Me Ishmael*.
17. See, e.g., Derrida's remarks on "iterability" in *Limited Inc*.
18. Ortega was one of the first philosophers to theorize the condition of postmodernity as a minimal humanism, a humanism of resistance very similar to Olson's own project.
19. The key terms in this grammar as noted by Merrill are "*particularism* and *physicality*," "*[t]opos*, *place*, *objectism*, *complementarity*, and, of course, *projective*" (45).
20. The compositional equivalent to illiteracy would appear to be anti-usage. Pauline Wah's notes on Olson's 1963 classes in Vancouver include the following line of thinking:

> Word: look at it as it is—it has its own life, roots, existence—word is objective not subjective.
>
> root: "to find *activeness* in *use* & *meaning*" of the word (not denotation & connotation that we have been hung up with since Socrates)
>
> word always means an *action* or a *thing* (not an abstraction); looking at root helps you see it this way
>
> words have lost efficiency not through misuse but through habits of using them in discourse (as abstractions), so that when a person uses them, not really seeing them.
>
> Hence anti-usage. . . . Anti-words as abstractions, become sloppy then. Anti-words in the universe of discourse, words in the human universe. (OJ 4:66)

Because words have become anti-words in the culture of *logos*, their correction requires an anti-usage.

21. In later years Olson will make explicit reference to ethics as "*ethos*," which he takes in the etymological sense, as "cave-of-being" (CPr 369), and the human in itself is an ethos from this perspective, not because of its interiority as conceived by psychology, but because its physiological recesses are the source of its power. As Olson had earlier written in an unpublished prose note, distinguishing his own notion of the human from the antimaterialist philosophy of personalism:

> For person at least does insist that the problem is inside us, and won't go away by going outside. But what has brought personalism down in our own time is just the other exaggeration: that what happens inside is person. For person then—so dependent on—stifles of itself and ego, and all its arrogations of importance…I myself would put the problem differently, and in the present context of primaries, look again to the cave as sign. For the question which presses home to me is, do we so much inhabit ourselves as we use our recesses for that morality we crave—that morality which is the issue of what Ortega called life to be, preoccupation with itself. (Storrs, "The Three Traps")

22. Olson's Heraclitean aspect is evident, for example in his fondness for two fragments that he took from the philosopher, "*Man is estranged from that with which he is most familiar*" (one of two epigraphs to *The Special View of History* [SV 14]) and "What does not change / is the will to change" (the opening line of "The Kingfishers" [CP 86]). Olson enlarges upon the meaning of the first fragment all through the *Special View*; Guy Davenport in "Scholia and Conjectures" discusses Olson's translation of the second (see 252). On Olson and Heraclitus, see also von Hallberg 48–49 and 235 n. 47; and Byrd 14–15.
23. I quote these lines from the version of Zukofsky's text that Olson might have known, the preface to *An "Objectivists" Anthology* (1932). Zukofsky revised this text and made it the third part of "An Objective" when he prepared his essays for publication in book form as *Prepositions* (1967). Zukofsky, I should note, felt that Olson had "mungled" his ideas, and was resentful of the younger poet's appropriation and alteration of his term (cited in Stanley 147).
24. Olson received the grant but the book was never written.
25. (Riding) Jackson, I would note here, differs from Whitman and Olson in that her Cratylism avoids Heraclitean commitments. Although she is emphatic that the perfect language is natural, it is not "nature" in the empirical sense that she upholds, but the nature of the mind. "The world of the mind's life," she writes, "substanced by thought, thrusts its reality into the world of the body's life in *words*" (UMW 74). The body, then, is nature subject to change, properly made subservient to the mind, which, by "*thought*, knows truth as a unity": "The human body rises out of the general physical numerical accumulation of recurrences—which takes on the appearance of an articulate Nature but does nothing but translate the entire event of being into incidents in a succession, of no meaning other than that of succession" (UMW 74).
26. I base the dating of Olson's reading of Gelb on several footnote by Richard Blevins to the Olson-Creeley correspondence; see, e.g., CORC 10:246 n. 150 and 10:247 nn. 155–57. According to Maud in *Charles Olson's Reading*, the book was purchased in 1957 (see 132), but Olson often owned multiple copies and the book may well have been part of the Black Mountain College library. For the letters to Creeley that look forward to "Logography," see CORC 10:90–102.
27. The best reading of Pound's influence on "Projective Verse" is Burton Hatlen, "Ezra Pound's *Pisan Cantos* and the Origins of Projective Verse," which deals

specifically with Olson's reading of the typescript of the *Pisan Cantos* at the time of his visits to St. Elizabeth's.

28. Thus, when, at the Berkeley Poetry Conference, Olson observed, "I wrote those essays—they're incongestable or something. They're not readable. If they're interesting, they can be dug up as signs" (Muth 1:133), his reference to incongestability was in part an ironic acceptance of the fact that *Proprioception*, like an ancient stone tablet, required decipherment.

Coda Language Poetry and Neo-Cratylism

1. The best introductions to Language poetry remain two edited volumes from the 1980s: Andrews and Bernstein, eds., *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*, a collection of critical writings; and Silliman, ed., *In the American Tree*, an anthology. A bibliography of works by the poets included in those two volumes would run to several dozen pages. For the poets' own accounts of the history of the group, see Bob Perelman, *The Marginalization of Poetry*; Barrett Watten, *The Constructivist Moment*; and, more recently, the *The Grand Piano*, an ongoing "experiment in collective autobiography" by Rae Armantrout, Steve Benson, Carla Harryman, Lyn Hejinian, Tom Mandel, Ted Pearson, Bob Perelman, Kit Robinson, Ron Silliman, and Barrett Watten. The earliest and most ongoing scholarship on Language poetry can be found in the work of Marjorie Perloff; see in particular *The Dance of the Intellect*, *Poetic License*, and *Differentials*. Other significant interventions include Jerome McGann, *The Point Is to Change It*; George Hartley, *Textual Politics and the Language Poets*; Peter Nicholls, "Difference Spreading"; Linda Reinfield, *Language Poetry: Writing as Rescue*; Walter Kalaidjian, *American Culture between the Wars*; Marnie Parsons, *Touch Monkeys*; Alan Golding, *From Outlaw to Classic*; Christopher Beach, "Antiabsorptiveness and Contemporary American Poetry"; Ann Vickery, *Leaving Lines of Gender*; Susan Schultz, "Language Writing"; and Henry Sussman, *The Task of the Critic*.
2. The utopian project of what I am calling neo-Cratylism has been recognized, though discussed in very different terms, since the late 1980s. See, e.g., Andrew Ross, "The New Sentence and the Commodity Form"; Hartley, *Textual Politics*; Peter Middleton, "Language Poetry and Linguistic Activism"; Norman Finkelstein, *The Utopian Moment*; Jed Rasula, *The American Poetry Wax Museum;* Bob Perelman, "Polemic Greeting to the Inhabitants of Utopia"; Jeff Derksen, "Where Have All the Equal Signs Gone?"; and David Marriott, "Signs Taken for Signifiers." Other political stances within Language poetry than the one addressed in this chapter can be found in Bernstein, ed., *The Politics of Poetic Form*.
3. There is at present almost no critical comment on Grenier, although his reflections on Olson and Stein are often favorably cited in scholarship on Language poetry. See, however, Perelman's chapter on Grenier in *The Marginalization of Poetry* and Stephen Ratcliffe's reflections on Grenier's "scrawl" in *Listening to Reading.* For critical approaches to Andrews's work, see, again, Perelman, and

also McGann, *The Point Is to Change It*, and the special issue of *Aerial* edited by Rod Smith. Scholarship on Hejinian is extensive, much of it dealing with *My Life*. For strong accounts of her poetics, see Charles Altieri, "Lyn Hejinian and the Possibilities of Postmodernism in Poetry"; Paul Naylor, *Poetic Investigations: Singing the Holes in History*; Peter Nicholls, "Phenomenal Poetics: Reading Lyn Hejinian"; and Philip Jenkins, *Poetic Obligation*.

4. Versions of this definition of symbolism also appear in an essay on Robert Creeley (" 'symbolism' not as referential signification but language trace, a token of recurrent, dogmatic experience of structural identity, something *is*, something" ["A Packet" 424]) and in a short statement of poetics for *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* ("symbolism not 'reference' but recognition of structural identities binding the world" ["Hedge-crickets Sing" 20]).
5. Craig Dworkin has eloquently written about this loss of legibility, a condition of textual sublime, and linked it with the Language writers' fascination with the " 'inhumanness' of language," an inhumanness central, as I show in chapter 1, to Cratylism (83).
6. Important parallels to Grenier include Clark Coolidge (whose substantialism developed on the model of geology) and Hannah Weiner (whose writing is composed from words seen clairvoyantly, as she called it, on objects in the world around her).
7. The most extensive scholarly account of the politics of the Language poets is also one of the earliest, that of George Hartley in *Textual Politics*, which situates the work within the lineage of Western Marxism. I am particularly indebted to his reading of McCaffery in the chapter on "Realism and Reification."
8. Drawing on critical writings by Lyn Hejinian that I discuss below, Armantrout's treatment of metaphor and metonymy highlights the feminist stance behind Hejinian's theoretical work. For a feminist study of the philosophy of language in Hejinian and other women Language poets, see Megan Simpson.
9. The fascination of this dream is evident in Bob Perelman's questioning reexamination of Language poetry's utopian politics (which he finds "ultimately mystificatory" in its most radical forms ["Polemic Greeting" 377]). Notwithstanding his reservations, Perelman concludes with an affectionate evocation of the utopian project, a long paragraph that begins, "I have heard paradise within words and I have read utopia in language" (382).

Works Cited

Aarsleff, Hans. *From Locke to Saussure: Essays on the Study of Language and Intellectual History*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1982.

Ackrill, J. L. *Essays on Plato and Aristotle*. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1997.

Adams, Barbara. *The Enemy Self: Poetry and Criticism of Laura Riding*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research P, 1990.

Althusser, Louis. *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Tr. Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review P, 1971.

Altieri, Charles. *Enlarging the Temple: New Directions in American Poetry during the 1960's*. Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell UP, 1979.

———. "From Symbolist Thought to Immanence: The Ground of Postmodern American Poetics," *Boundary2* 1.3 (Spring 1973): 605–42.

———. "Lyn Hejinian and the Possibilities of Postmodernism in Poetry." In *Women Poets of the Americas: Toward a Pan-American Gathering*. Ed. Jacqueline Vaught Brogan and Cordelia Chávez Candelaria. Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1999. 146–55.

———. "Olson's Poetics and the Tradition," *Boundary2* 2.1–2 (Autumn 1973): 173–88.

Andrews, Bruce. *Paradise & Method: Poetics & Praxis*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1996.

Andrews, Bruce, and Charles Bernstein, eds. *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1984.

Armantrout, Rae. "Feminist Poetics and the Meaning of Clarity," *Sagetrieb* 11.3 (Winter 1992): 7–16.

Armantrout, Rae, Steve Benson, Carla Harryman, Lyn Hejinian, Tom Mandel, Ted Pearson, Bob Perelman, Kit Robinson, Ron Silliman, and Barrett Watten, eds. *The Grand Piano: An Experiment in Collective Autobiography*. 5 vols. Detroit, MI: Mode A, 2006. Ten volumes are projected.

Ashbery, John. *Other Traditions*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2000.

Ashton, Jennifer. *From Modernism to Postmodernism: American Poetry and Theory in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2005.

Baker, Deborah. *In Extremis: The Life of Laura Riding*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1993.

Barney, Rachel. *Names and Nature in Plato's* Cratylus. New York: Routledge, 2001.

Bauerlein, Mark. *Whitman and the American Idiom*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1991.

Baxter, Timothy M. S. *The Cratylus: Plato's Critique of Naming*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992.

Beach, Christopher. "Antiabsorptiveness and Contemporary American Poetry: New Principles of Pleasure." In *New Definitions of Lyric: Theory, Technology, and Culture*. Ed. Mark Jeffrey. New York: Garland, 1998. 201–13.

Bell, Michael Davitt. *The Development of American Romance: The Sacrifice of Relation*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980.

Bernstein, Charles. *Content's Dream*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1986.

———. "Introduction." In *Rational Meaning: A New Foundation for the Definition of Words and Supplementary Essays*. By Laura (Riding) Jackson and Schuyler B. Jackson. Ed. William Harmon, Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1997. ix–xxi.

———, ed. *The Politics of Poetic Form: Poetry and Public Policy*. New York: Roof, 1990.

Berry, Eleanor. "The Emergence of Charles Olson's Prosody of the Page Space," *Journal of English Linguistics* 30.1 (March 2002): 51–72.

Billitteri, Carla. "A Form of Tidiness: Laura (Riding) Jackson and the Work of Poetry-Writing," *Textual Practice* 22.2 (2008): 315–36.

———. "Stories, Not History: Laura Riding's Progress of Truth," *Arizona Quarterly* 65.1 (Spring 2009): 85–105.

Bostock, David. "Plato on Understanding Language." In *Language*. Ed. Stephen Everson. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994. 10–27.

Bové, Paul A. *Destructive Poetics: Heidegger and Modern American Poetry*. New York: Columbia UP, 1980.

Bradford, Richard. "Speech and Writing in Poetry and Its Criticism," *Visible Language* 22.2–3 (Spring 1988): 169–94.

Bram, Shahar. *Charles Olson and Alfred North Whitehead: An Essay on Poetry*. Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell UP, 2004.

Brown, Gillian. *The Consent of the Governed: The Lockean Legacy in Early American Culture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2001.

Bushnell, Horace. *Selected Writings on Language, Religion, and American Culture*. Ed. David L. Smith. Chico, CA: Scholars P, 1984.

Butterick, George F. *A Guide to* The Maximus Poems *of Charles Olson*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1980.

Byrd, Don. *Charles Olson's* Maximus. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1980.

Byrne, Laura. "The Geometrical Method in Spinoza's *Ethics*," *Poetics Today* 28.3 (Fall 2007): 443–74.

Carpenter, Brian. "'A Marvelously Big Stone': Geological Objects and Mythological Experience in the Writing of Charles Olson." M.A. Thesis, University of Maine, 2005.

Ciani, Daniela. "Laura Riding's Truthfulness to the Word and to the Self," *Revue Française D'Études Américaines* 61.17 (1994): 301–10.

Clark, Alan J. "Laura (Riding) Jackson: A Revised Check-List March 1923–January 2001," *Chelsa* 69 (2000): 147–79.

Clark, Tom. *Charles Olson: The Allegory of a Poet's Life*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1991.

Cmiel, Kenneth. "'A Broad Fluid Language of Democracy': Discovering the American Idiom," *Journal of American History* 79.3 (December 1992): 913–36.

Creeley, Robert. *Collected Essays*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1989.

Davenport, Guy. "Scholia and Conjectures for Olson's 'The Kingfishers,'" *Boundary2* 2.1–2 (Autumn 1973): 250–62.

Davidson, Michael. *Ghostlier Demarcations: Modern Poetry and the Material World*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1997.

———. *Guys Like Us: Citing Masculinity in Cold War Poetics*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2004.

Dembo, L. S. *Conceptions of Reality in Modern American Poetry*. San Francisco: U of California P, 1966.

Derksen, Jeff. "Where Have All the Equal Signs Gone? Inside/Outside the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Site." In Huk, ed. 41–65.

Derrida, Jacques. *Dissemination*. Tr. Barbara Johnson. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1981.

———. *Limited Inc*. Tr. Samuel Weber. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1988.

———. *Of Grammatology*. Tr. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1974.

Dewey, Anne. *Beyond* Maximus*: The Constitution of Public Voice in Black Mountain Poetry*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2007.

DuPlessis, Rachel Blau. "Manhood and Its Poetic Projects: The Construction of Masculinity in the Counter-Cultural Poetry of the U.S. 1950s," *Jacket* 31 (October 2006): http://jacketmagazine.com/31/duplessis-manhood.html (last accessed May 2008).

———. "Manifests." *Blue Studios: Poetry and Its Cultural Work*. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2006. 73–95.

Dworkin, Craig. *Reading the Illegible*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2003.

Eco, Umberto. *The Search for the Perfect Language*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1995.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Essays: First Series*. Introduction and Notes by Joseph Slater. Text Established by Alfred R. Ferguson and Jean Ferguson Carr. Cambridge, MA: Belknap P of Harvard UP, 1979.

———. *Essays: Second Series*. Introduction and Notes by Joseph Slater. Text Established by Alfred R. Ferguson and Jean Ferguson Carr. Cambridge, MA: Belknap P of Harvard UP, 1979.

———. *Letters and Social Aims*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1883.

———. *Nature, Addresses, and Lectures*. Introduction and Notes by Robert E. Spiller. Text Established by Alfred R. Ferguson. Cambridge, MA: Belknap P of Harvard UP, 1971.

Erkkila, Betsy. *Whitman the Political Poet*. New York: Oxford UP, 1989.

Feidelson, Charles. *Symbolism and American Literature*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1953.

Finkelstein, Norman. *The Utopian Moment in Contemporary American Poetry*. London and Toronto: Bucknell UP, 1993.

Folsom, Ed. *Walt Whitman's Native Representations*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994.

Fredman, Stephen. *The Grounding of American Poetry: Charles Olson and the Emersonian Tradition*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1993.

Friedlander, Benjamin. "Laura Riding/Some Difficulties," *Poetics Journal* 4 (May 1984): 35–42.

Friedman, Rohn S. "A Whitman Primer: Solipsism and Identity," *American Quarterly* 27.4 (October 1975): 443–60.

Friedmann, Elizabeth. *A Mannered Grace: The Life of Laura (Riding) Jackson*. New York: Persea Books, 2005.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method* (1960). New York: Continuum, 1989.

Gasché, Rodolphe. *The Wild Card of Reading: On Paul de Man*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998.

Géfin, Laszlo. *Ideogram: History of a Poetic Method*. Austin: U of Texas P, 1982.

Gelb, I. J. *A Study of Writing*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1952.

Genette, Gérard, *Mimologics* (1976). Ed. Thaïs E. Morgan. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1995.

Gilbert, Alan. "Charles Olson and Empire, or Charles Olson Flips the Wartime Script." Paper presented at the National Poetry Foundation Conference on North American Poetry in the 1960s, University of Maine, Orono, July 2000. Text available on the Olson Now Documents Page, Electronic Poetry Center, http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/olson/blog/Olson_and_Empire.pdf (last accessed May 2008).

Ginsberg, Allen. *Collected Poems 1947–1980*. New York: Harper & Row, 1984.

Golding, Alan. *From Outlaw to Classic: Canons in America Poetry*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1995.

Gordon, W. Terrence. *C. K. Ogden: A Bio-bibliographic Study*. Metuchen: Scarecrow P, 1990.

Grenier, Robert. *Attention: Seven Narratives*. A Curriculum of the Soul, no. 28. Canton, NY: Institute of Further Studies, 1985. Text available on the Eclipse Page. http://english.utah.edu/eclipse/projects/ATTENTION/attention.html (last accessed May 2008).

———. "Hedge-crickets Sing." In Andrews and Bernstein, eds. 19–20.

———. "Language / Site / World." In Perelman, ed. 230–45.

———. "Notes on Coolidge, Objectives, Zukofsky, Romanticism, And &." In Silliman, ed. 504–17.

———. "On Speech." In Silliman, ed. 477–78.

———. "A Packet for Robert Creeley," *Boundary2* 6.3/7.1 (Spring/Fall 1978): 421–41.

———. "Realizing Things." A talk delivered at the State University of New York, Buffalo, October 22, 1998. http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/grenier/rthings.html (last accessed May 2008).

———. *Sentences*. Cambridge: Whale Cloth P, 1978. Electronic version available at http://www.whaleclot.org/grenier/sentences_.htm (last accessed May 2008).

———. *Series*. Kensington, CA: This Press, 1978.
———. *What I Believe Transpiration/Transpiring Minnesota*. Oakland, CA: O Books, 1991.
Grossman, Allen. *The Long Schoolroom: Lessons in the Bitter Logic of the Poetic Principle*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2000.
———. *The Sighted Singer: Two Works on Poetry for Readers and Writers*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1992.
Grossman, Jay. *Reconstituting the American Renaissance: Emerson, Whitman, and the Politics of Representation*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2003.
Gura, Philip F. *The Wisdom of Words: Language, Theology, and Literature in the New England Renaissance*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1981.
Halliwell, Stephen. *The Aesthetics of Mimesis*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2002.
Hamilton, Jeff, ed. "Responses to *Though Gently*" (Contributions by H. L. Hix, Laura Mullen, and Nick LoLordo, Elizabeth Friedmann, Lisa Samuels, Jeff Hamilton, Chris Stroffolino, Tom Fisher, Jed Rasula, Jerry Harp, John Nolan, and Alan J. Clark), *Delmar* 8 (Winter 2002): 55–128.
Handley, George B. *New World Poetics: Nature and the Adamic Imagination of Whitman, Neruda, and Walcott*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 2007.
Hartley, George. *Textual Politics and the Language Poets*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989.
Hatlen, Burton. "Kinesis and Meaning: Charles Olson's 'The Kingfishers' and the Critics," *Contemporary Literature* 30.4 (Winter 1989): 546–72.
———. "Pound's *Pisan Cantos* and the Origins of Projective Verse." In *Ezra Pound and Poetic Influence*. Ed. Helen Dennis. Amsterdam: Rodolpi P, 2000. 130–55.
Havelock, Eric A. *Preface to Plato*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1963.
Hejinian, Lyn. *The Language of Inquiry*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2000.
———. *My Life*. Los Angeles, CA: Green Integer, 2002.
Heuving, Jeanne. "Laura (Riding) Jackson's 'Really New' Poem." In *Gendered Modernisms: American Women Poets and Their Readers*. Ed. Margaret Dickie and Thomas Trevisano. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1996. 191–213.
Hokanson, Robert O'Brien. "'Projecting' Like a Man: Charles Olson and the Poetics of Gender," *Sagetrieb* 9.1–2 (Spring–Fall 1990): 169–83.
Hollis, Carroll C. *Language and Style in Leaves of Grass*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1983.
———."Whitman and William Swinton: A Co-operative Friendship," *American Literature* 30.4 (January 1959): 425–49.
Howard, Leon. "Walt Whitman and the American Language," *American Speech* 5.6 (August 1930): 441–51.
Huk, Romana, ed. *Assembling Alternatives: Reading Postmodern Poetries Transnationally*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2003.
Inman, P. "One To One." In Bernstein, ed. *Politics of Poetic Form*, 221.25.
———. "Writing and Politics." In Andrews and Bernstein, eds. 154–55.
Irwin, John. *American Hieroglyphics: The Symbol of the Egyptian Hieroglyphics in the American Renaissance*. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1980.

James, Henry. *The Question of Our Speech; The Lesson of Balzac. Two Lectures*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1905.

Jenkins, Grant Matthew. *Poetic Obligation: Ethics in Experimental American Poetry after 1945*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2008.

Kalaidjian, Walter. *American Culture between the Wars: Revisionary Modernism & Postmodern Critique*. New York: Columbia UP, 1993.

Kasulis, T. P. "Reference and Symbol in Plato's *Cratylus* and Kuukai's *Shojijissogi*," *Philosophy East and West* 32.4 (October 1982): 393–405.

Kim, Heidi Kathleen. "From Language to Empire: Walt Whitman in the Context of Nineteenth-Century Popular Anglo-Saxonism," *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 24.1 (Summer 2006): 1–19.

Kim, Joon-Hawn. *Out of the "Western Box": Towards a Multicultural Poetics in the Poetry of Ezra Pound and Charles Olson*. New York: Peter Lang, 2003.

Koeneke, Rodney. *Empires of the Mind: I. A. Richards and Basic English in China, 1929–1979*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2004.

Kramer, Michael P. *Imagining Language in America: From the Revolution to the Civil War*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992.

Kuberski, Philip. "Charles Olson and the American Thing: The Ideology of Literary Revolution," *Criticism* 27.2 (Spring 1985): 175–93.

Larson, Kerry C. *Whitman's Drama of Consensus*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988.

Lawson, Andrew. *Walt Whitman and the Class Struggle*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2006.

LeMaster, J. R., and Donald D. Kummings, eds. *Walt Whitman: An Encyclopedia*. New York: Garland, 1998.

Lepore, Jill. *A Is for American: Letters and Other Characters in the Newly United States*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002.

Levin, Susan B. *The Ancient Quarrel between Philosophy and Poetry Revisited: Plato and the Greek Literary Tradition*. New York: Oxford UP, 2001.

Lewis, R. W. B. *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1955.

Lindberg, Kathryn V. "Whitman's 'Convertible Terms': America, Self, Ideology." In *Theorizing American Literature: Hegel, the Sign, and History*. Ed. Bainard Cowan and Joseph G. Kronick. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1991. 233–68.

Mackey, Nathaniel. *Discrepant Engagement: Dissonance, Cross-Culturality, and Experimental Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993.

Mallarmé, Stéphane. *Oeuvres Complètes*. Paris: Gallimard, 1945.

Marriot, David. "Signs Taken for Signifiers: Language Writing, Fetishism, and Disavowal." In Huk, ed. 338–46.

Masopust, Michael A. "Laura Riding's Quarrel with Poetry," *South Central Review* 2.1 (Spring 1985): 42–56.

Matthiessen, F. O. *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman*. New York: Oxford UP, 1941.

Maud, Ralph. *Charles Olson's Reading: A Biography*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1996.

———. *What Does Not Change: The Significance of Charles Olson's "The KingFishers."* Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1998.

McCaffery, Steve. "Charles Olson's Art of Language: The Maya Stratum in Projective Verse," *Ellipses* (Spring 1990): 37–47.

———. "The Death of the Subject: The Implications of Counter-Communication in Recent Language-Centered Writing," *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, supplement no. 1 (June 1980): n.p.

———. *North of Intention: Critical Writings 1973–1986*. New York: Roof, 1986.

———, ed. *The Politics of the Referent*. Published as *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, supplement no. 1 (June 1980).

McGann, Jerome. *Black Riders: The Visible Language of Modernism*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993.

———. "'The Grand Heretics of Modern Fiction': Laura Riding, John Cowper Powys, and the Subjective Correlative," *Modernism/Modernity* 13.2 (April 2006): 309–23.

———. *The Point Is to Change It: Poetry and Criticism in the Continuing Present*. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2007.

———. *Social Values and Poetic Acts: The Historical Judgment of Literary Work*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1988.

Merrill, Thomas F. *The Poetry of Charles Olson: A Primer*. Newark: U of Delaware P, 1982.

Meyer, Steven. "'An Ill-Matched Correspondence': Laura Riding's Gertrude Stein," *Raritan: A Quarterly Review* 19.4 (Spring 2000): 159–70.

Middleton, Peter. "Language Poetry and Linguistic Activism," *Social Text* 25–26 (1990): 242–53.

Mills-Courts, Karen. *Poetry as Epitaph: Representation and Poetic Language*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1990.

Moraru, Christian. "'Topos/Typos/Tropos': Visual Strategies and the Mapping of Space in Charles Olson's Poetry," *Word & Image* 14.3 (July–September 1998): 253–66.

Mossin, Andrew. "'In Thicket': Charles Olson, Frances Boldereff, Robert Creeley and the Crisis of Masculinity at Mid-Century," *Journal of Modern Literature* 28.4 (Summer 2005): 13–39.

Nathanson, Tenney. *Whitman Presence: Body, Voice, and Writing in* Leaves of Grass. New York: New York UP, 1992.

Naylor, Paul. *Poetic Investigations: Singing the Holes in History*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1999.

Nicholls, Peter. "Difference Spreading: From Gertrude Stein to L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Poetry." In *Contemporary Poetry Meets Modern Theory*. Ed. Anthony Easthope and John O. Thompson. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1991. 116–27.

———. "Phenomenal Poetics: Reading Lyn Hejinian." In *Mechanics of the Mirage: Postwar American Poetry*. Ed. Michael Delville and Christine Pagnoulle. Liège, Belgium: Liege Language and Literature, 2000. 241–52.

Nolan, John. "Editor's Introduction: Poetry, Language, Truth-Speaking." In *The Failure of Poetry, The Promise of Language*. By Laura (Riding) Jackson. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2007. 1–16.

Nolan, John. "The Place of *Though Gently* in the Development of Laura (Riding) Jackson's Thinking," *Delmar* 8 (Winter 2002): 117–23.

Norris, Christopher. "Laura Riding's *The Telling*: Language, Poetry, and Neutral Style," *Language and Style* 11.3 (Summer 1978): 137–45.

Ogden, C. K. *Debabelization*. London: Kegan Paul, 1931.

———. *The System of Basic English*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1934.

Ogden, C. K., and I. A. Richards. *The Meaning of Meaning. A Study of the Influence of Language upon Thought and of the Science of Symbolism* (1922). New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1956.

Oldham, James. "*The Telling*: Laura (Riding) Jackson's Project for a Whole Human Discourse." In *Reclaiming Rhetorica: Women in the Rhetorical Tradition.* Ed. Andrea A. Lunsford and James J. Murphy. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1995. 247–63.

Olson: The Journal of the Charles Olson Archives. 10 vols. 1974–1978.

Olson, Charles. "The Art of the Language of Mayan Glyphs," *Alcheringa* 5 (Spring–Summer 1973): 94–100.

———. "The Bezel," TS., 1962, Box/Folder 29:1497. Charles Olson Papers. Archives and Special Collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut Libraries. Used with permission.

———. *The Collected Poems of Charles Olson*. Ed. George F. Butterick. Berkeley: U of California P, 1987.

———. *Collected Prose.* Ed. Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander. Berkeley: U of California P, 1997.

———. "Credo," TS., ca. 1949, Box/Folder 29:1519. Charles Olson Papers. Archives and Special Collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut Libraries. Used with permission.

———. "Definitions by Undoing," *Boundary2* 2.1–2 (Fall 1973–Winter 1975): 7–12.

———. *Letters for Origin, 1950–1956*. Ed. Albert Glover. New York: Cape Goliard P, 1970.

———. "Logography," MS./TS., ca. 1959, Box/Folder 32:1613. Charles Olson Papers. Archives and Special Collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut Libraries. Used with permission.

———. *The Maximus Poems*. Ed. George F. Butterick. Berkeley: U of California P, 1983.

———. *Muthologos. The Collected Lectures and Interviews*. 2 vols. Ed. George F. Butterick. Bolinas, CA: Four Seasons Foundation, 1978–1979.

———. "A New Short Ars Poetica, A Litle Boke," TS., ca. 1955–1956, Box/Folder 33:1652. Charles Olson Papers. Archives and Special Collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut Libraries. Used with permission.

———. "Note on Type-Face," TS., ca. 1950, Box/Folder 33:1658. Charles Olson Papers. Archives and Special Collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut Libraries. Used with permission.

———. Notebook No. 109, July 15, 1966–October 1967, Box 58. Charles Olson Papers. Archives and Special Collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut Libraries. Used with permission.

———. "'Nudae Quantitates': A Character to Verse Now," TS., 1956, Box/Folder 33:1666. Charles Olson Papers. Archives and Special Collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut Libraries. Used with permission.
———. "Once You Know Your Own Name . . . ," MS., 1965, Box/Folder 33:1669. Charles Olson Papers. Archives and Special Collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut Libraries. Used with permission.
———. "The Place & the Thing & the Act, of the Action," MS., 1955–1956, Box/Folder 34:1680. Charles Olson Papers. Archives and Special Collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut Libraries. Used with permission.
———. "Poetry and Criticism," TS., 1947, Box 34. Charles Olson Papers. Archives and Special Collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut Libraries. Used with permission.
———. "The Principle Extrications & New Coordinates Now Called For," MS./TS., ca. 1951, Box 37. Charles Olson Papers. Archives and Special Collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut Libraries. Used with permission.
———. "Projective Verse II," TS., 1956, Box 34. Charles Olson Papers. Archives and Special Collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut Libraries. Used with permission.
———. "Propositions," TS., ca. 1952, Box 37. Charles Olson Papers. Archives and Special Collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut Libraries.
———. "Rhapsodia: To Sew Song Together," TS., 1949, Box 35. Charles Olson Papers. Archives and Special Collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut Libraries. Used with permission.
———. *Selected Letters*. Ed. Ralph Maud. Berkeley: U of California P, 2000.
———. *The Special View of History*. Ed. Ann Charters. Berkeley: Oyez, 1970.
———. "A 'State' Destroys a Noun," TS., 1963, Box 36. Charles Olson Papers. Archives and Special Collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut Libraries. Used with permission.
———. "The Three Traps," TS., 1953, Box 36. Charles Olson Papers. Archives and Special Collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut Libraries. Used with permission.
Olson, Charles, and Cid Corman. *Complete Correspondence, 1950–1964*. 2 vols. Ed. George Evans. Orono, ME: National Poetry Foundation, 1987.
Olson, Charles, and Robert Creeley. *The Complete Correspondence*. 10 vols. Ed. George F. Butterick (vols. 1–8) and Richard Blevins (vol. 9–10). Santa Barbara and Santa Rosa, CA: Black Sparrow P, 1980–96.
Ophir, Ella Zohar. "The Laura Riding Question: Modernism, Poetry, and Truth," *Modern Language Quarterly* 66.1 (March 2005): 85–114.
———. "Toward a Pitiless Fiction: Abstraction, Comedy, and Modernist Antihumanism," *Modern Fiction Studies* 52.1 (Spring 2006): 92–120.
Oppen, George. *New Collected Poems*. Ed. Michael Davidson. New York: New Directions, 2002.

Ortega Y Gasset, José. *The Revolt of the Masses*. Tr. Anonymous. New York: W. W. Norton, 1932.

Paddon, Seija. "The Diversity of Performance/Performance as Diversity in the Poetry of Laura (Riding) Jackson and Evan Boland," *English Studies in Canada* 22.4 (December 1996): 425–39.

Parsons, Marnie. *Touch Monkeys: Nonsense Strategies for Reading Twentieth-Century Poetry*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1994.

Paul, Sherman. *Olson's Push: Origin, Black Mountain, and Recent Poetry*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana UP, 1978.

Perelman, Bob. *The Marginalization of Poetry: Language Writing and Literary History*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1996.

———. "Polemic Greeting to the Inhabitants of Utopia." In Huk, ed. 375–83.

———, ed. *Writing/Talks*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1985.

Perloff, Marjorie. *The Dance of the Intellect: Studies in the Poetry of the Pound Tradition*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1985.

———. *Differentials: Poetry, Poetics, Pedagogy*. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2004.

———. *Poetic License: Essays on Modernist and Postmodernist Lyric*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1990.

Phillipson, Robert. *Linguistic Imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992.

Plato. *The Collected Dialogues*. Ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns. Tr. Lane Cooper, F. M. Cornford, W. K. C. Guthrie, R. Hackforth, Michael Joyce, Benjamin Jovett et al. Bollingen Series LXXI. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1961.

———. *Cratylus*. Tr. C. D. C. Reeve. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1998.

Poirier, Richard. *A World Elsewhere: The Place of Style in American Literature*. New York: Oxford UP, 1966.

Pound, Ezra. *ABC of Reading*. 1934. New York: New Directions, 1960.

Quartermain, Peter. *Disjunctive Poetics: From Gertrude Stein and Louis Zukofsky to Susan Howe*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992.

Rasula, Jed. *The American Poetry Wax Museum: Reality Effects, 1940–1990*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1996.

———. "*Though Gently*," *Delmar* 8 (Winter 2002): 106–11.

Rasula, Jed, and Steve McCaffery, eds. *Imagining Language: An Anthology*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1998.

Ratcliffe, Stephen. *Listening to Reading*. Albany: State U of New York P, 2000.

Reed, Sampson. *Observations on the Growth of the Mind with Remarks on Some Other Subjects (1838)*. Third Edition. Introduction by Carl F. Strauch. Gainesville, FL: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1970.

Reeve, C. D. C. "Introduction." *Cratylus*. By Plato. Tr. C. D. C. Reeve. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1998.

Reeves, James. *The Natural Need*. Deyá, Majorca, Spain: Seizin P, 1935.

Reinfeld, Linda. *Language Poetry: Writing as Rescue*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1992.

Reynolds, David S. *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography*. New York: Vintage Books, 1996.

Rich, Adrienne. *The Dream of a Common Language: Poems 1974–1977*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1978.

Riding, Laura. *Anarchism Is Not Enough*. London: Cape; New York: Doubleday, 1928. Rpr. Ed. Lisa Samuels. Berkeley: U of California P, 2001.

———. *First Awakenings: The Early Poems of Laura Riding*. Ed. Elizabeth Friedmann, Alan J. Clark, and Robert Nye. New York: Persea Books, 1996.

———. *Four Unposted Letters to Catherine*. Paris: Hours Press, 1930. Rpr. Ed. Elizabeth Friedmann and Alan J. Clark. New York: Persea Books, 1993.

———. *Lives of Wives.* London: Cassell; New York: Random House, 1939. Rpr. Los Angeles, CA: Sun & Moon P, 1988.

———. *Poems: A Joking Word*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1930.

———. *Progress of Stories*. Deyá, Majorca, Spain: Seizin Press; London: Constable, 1935. Rpr. New York: Persea Books, 1994.

———. "Riding, Laura." In *Twentieth Century Authors: A Biographical Dictionary of Modern Literature*. Ed. Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft. New York: H. W. Wilson, 1942. 1173.

———. *Though Gently*. Deyá, Majorca, Spain: Seizin P, 1930.

———. *The World and Ourselves*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1938.

Riding, Laura, and Robert Graves, eds. *Epilogue: A Critical Summary*, 3 vols. Deyá, Majorca, Spain/London: Seizin Press/Constable, 1935–37.

———. *A Survey of Modernist Poetry*. London: William Heinemann, 1927.

Riding, Laura, Harry Kemp, and others. *The Left Heresy in Literature and Life*. London: Methuen, 1939.

(Riding) Gottschalk, Laura. "A Prophecy or a Plea," *The Reviewer* (April 5, 1925): 1–7.

(Riding) Jackson, Laura. "Correspondence: On Ambiguity," *Modern Language Quarterly* 36 (March 1975): 102–6.

———. *The Failure of Poetry, The Promise of Language*. Ed. John Nolan. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2007.

———. "Is There a World for Literature?—Is There Literature for a World?" *Chelsea* 44 (1995): 14–30.

———. *It Has Taken Long—: From the Writings of Laura (Riding) Jackson*. Published as *Chelsea* 35 (December 1976).

———. "Jackson, Laura (Riding)." In *Twentieth Century Authors, First Supplement: A Biographical Dictionary of Modern Literature*. Ed. Stanley J. Kunitz and Vineta Colby. New York: H. W. Wilson, 1955. 482–83.

———. "Laura (Riding) Jackson in Conversation with Elizabeth Friedmann," *P. N. Review*, 17.4 (March/April 1991): 67–76.

———. *The Laura (Riding) Jackson Reader*. Ed. Elizabeth Friedmann. New York: Persea Books, 2005.

———. *The Poems of Laura Riding*. New York: Persea Books, 2001.

———. *The Telling*. New York: Harper & Row, 1972.

———. *Under the Mind's Watch: Concerning Issues of Language, Literature, Life of Contemporary Bearing*. Ed. John Nolan and Alan J. Clark. Bern: Peter Lang, 2004.

(Riding) Jackson, Laura, and Schuyler B. Jackson. *Rational Meaning: A New Foundation for the Definition of Words and Supplementary Essays*. Ed. William Harmon. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1997.

Rifkin, Libbie. *Career Moves: Olson, Creeley, Zukofsky, Berrigan, and the American Avant-Garde*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 2000.

Rimbaud, Arthur. *Complete Works, Selected Letters*. Tr. Wallace Fowlie. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1966.

Ross, Andrew. "The New Sentence and the Commodity Form: Recent American Writing." In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1988. 361–80.

Rossi, Paolo. *Logic and the Art of Memory: The Quest for a Universal Language*. Tr. Stephen Clucas. London: Athlone P, 2000.

Samuels, Lisa. "Creating Criticism: An Introduction to *Anarchism Is Not Enough*." In Riding, *Anarchism Is Not Enough*. xi–lxxviii.

———. "The T Function in Laura Riding's *Though Gently*," *Delmar* 8 (Winter 2002): 81–86.

Schultz, Susan. "Language Writing," *Talisman: A Journal of Contemporary Poetry and Poetics* 23–26 (2001–2): 321–32.

———. "Laura Riding's Essentialism and the Absent Muse," *Arizona Quarterly* 48.1 (Spring 1992): 1–24.

Sedley, David. *Plato's* Cratylus. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003.

Silliman, Ron, ed. *In the American Tree: Language, Realism, Poetry*. Orono, ME: National Poetry Foundation, 1986, 2002.

Silverman, Allan. "The End of the *Cratylus*: Limning the World," *Ancient Philosophy* 21 (2001): 1–18.

Simpson, David. *The Politics of American English, 1776–1850*. New York: Oxford UP, 1986.

Simpson, Megan. *Poetic Epistemologies: Gender and Knowing in Women's Language-Oriented Writing*. Albany: State U of New York P, 2000.

Smith, Rod, ed. *Aerial 9: Bruce Andrews*. Washington, DC: Aerial/Edge, 1999.

Southard, Sherry G. "Whitman and Language: An Annotated Bibliography," *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 2.2 (Fall 1984): 31–49.

Spinoza, Baruch *Complete Works*. Ed. Michael L. Morgan. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2002.

Stanley, Sandra Kumamoto. *Louis Zukofsky and the Transformation of a Modern American Poetics*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1994.

Stein, Gertrude. *Lectures in America*. In *Writings 1932–1946*. Ed. Catherine R. Stimpson and Harriet Chessman. New York: Library of America, 1998. 191–336.

Stewart, George R. *Names on the Land: A Historical Account of Place-Naming in the United States*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958.

Stroffolino, Chris. "*Though Gently*: Intellectual Drama as Human Situation," *Delmar* 8 (Winter 2002): 96–101.

Sussman, Henry. *The Task of the Critic: Poetics, Philosophy, and Religion*. New York: Fordham UP, 2005.

Thomson, J. A. K. *The Art of the Logos*. London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1935.
Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden*. Ed. J. Lyndon Shanley. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971.
Thurin, Erik Ingvar. *Whitman between Impressionism and Expressionism: Language of the Body, Language of the Soul*. London and Toronto: Associated UP, 1995.
Traubel, Horace. *With Walt Whitman in Camden, March 28, 1888–July 14, 1888* [Volume 1]. Boston: Small, Maynard, 1906.
———. *With Walt Whitman in Camden, July 16, 1888–October 31, 1888* [Volume 2]. New York: D. Appleton, 1908.
———. *With Walt Whitman in Camden, November 1, 1888–January 20, 1889* [Volume 3]. New York: Mitchell Kennerley, 1914.
———. *With Walt Whitman in Camden, January 21, 1889–April 7, 1889* [Volume 4]. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1953.
———. *With Walt Whitman in Camden, April 8, 1889–September 14, 1889* [Volume 5]. Ed. Gertrude Traubel. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1964.
———. *With Walt Whitman in Camden, September 15, 1889–July 6, 1890* [Volume 6]. Ed. Gertrude Traubel and William White. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1982.
———. *With Walt Whitman in Camden, July 7, 1890–February 10, 1891* [Volume 7]. Ed. Jeanne Chapman and Robert MacIsaac. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1992.
———. *With Walt Whitman in Camden, February 11, 1891–September 30, 1891* [Volume 8]. Ed. Jeanne Chapman and Robert MacIsaac. Oregon House, CA: W L Bentley, 1996.
———. *With Walt Whitman in Camden, October 1, 1891–April 3, 1892* [Volume 9]. Ed. Jeanne Chapman and Robert MacIsaac. Oregon House, CA: W L Bentley, 1996.
Vanderborg, Susan. *Paratextual Communities: American Avant-Garde Poetry since 1950*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2001.
Vickery, Ann. *Leaving Lines of Gender. A Feminist Genealogy of Language Writing*. Hanover, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2000.
Von Hallberg, Robert. *Charles Olson: The Scholar's Art*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1978.
Wallace, Jo-Ann. "Laura Riding and the Politics of Decanonization," *American Literature* 64.1 (March 1992): 111–26.
Ward, John Powell. *The Spell of the Song: Letters, Meaning, and English Poetry*. Madison, WI: Farleigh Dickinson UP, 2004.
Warren, James Perrin. *Walt Whitman's Language Experiment*. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1990.
———. "Whitman as Ghostwriter: The Case of *Rambles among Words*," *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 2.2 (Fall 1984): 22–30.
Watten, Barrett. *The Constructivist Moment: From Material Text to Cultural Poetics*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2003.
———. "Robert Grenier, *Sentences*." In Andrews and Bernstein, eds. 235–37.
———. *Total Syntax*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1985.

Wexler, Joyce Piell. *Laura Riding's Pursuit of Truth*. Athens: Ohio UP, 1979.
Whitman, Walt. *An American Primer . . . , with Facsimile of the Original Manuscript*. Ed. Horace Traubel. 1904. San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 1970.
———. *Daybooks and Notebooks*. 3 vols. Ed. William White. New York: New York UP, 1978.
———. *Leaves of Grass. Comprehensive Reader's Edition*. Ed. Harold W. Blodgett and Sculley Bradley. New York: New York UP, 1965.
———. *Leaves of Grass: A Textual Variorum of the Printed Poems*. 3 vols. Ed. Sculley Bradley, Harold W. Blodgett, Arthur Golden, and William White. New York: New York UP, 1980.
———. *New York Dissected: A Sheaf of Recently Discovered Newspaper Articles by the Author of* Leaves of Grass. Ed. Emory Holloway and Ralph Adimari. New York: R. R. Wilson, 1936.
———. *Notebooks and Unpublished Prose Manuscripts*. 6 vols. Ed. Edward F. Grier. New York: New York UP, 1984.
———. *Prose Works 1892*. 2 vols. Ed. Floyd Stovall. New York: New York UP, 1964.
Wilhelm, Richard, tr. *The Secret of the Golden Flower: A Chinese Book of Life*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1931.
Williams, Bernard. "Cratylus' Theory of Names and Its Refutation." In *Language and Logos: Studies in Ancient Greek Philosophy Presented to G. E. L. Owen*. Ed. Malcolm Schofield and Martha Craven Nussabaum. Cambridge UP, 1982. 83–93.
Williams, William Carlos. *Collected Poems*. 2 vols. Ed. A Walton Litz and Christopher MacGowan. New York: New Directions, 1986–88.
Wilson, John. B. "Grimm's Law and the Brahmins," *New England Quarterly* 38.2 (June 1965): 234–39.
Wimsatt, W. K., and Monroe C. Beardsley. *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry*. Lexington: U of Kentucky P, 1954.
Wolfson, Harry Austryn. *The Philosophy of Spinoza*. 2 vols. 1934. Cleveland, OH, and New York: Meridian Books, The World, 1958.
Zemach, Eddy M. *The Reality of Meaning and the Meaning of Reality*. Hanover, CT: Brown UP, 1992.
Zukofsky, Louis. *80 Flowers*. In *Complete Short Poetry*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1997. 321–51.
———. *Prepositions +: The Collected Critical Essays*. Hanover, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2000.

Index

Note: Locators in italics indicate figures.