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Editorial Collaboration and Control: Laura Riding and the Seizen Press Years

A Dissertation

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the Faculty of Arts and Humanities

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of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

With the founding of Seizin Press in 1927, Laura Riding began a new epoch in her career as poet and literary theorist. Along with her partner, Robert Graves, Riding worked among and with important literary tastemakers of the Modernist era, such as Gertrude Stein, Len Lye and James Reeves. Riding's demanding and intense editorial and collaborative style resulted in some unique and fascinating works, such as the bizarrely beautiful *Life of the Dead* and the egomaniacal *The World and Ourselves*. Beyond close literary examination of the above works, this study looks at the pressures both within the Seizin Press community and without—such as the demands of new publishing standards on small presses, and the intrusion of the Spanish Civil War. Ultimately, the control Riding exerted on both her own work and the works of those around her reflected more than the hysterical micro-managing of which she and so many other women editors were accused. Instead, her obsessive desire to control every word written by her collaborators and clients spoke to her radical view of language as not only stable, but the only link with ultimate truth. Authors, especially poets, became more and more suspect as purveyors of lies in Riding's point of view. During her years at the press, Riding's understanding of the poet's role in society shifted from one akin to priest

into one akin to charlatan. For Riding scholars, it is especially important that we consider the impact of Riding's years at Seizin Press in her infamous disavowal of poetry in 1941. This study therefore works to place in conversation Riding's years at Seizin with her language theories and, in turn, explore the way such theories defined Riding's reality through her work at the press.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In late 1927, Laura Riding¹ and Robert Graves began the Seizin Press in London, England. Over the next decade, they would publish small runs of books by authors and artists such as Gertrude Stein, Len Lye, and James Reeves. Mainly, though, the press served Laura Riding as an artistic and professional publishing venue, providing her with complete authorial control over the production of her unique works as well as the opportunity to collaborate with other artists and authors, both as editor and writer. Once Riding and Graves moved the press to Majorca, Spain, in 1929, they attracted a community of modernist authors, artists, and thinkers. The intersection of collaboration and control which Seizin Press represented in Riding's authorial and editorial careers produced a very specific form of modernist literature that was aesthetically rigorous, politically ambiguous, and morally ambitious.

In this way, Seizin Press and the Majorcan community of artists which drifted in and out of its sphere comprised more than a physical printing press and its clientele. The number of works bearing the Seizin imprint is relatively small. However, the works produced by Riding solely and in conjunction with the community of artists surrounding the press represent her own distinct contribution to the modernist aesthetic of the late 1930s. What emerges is a striking portrait of modernist ideals clashing with Riding's

¹ Since Laura (Riding) Jackson was known as Laura Riding during the time period of my research, I have chosen to refer to her as "Laura Riding" throughout my dissertation.

infamous control which was born of her language theories. Laura Riding as co-editor of most Seizin Press productions and chief collaborator with many of the Deià community's "artists-in-residence" found herself at the center of this small but vibrant gathering of writers, artists, and thinkers. These specific features —aesthetic rigor, political ambiguity, and moral prescription—of the works produced by Laura Riding's Majorcan modernist community may best be observed and explained through specific works published during the Seizin Press period of her career in the 1930s.

This study will sample a range of Seizin Press productions including poetry by James Reeves and Robert Graves, as well as Riding, the illustrated poem *The Life of the Dead*, and *Epilogue* issues I and IV. To consider these works by Riding in a vacuum, separate from the creative milieu of Seizin Press would not reveal the significant connections these little known works have to the unique historical context of the late modernist movement of the 1930s. By the same token, to emphasize only the literary and political significance of the works misconstrues many of their primary themes and influences. Despite these works' obvious relevance to a historical study of modernism for their style and topicality, the importance for Riding scholars of these works lies in their contribution to Riding's ongoing questioning of language's dual obligation to truth and beauty. Through these works, Riding developed and tested her unique theories about language, theories that would ultimately lead to her 1941 disavowal of poetry. Beyond the interest such a study would have for Riding scholars, the intersection of politics, linguistic theory, and textual studies that Riding's work at Seizin comprises presents a

microcosm of the small press and its potential for influence. For this reason, Riding's career at Seizin Press deserves careful study.

Chapter Two shall detail the publishing history of Seizin Press, which like many small presses, was begun out of a spirit of independence (Hoffman, Allen, and Ulrich 27). Tired of meddling publishers and inaccurate printers, Laura Riding and Robert Graves decided to invest in their own printing press in late 1927. Using some of the advance from Graves' publisher for his work *Lawrence and the Arabs* (Friedmann 107), Riding and Graves purchased an 1872 Crown Albion press with the help of Graves' friend, Vyvyan Richards (Ford 385). A more detailed description of the press's performance and function will be addressed in the next chapter. What should be emphasized at this point is that though this press was not the height of printing technology for the 1920s, it was still serviceable and reliable. Riding and Graves very much lived the life of printers, immersing themselves in publishing as they installed the massive machine in the main room of their flat at 35 Peter's Square, Hammersmith (Friedmann 108). Despite its reliability, the machine proved difficult to operate. Weighing over seventeen hundred pounds, the press required great skill and patience to master. According to Graves' biographer, Richard Percival Graves, Riding and Graves spent the remainder of 1927 and the early part of 1928 merely learning how to use the press under the tutelage of Richards (63). Their determination bespoke their dedication to the promise of independence which the press delivered.

The relevance of Seizin Press to a study of modernism is inherent in the motives of the joint owners. Despite a shared vision of independence, both Riding and Graves

undertook the task of running a printing press for very different, if both very modern, reasons. The contrasting motives behind the press' inception embody two quintessentially modernist ideals: romanticism re-imagined and authority disdained, attitudes which the press' works would later perpetuate. Graves saw the press as an opportunity to realize a dream he had shared with college classmates Richards and T. E. Lawrence of running their own small press (Mason 402). The three had entertained the romantic notion of "building a mediaeval hall in Epping Forest, where they would produce hand printed books of exceptional quality" (R. P. Graves 62). Although T.E. Lawrence never realized the dream, both Richards and Graves would open small presses of their own. The pull of returning to a "handmade" world was something shared by other modernist authors, as is evidenced by the small press movement in general. Like the Yeats family's Cuala Press and Morris's Kelmscott Press, Seizin Press, for Graves, at least, represented a way to reclaim what had been lost by commercial publishing and mass book binding: the craftsman's connection with the physical artifact of the printed word. In this way, Seizin Press from its inception bore the imprint of a sort of Eliot-style modernism, a desire to "make it new" in a very old way, with an eye toward the medieval through the lens of Romanticism.

Yet the press's history does not resemble a Kelmscott or Cuala or even a Hogarth Press. Seizin Press was not known for producing obsessively crafted or even commercially successful books. What it might be known for, however, is remarkable independence in both choice of publications and editorial spirit (Mason 402). For this reputation, Seizin Press must thank Laura Riding. A full partner in the press while in

London, Riding grew to influence Seizin even more once the venture moved to Spain. Even the title of the press was chosen by Riding, and it encapsulates her distinct motives for operating the press. The word “seizin” is an archaic term for “possession.” She explained her choice of the term in a letter to Hugh Ford, who would later write the first scholarly account of the press’s activities:

The notion of possession, incidentally appropriate to the fact of having of the printing instrument, was an important one to me—but not in the crude sense of occupying the master position. The “taking of possession” involved meant to me personal identification with the area of the activity being the more “there.” With such significances attending the notion, I went to the Thesaurus. The second word is ‘seisin’ (or seizin). (Personal Letter to Hugh Ford, qtd in Friedmann 108)

In choosing the title “Seizin,” Riding expressed a sensibility equally modern to Graves’ latent nostalgia: authorial rebellion against status quo textual authorities such as mainstream publishers through possession of the textual artifact. This fixation upon the physical text resonates with works such as *The Life of the Dead*, *Epilogue*, and *The World and Ourselves*, as well as other Seizin productions in which control of the physical form of the book determines its content. This resonance in turn comments upon Riding’s own fascination with language’s role as a fixed feature separated from the author through time, a key component of her linguistic theories.

Part of Riding’s fascination with the textual object stemmed from her work with the Fugitives. Through the Fugitives, particularly Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren in their *Understanding Poetry*, the New Criticism eventually dominated the study of American and English literature. Although Riding would come to oppose the movement, in the late 1920s she was still very much at its center. Her shifting

relationship with the Fugitives and its role in both her poetry and editorial decisions will be the subject of Chapter 3. As a result of her experiences with the New Criticism, she clearly understood that he (or she) who possessed the text possessed the authority behind the words, and hence, the title she chose for her press: “Seizin.”

The concept of possession infiltrates the operations and the products of the Seizin Press. Jerome McGann in his study of textuality, modernism and the small printing press movement entitled *Black Riders* states that the small press movement “came as a movement of resistance against this new current of commercial book production” (7). In Seizin Press, one witnesses this resistance moving in two directions simultaneously: forwards, with Riding’s text obsessed authority, and backwards, with Graves’ gentle nostalgia for the romantic as well as the pre-industrial ages. However, the dominant drive behind Seizin Press productions would remain content, not “covers,” so to speak, according to Riding’s wishes. This was neither a vanity nor a boutique press. The works produced—written or published or both—at Deià were for a specific modernist audience receptive to aesthetically and intellectually avant-garde material. Therefore works constructed in the community where the press operated as well as literal productions of the press embody the same unique modernist spirit.

After exploring Seizin Press’s history and providing a background for Riding’s testy relationship with poetry and linguistics, this study will turn to Riding’s collaborative habits through careful examination of her professional relationships with collaborators such as Robert Graves and James Reeves. For Riding, her position as small press editor and chief taste maker in her circle of literati at Deià provided her with a unique

opportunity to produce materials that would influence a generation of writers. In this sense, she fashioned herself as a Pound or an Eliot, although she would have chafed at the comparison. Whereas Pound pollinated little magazine after little magazine (Harriet Monroe's *Poetry*, Margaret Anderson's *The Little Review*, to name a few) with his modernist vision, and Eliot settled into comfortable venerability with the *Criterion*, Riding sought both a sphere and a voice with particular poignancy, and her work at *Seizin*, for a brief time, achieved both. Ian Hamilton writes in his book, *The Little Magazine: A Study of Six Editors*, that a small magazine can only be effective for less than a decade or else it loses its potency (2). If his comments might be extended to little presses as well, then Riding's *Epilogue* and *Seizin Press* did not outlive their relevance, but rather fully embodied the quintessential modernist vision of artists engaged in every aspect of their own production. Riding seized this opportunity for relevancy through her multiple collaborations with other authors. The often times one-sided nature of those collaborations attest not only to Riding's demanding character as a professional but to the singularity of purpose with which she approached each project. Every production at *Seizin*, for Riding, was a chance to explore and prove her ideas regarding the connection between language and art.

An example of one such collaboration and the subject of Chapter 5 is the graphic poem *The Life of the Dead*, which Riding produced with the artist John Aldridge. In *The Life of the Dead*, Riding makes her clearest link between her view of the modernist literary movement and her theories about poetic language's decay. Despite having written the poems for *The Life of the Dead* almost a decade before her formal disavowal

of poetry, Riding demonstrates within the poems her growing conviction that language as poetry has failed. The ironic awareness that this juxtaposition of such a topic and genre necessitate results in a work of modernist literature which is both highly critical and simultaneously typical of the modernist movement. What merits close study in this work is not Riding's poetic prowess, which seems a bit contrived when compared with her more well known works of poetry, but the way she uses her collaborator, John Aldridge's, illustrations to further her linguistic evangelism. In this collaborative relationship supposedly comprised of equals, the desire for control, which some say poisoned Riding's editorial activities, emerges not as a liability but as an essential characteristic for success.

Riding's intense control of collaborative relationships indicates the depth of her belief that poetic language had decayed and her commitment to the revivification of poetic language through the continued pursuit of her vision of absolute truth. Although Riding would eventually abandon poetry, during the Seizin Press years of the 1930s, Riding still believed that poetry could be rescued. *The Life of the Dead*, like the first issues of *Epilogue* which shortly followed, speaks of that hope, but darkly. This work serves first and foremost as a cautionary tale against the evils of poetry in the service of what Riding would term "false" purposes—aesthetic pleasure, personal performance, and overemphasis of the artist's ego. In *The Life of the Dead*, we witness Riding seeking to control not only the means of production but also the conditions of reception to such an extent that she uses Aldridge's illustrations to ensure that her readers receive the message she has conceived. The control of such a prescriptive message seems hypocritical except

that for Riding, the importance of the message becomes an all-consuming imperative. She wants to save poetry, and she believes that poetry is the best way to do it. For her, the importance of her mission both demands and sanctions her complete control in order to execute her vision.

Riding conceived *Epilogue*, Seizin Press's in-house little magazine, as another means of saving language from poetry, and thus poetry from itself. In its inception a collaborative effort with Riding as the editor, *Epilogue* became increasingly Riding's mouthpiece for her beliefs about language. Many of the articles were commissioned by Riding on topics of specific interest to her, and often, the final pieces were written in large part by Riding herself. Three issues made it into print, and this study will focus primarily on the first issue, *Epilogue I*, in Chapter 6. *Epilogue I* provides a unique opportunity to study not only Riding's editorial habits but also her controlling collaborative style as well. Because *Epilogue* was published by Seizin, Riding's choices of font, arrangement of articles, and decisions regarding content become paramount in understanding the relationship between Riding's control of bibliographic codes and her desire to revolutionize poetic language. As she did with *The Life of the Dead*, Riding attempted to control not only the production of *Epilogue* but the reception as well. Her linguistic theories led her to mistrust poetic language, and in *Epilogue*, she explored, with the help of other artists, how language might be purified. This would become the obsession which dominated the rest of her career.

To the extent which *Epilogue* was written by artists other than Riding, it provides important insight into a unique enclave of modernist thought and work. Comparisons to

other little magazines demonstrate some important differences, and maybe even more tellingly, striking similarities. Much has been made of Riding's daunting editorial control, and this study certainly will not deny that characteristic of Riding's working relationships. However, it should be noted that other editors of little magazines took advantage of this "perk" of the job as well. Margaret Anderson, editor of *The Little Review*, wrote in the introduction to the first editorial that she had created a magazine to suit her own interests (Marek, "Women" 66). Women were not the only editors taken to task for their domination. Hamilton jokes in *The Little Magazine: A Study of Six Editors* that the *Criterion* should be studied primarily for what it reveals about its famous editor, Eliot (67). And, as Hamilton notes of other little magazines, *Epilogue* also responded to political pressures as the 1930s wore on (127). The difference between *Epilogue* and other little magazines, however, lay in the intensity of Riding's editorial control. Whereas many little magazines were shaped by the political currents of the 1930s, Riding would use the political currents of the 1930s to promote her own theories about language's relationship to truth and art. This proves most striking in its final issue, *The World and Ourselves*, an analysis of which comprises Chapter Seven.

Little scholarly work exists which deals primarily with Riding's contributions as editor and collaborator in connection with Seizin Press. In fact, until the late 1990s, most literary critics dismissed Riding as a failed poet. In his article, "Laura Riding: A Modernist Puzzle," published in *American Scholar* in 1999, Victor Cassidy voices the standard assessment of Riding held by critics for much of the twentieth century. He writes that Riding was a disgruntled modernist poet whose reception never met her

dreams of success. Focusing on Riding's controversial disavowal of poetry in 1941, Cassidy dismisses Riding's action as a publicity stunt, failing to connect Riding's previous work at Seizin Press on language and meaning, such as *Epilogue* or *The World and Ourselves*, to her eventual abandonment of poetry (95). In a later book, *A Poetics of Impasse in Modern and Contemporary American Poetry*, Susan Schultz expresses the other widely held critical opinion of Riding: that she abandoned poetry because of loyalty to her husband Schuyler Jackson, a failed poet (47-77). Among critics who seriously studied Riding, this feminist perspective dominated Riding criticism for the last three decades of the twentieth century, obscuring the pivotal role her time at Seizin played in her decision to abandon poetry, and more importantly, in her development as a writer.

Refreshingly, critics such as Jerome McGann and Ella Zohar Ophir have recently begun to address both Riding's poetry and poetic disavowal in terms of her commitment to language's capacity for expressing literal truth, a perspective that finds textual support in both Riding's poetry and her prose work produced after 1941. In his article "Laura Riding Jackson and the Literal Truth," Jerome McGann tackles Riding's beliefs regarding the failure of language in poetry due to aesthetic concerns (form, syntax, metaphor, etc.) which she saw overpowering language's fidelity to truth. Through textual analysis of her poetry and later prose, McGann explains her aesthetic concerns and fascination with the literal truth. McGann contextualizes Jackson's work within modernism as an epistemological movement toward uncertainty and ambiguity, which he believed opened the door for the later language poets, securing Riding's importance as an influential modernist poet (472). However, as this study emphasizes, what opened the door for later

poets in many ways closed the door Riding. In “The Laura Riding Question: Modernism, Poetry and Truth,” Ophir uses cultural and social criticism to re-contextualize McGann’s assessment of Riding’s poetic and critical “commitments” to truth and language as more professionally and politically motivated than McGann admits in his analysis of her language theories and poetry. For Ophir, Riding’s strong commitment to truth represented her unique renegotiation of poetry’s place in the modern world, a world where the value of every artistic endeavor was suddenly in question (94). Both authors have produced a body of work regarding the motivation for and complexity of Riding’s decision to disavow poetry which has reopened the door to serious study of Riding as a writer.

Of the scholarly work which deals explicitly with Riding’s role as editor of *Seizin* Press, there appear to be two evaluations of Riding’s success. Some scholars, such as Joyce Wexler in her article “*Epilogue: How Poetic Authority Became Authoritarian,*” have stated that Laura Riding’s dominating presence as chief editor during such projects as *Epilogue* proved the downfall of *Seizin* Press (133). This evaluation, though an accurate description of Riding’s editorial style, neglects to figure in the actual causes of the press’s demise, while providing an unsatisfactory explanation for Riding’s behavior. Other critics, such as Jane Marek in *Women Editing Modernism*, consider Riding’s efforts with *Seizin* as a welcome example of strong feminine editorial control in what was traditionally a male dominated industry (100). While the positive press helps Riding’s rediscovery in this century, Marek’s glancing praise lacks the textual and literary criticism necessary in order to legitimate Riding as an influential Modernist editor.

Marek also neglects the fact that many little magazines and small presses besides *Seizin* had women at the helms. For example, Margaret Anderson ran *The Little Review* in Chicago, and Harriet Monroe championed *Poetry* for two decades, both magazines instrumental in establishing Modernist taste. Then of course, there was Virginia Woolf and the Hogarth Press. To focus solely on Laura Riding's time at *Seizin* as a victory for female literati misses two important points. One, women played a much bigger role in the modernist era than traditionally understood, and two, Laura Riding's work as editor and collaborator at *Seizin* press cannot be merely described as a success or a failure. To reduce our assessment in this manner marginalizes the importance of the philosophical shifts Riding experienced in her poetic sensibilities, and in turn, those shifts effects on production at her press.

Ultimately, neither critical perspective of Riding's time at *Seizin* Press addresses Riding's language theories in relation to her role as editor and collaborator in *Seizin* Press productions. This is partly due to the general lack of criticism concerning this period of her career and partly due to the feminist or biographical nature of the criticism which does exist. The critical gap this study seeks to close involves evaluating how Riding's developing theory of language affected her role as editor of major works at *Seizin*, particularly the little magazine, *Epilogue*, as well as collaborative projects such as *The Life of the Dead* and *The World and Ourselves*. This evaluation will examine specific works by Riding from a linguistic perspective in order to complicate her impact on the literary canon beyond her currently accepted status as feminist heroine and poetic pariah. Beyond revivifying a neglected area of Riding studies, the exploration of Riding's career

as editor and collaborator of Seizin Press will, as promised earlier, reveal a specific mode of modernism in its artistic rigor and moral exactitude

Laura Riding Jackson wrote in *The Telling* in 1972 that, "We know we are explainable, and not explained. Many of the lesser things concerning us have been told but the greater things have not been told; and nothing can fill their place" (9). Many of what Riding might have considered the lesser details of her life have been covered by literary historians and critics over the past two decades since her death. Her poetry and her stunning disavowal of it occupy most of the critical articles devoted to Riding. Yet we know from her post-1941 work that both her poetry and her decision to abandon it were always merely consequences of her larger, "greater" concerns: language and its potential for truth. In studying Riding's work at Seizin Press as editor and collaborator, Riding's beliefs about the "greater" things as well as her contributions to the late modernist period become clearer.

Chapter 2: Small Presses in the Modernist Era: A Brief History of the Seizin Press

The story of the small press movement in literary studies is the story of the growing accessibility of technology to the amateur or lay person complicated by the contingent economic and aesthetic concerns such access created. Seizin, however much its history deviated from other private presses in its remote location and small production period, was still subject to these pressures. Advances in the printed arts during the mid-19th century made private, independent publishing possible for a growing population of enterprising literati. Whereas William Blake might be viewed as the father of the movement, painstakingly crafting his illuminated volumes without the aid of a sophisticated hand press, William Morris continued Blake's tradition in the late Victorian era, establishing with Kelmscott Press a modern prototype of the independent author and publisher.

Morris provides a fine example of the "man against the world" press through his work at Kelmscott. Established in 1890, Kelmscott represented the last major publishing venture of Morris's life, and he began it as an effort of further separation from his already separatist work at the Commonweal (Miller 12). A long time member of socialist circles, Morris experienced the full paradox of writing, publishing, and marketing socialist philosophy through capitalist means. Elizabeth Carolyn Miller sums up Morris's

conundrum in her article “William Morris, Print Culture, and the Politics of Aestheticism” when she asks:

If Aestheticism is defined conventionally by its insistence on the autonomy of art and the isolation of individual consciousness ‘each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of the world,’ as Walter Pater put it, and, consequently, by inwardness, reflexivity, and detachment from socio-political reality, was Morris its adversary or unwitting proponent? (1)

Everyone in the fine or small press movement of the 19th and early 20th centuries operated under the tension created between these two poles of liberal individualism and socialist rebellion whether they consciously chose to accept their positions or not. Morris’s unacknowledged scapegoat seems to have been his aesthetic ideals. Those ideals excused his anti-socialist behavior expressed through the high selectivity and obsessive attention to detail which caused Kelmscott Press productions to be rejected by Morris’s socialist connections (Miller 1). In his devotion to an aesthetic ideal to the frustration of an economic and political agenda, Morris prefigured the age of modernist small presses to come, and in particular, Laura Riding. For while Riding’s domineering editorial style may not have been the cause of the press’s demise, her unwavering dedication to a belief of art’s obligation to truth through language would gradually come to dwarf all other considerations of practice or theory at the press.

If Morris provides a touchstone along the path of independent press development, then Virginia and Leonard Woolf’s Hogarth Press may serve as a valid contemporary comparison for Seizin’s environment and production. Although quite different from Seizin in its production scope and English location, Hogarth also operated within and because of a circle of intelligentsia drawn to the promise of independent publishing and

the Woolfs' combined literary charisma, much like Seizin. In his article "Cultural Work and Friendship Work: The Case of 'Bloomsbury'", David Morgan makes a compelling argument for considering the literary impact of the Woolfs and their press in anthropological terms. His use of the term "network" to describe the "fuzzy . . . indefinite" relationships among the members of the Bloomsbury groups holds particular poignancy for a discussion of patterns of influence at Seizin. "Bloomsbury was not a group in the sense of a clearly bounded entity. [It was] a fairly dense clustering of relationships . . . or, alternatively, a particularly close knit-network, close knit in that each was known directly to the other and the relationship between these members were frequent and direct," Morgan writes (21). The relationships of the members of Seizin's circle of influence share the same flexible quality as those at Bloomsbury. Authors and artists joined and worked and left with little regularity. Frequently, artists lived with Riding and Graves, partaking in an intense "direct" relationship with their editors. One important difference separates the Seizin community from the Bloomsbury group. Whereas relationally the Bloomsbury group operated as a series of clusters, Seizin Press's network of relationship might be viewed as a wheel, with Laura Riding as its hub.

Although this dissertation encompasses works written during the Seizin Press period and not just works published by Seizin Press, it would be remiss to not discuss the details of the printing operation of the actual Seizin Press. The press operated in London for roughly two years under Riding's direction that it should only publish "necessary books by particular people." In that time, it produced three volumes. The first Seizin, Riding's *Love as Love, Death as Death* bore the number "one," and each subsequent

Seizin publication carried a number. This was a substantial (by small press terms) book of poetry composed of 64 pages, and the press published 175 copies—a significant number for a first run. Riding and Graves sent the typesetting out to a Monotype firm—a decision that sacrificed some independence for convenience but nonetheless allowed them to reset anything they deemed necessary once they received the plates. However, this still left much for two novices to handle. Hugh Ford’s account of the press documents their struggles. Once the pair received the plates, they had to soak the Batchelor hand-made paper to achieve a uniform printed effect on each page (386). The process was laborious and time-consuming. Graves’s biographer, Richard Percival Graves, records his great uncle describing the process, ““In 1927, I began learning to print on a hand press. In 1928, I continued learning to print”” (63).

The press used at Seizin was a Crown Albion, considered by most small printers to be the Cadillac of hand presses. The Albion press, of British manufacture, was an improvement over the Columbian press, an American invention, which had dominated the printing world for some time before the Albion emerged in 1824 (Moran 91). Thus, even though Riding and Graves used one of the best and most reliable models of hand presses available, the technology upon which they depended was still over 100 years old. Even in appearance, the Crown Albion press seemed old-fashioned and quaint. Four wooden legs composed the base of the frame, while an amalgamation of steel and wood (strategically assembled to provide a flat plane and a system of pulleys attached to a drum controlled by a handle) “punched” out the type one page at a time, like a giant, efficient manual typewriter. The process of printing with so much wood and steel on delicate

paper was fraught with difficulties. Tympan, mechanisms designed to modulate the impact of the letter type against the paper plate, could blow and the springs which provided the force with which the plate struck the drum could pop (Southward). Such accidents could result in damaged paper, damaged typeface, or both. The nostalgic independence of running a small press often came at the price of convenience and efficiency.

Seizin Two represented growth not only in printing skill but in the number of authors under the Seizin manifest. Gertrude Stein published *An Acquaintance with Description* with the press in 1929 (Ford 389). Interestingly enough, Graves' and Riding's biographers tell contradictory tales about the procurement of Stein's manuscript. According to Richard Percival Graves, the couple went abroad in the summer of 1928 to meet Stein. Stein, under the influence of Riding's irresistible sexuality, drummed up a small manuscript for them to use (63). Yet Elizabeth Friedmann tracks a more believable course of events in *A Mannered Grace: The Life of Laura Riding Jackson*. Riding and Stein, having become friends via mail after Riding's favorable portrait of Stein's poetry in *A Survey of Modernist Poetry*, decided to meet in person in the summer of 1928. Sometime between their initial meeting by correspondence and their first face-to-face meeting, the two found sufficient intellectual compatibility that they mutually decided that Stein should have *An Acquaintance with Description* printed by Seizin (112,120-121). By the time the two met in Paris in 1928, Seizin Two was well underway. Stein's book, like Riding's, sold for 11 s., 6 d., or about a dollar currently, and was distributed by the London bookseller William Bain (Mason 403).

Robert Graves' volume of poems published in 1929 rounded out the list of works published by Seizin while the press was located in London. Graves' work was short and little has been recorded by either Graves' biographer or Riding's about its production. Nineteen twenty-nine proved to be a pivotal year both personally and professionally for Riding and Graves which would result in the moving of the press. In the emotional and financial upheaval resulting from Graves' final separation from his wife Nancy and Riding's attempted suicide, the details surrounding the publication of Graves' *Poems 1929* (Ford 391) have been lost..

Seizin's London years provide an excellent opportunity to consider the production of the small press in historical and economic context. In his article, "Literary Culture and Literary Publishing in Inter-war Britain," Andrew Nash provides such context for not only small presses but larger firms as well. According to Nash's figures, Seizin books were pricey, even by small press standards. "In 1920 a new novel published at 8s. 6d. cost the equivalent of a fifth of the average weekly industrial wage, and non-fiction was priced even higher," he writes, suggesting that a Seizin production, typically priced between 7s. and 12s., was automatically priced beyond the means of the working public (327). Here is where the illusion of the small literary press movement as means to a purely socialist end breaks down, at least with regard to Seizin. Just as Morris' socialist connections found little use for his expensive and often elitist aesthetics, Seizin's target consumers were not political radicals or revolutionaries, a fact which Riding even exploited as the 1930s waned. Riding and Graves did not look for a large audience so much as a specific audience for their works, and the works of other Seizin authors. Such

prices, while off-putting to the masses, signaled to other literati that these works were serious by purposely placing these books out of the reach of circulating libraries and book clubs (327).

The intersection of politics, economics, and aesthetics re-emerges when one considers the pricing structure of Seizin productions. Riding and Graves priced their books out of reach of popular consumption and even beyond their ready-made audience of cultured elite raised on the boutique prices of the little presses of the 20s. Even more telling, when one considers the pricing structure of other small presses—take the Woolf’s Hogarth Press again—the figures suggest room in niche printing for the common man’s salary. A glance at the press’s 1931 summary shows a number of 1*s.* and 2*s.* books. A book of poetry, such as those by Lord Derwent or Joan Easdale, seemed to have sold for a standard 4*s* when published by Hogarth, unlike Riding’s *Love as Love, Death as Death*, which was roughly the same size, but sold for 11*s* 6*d.* Of course, the Woolfs ran a considerably larger operation than Riding and Graves, which no doubt afforded them the luxury of pricing for volume. However, even taking this into consideration, Seizin’s refusal to offer anything for less than 7*s* suggests a far more exclusionary policy than necessary in order to be considered a press which produced literature of the highest caliber, committed to both aesthetic excellence and, in many works, Ridings esoteric devotion to abstract truth. Hugh Ford provides a possible clue to Riding’s rationale for pricing her books as she did, and it relates to her understanding of possession in regards to Seizin Press. “[Riding] associated possession and the consequence of proprietary devotion with the principle of hospitality as a new (potential) dynamics of general human

behavior, extending from the field of personal possession,” he writes, describing Riding’s theory behind Seizin Press. In other words, the works printed by Seizin were more than literature; they were the gatekeepers to a new ideal. While Riding disdained the concept of the individual, she depended upon material possessions—i.e. books—to promulgate her point of view. The high cost of Seizin publications reflects Riding’s conflicting notions of the individual and his or her relation to language, literature, and art through the consumption of material objects as either free right or earned possession.

Majorca represented a fresh start for the press as well as its owners. A large island off the eastern coast of Spain, Majorca offered the couple a welcome reprieve from London’s cold and damp. Riding and Graves chose to settle in the tiny village of Deià for economic reasons, and by the spring of 1930, they had established their press, preparing a prospectus for would-be patrons (Baker 221). The press itself was located in their rental house, Casa Salerosa, and in part due to the intellectual buzz surrounding the press and in part due to the balmy island weather, Graves and Riding began receiving visitors. From 1930 until they left Majorca in 1936, the couple housed, entertained, and mentored a variety of artists, writers, and thinkers ranging from film maker Len Lye to mathematician Jacob Bronowski. Here is where an intellectual gathering resembling a Spanish Bloomsbury worked and produced the most significant of the Seizin Press productions. At the center of this ever-changing community of intelligentsia, Laura Riding functioned as both an editor and a collaborator. It is this circle of influence and creativity anchored by the Seizin Press itself which figures so prominently in Riding’s final years as a poet and in the crystallization of her language theories.

Seizin's rate of production increased several fold once moved to Majorca.

Whereas previously the press produced roughly one work a year, according to a 1931 press announcement, Seizin produced three works in late 1930 alone. The couple's friend Len Lye, the New Zealand film maker, gave them *No Trouble*, an experimental, epistolary, graphic work. Riding worked closely with Lye to set the pages, and this collaboration led to her own epistolary book, *Everybody's Letters* (Ford 393-395). Seizins Five and Six were by Riding and Graves respectively. *Though, Gently* and *To Whom Else?* were both short books of poems. Although both authors continued to publish work through major publishing houses in London, they took advantage of their ability to print small works without external oversight. This is apparent in Hugh Ford's description of *Though, Gently*:

Seizin Five might be described as a hand printer's dream. The poems were mostly short, allowing the placement of one and sometimes two on a page, and the prose passages, which alternated with the poems, were likewise brief. Seeing them thus arranged . . . and framed by spacious white borders is to appreciate one of the privileges available to the private press printer: the controlled arrangement of space so as to enhance the appearance of the printed word. (396)

However much the two owners of Seizin might have enjoyed printing others' works, there were clear advantages which private printing afforded their own work.

Not only did private printing create an environment in which the author or editor could choose typeface, paper quality and illustrations, but it allowed an author the flexibility to publish writing outside the most popular genre of the time, the novel. Nash describes how most libraries and book clubs would not purchase books which did not provide their consumers with the biggest "bang for the buck," or in other words, the

largest proportion of pages to cost. Therefore, books of short stories and poetry were often neglected (327). By printing their own works, Riding and Graves had the luxury of devoting a whole page to a poem and of publishing only the poems they wanted in a particular volume. Notoriously opposed to anthologies because of their wholesale approach to poetry, Riding and Graves could now present their poems in what they deemed to be the most artistically complete way, as members of a set in a single volume. Moreover, Riding could take some innovative risks with her genre bending prose, free to blend poetry and short story without concern for an outside publisher's page count demands.

The same press release that details Seizins Four, Five and Six also mentions Seizins Seven and Eight as forthcoming in summer of 1931. Riding published *Laura and Francisca*, a story poem representative of her genre experimentation, with a cover by Len Lye. Seizin Eight, mentioned in the flyer as *Of Others*, never materialized from Seizin Press. It was a collection of writings by Riding's acquaintances. Instead of editing and publishing the collection herself, Riding sent the work out to be published by another firm (Friedmann 203). It seemed the expense of running a private press had caught up with Graves and Riding at last. "There are not going to be any more Seizin books: it is altogether too expensive and time taking a business for us here . . ." Riding wrote her friend and collaborator Jacob Bronowski in 1933 ("Personal Letter to Jacob Bronowski," qtd in Friedmann 201) For Seizin Press, at least, the age of single-run, small press books was drawing to a close. Roderick Cave in *Private Presses* details some of the issues which consistently plagued Seizin books: "Change in size, change in paper used, italic

type that does not always match the roman with which it was used—but the work was by no means bad for two amateurs less interested in the medium than in the message . . .” (203). When one considers the conditions under which Riding and Graves produced these early Majorcan volumes, miles from the London suppliers on which they depended, the frustrations which led them to begin sending books out to print become clear. Thus, Seizin became one of many small publishing houses which, like Hogarth, depended at times on a larger printer for its copies (204). The trend reflects the growing commercial viability of these small presses during the late modernist period. Ironically, that commercial viability and the subsequent demand for larger runs of popular titles led to small presses’ dependence on large publishing houses, and in most cases, their demise.

After *Laura and Francisca*, the history of Seizin Press becomes considerably less straightforward as financial concerns compromised the independence of the press. In September of 1932, Riding and Graves entered into a mutually beneficial arrangement with a recently organized publishing firm Arthur Barker, Ltd. Under this new agreement, books printed by Seizin would bear the Seizin imprint but be distributed by Arthur Barker (Friedmann 201). For Riding, the most exciting prospect this relationship offered was Barker’s promise to publish her fledgling little magazine, *Epilogue*, also known as *The Critical Vulgate*. Yet after three years of collaborative effort, Barker turned down the first issue of *Epilogue* in 1935 (Baker 317). Barker’s aborted relationship with the press produced no joint works under the Seizin/Barker imprint. Hugh Ford in his history of the Seizin Press does not even mention Barker’s involvement. However, Barker’s interference with the press did result in a two year pause in the press’s production

schedule while the owners waited for definite word from Barker about various works. The chronological gap between (non-existent) Seizin Eight and the final Seizins belies the schedule predicted by the 1931 press release.

In 1935, Seizin press joined Constable and Company to produce the first issue of *Epilogue* (Ford 399). Other small presses, such as Nonesuch (a popular boutique press), had used Constable for printing support with great success (Cave 188). Graves agreed to pay the production costs, an arrangement which continued off and on for various Seizin/Constable titles (Baker 317). In addition to finally seeing *Epilogue* in print, Seizin saw eight other works to fruition in 1935 and 1936. Riding's *Progress of Stories* at last saw the light of day as well as her work *Convalescent Conversations*, published under the pseudonym of Madeleine Vara (Friedmann 550). Works by various Deià community members also debuted: Honor Wyatt's *The Heathen*, Tom Matthews' *The Moon's No Fool*, and an anonymous offering, *A Mistake Somewhere* (Baker 317). The Seizin imprint saw its first book of poems by a poet other than Robert Graves or Laura Riding, James Reeves' *The Natural Need*, as well as a novel by Graves, *Antigua*. Rounding out the list was a memoir from a German friend of Riding and Graves: Georg Schwarz's *Almost Forgotten Germany* (Baker 399). The bookseller William Bain continued to distribute the smaller runs of books for Seizin/Constable during this period (Mason 403). This interdependence of even a "private" press such as Seizin on multiple commercial entities such as Bain and Constable suggests a far more complex function of the small press than merely providing independence for the editor and author. Larger publishing

houses and distributors looked to small presses to provide access to an otherwise elite group of high-culture readers.

Even though the actual printing of books for public distribution by the physical press known as Seizin ceased in 1935, works published jointly by Seizin and Constable bore the Seizin Press imprint. These works still underwent Riding's editorial scrutiny in the workshop at Deià. However, in the summer of 1936, even that last vestige of a publishing house disappeared. Riding and Graves left their Majorcan home on August 2, 1936, in the wake of the Spanish Civil War. On the British battleship which carried them back to Great Britain, they were allowed only one suitcase each (Friedmann 284). The old 1874 Crown Albion press stayed behind. The last book published to bear the Seizin/Constable imprint was Riding's *A Trojan Ending* in 1937 (Ford 402). By that point, the press had long since been abandoned, so the imprint existed only as an abstract reminder of a defunct entity.

However, the spirit of Seizin—encapsulated in the works published by Seizin, Seizin/Constable, and by the Deià community which surrounded the press—remained with Riding, perhaps because it had been driven by her unflinching artistic and moral standards. Even in exile, she began her most ambitious collaborative project to date: *The World and Ourselves, or Epilogue IV* (Friedmann 299) Published in 1938 by a London firm, Chatto and Windus, the work represents the end of the Seizin Press era much more so than the physical abandonment of the press in Majorca because it would be last time Riding would call upon the former community of artists to explore their commitment to language, truth, and ultimately, to her.

The decision to entrust the manuscript to Chatto and Windus rather than Constable may indicate Riding's at least tacit acknowledgement that *The World and Ourselves* would prove difficult to publish and market. By 1937, the firm had handled the works of many controversial modernist authors, such as T. F. Powys, Richard Aldington, and Wyndham Lewis (Nash 339). Chatto and Windus's association with Lewis, a longtime acquaintance and antagonist of Riding, no doubt drew her attention to the publisher. Chatto and Windus ultimately had the patience and facilities to see the final issue of *Epilogue* to completion.

In *The World and Ourselves*, we witness the culmination of Riding's editorial and collaborative experience during her time at Seizin Press. Her dedication to a theory of language which, at least in her mind, would revivify the way art, nationality, and morality related to each other and humanity as a whole provided the impetus for a continuation of t Seizin's presence long after the physical press was abandoned. While her work on *The World and Ourselves* suggests that her overbearing editorial style had become outright domination, one cannot help but wonder if, contrary to Wexler's assessment, Seizin survived as long as it did because of Riding's relentless spirit rather than in spite of it.

Another possible cause for Seizin's demise might not be as dramatic as the Spanish Civil War or Riding's delusions of grandeur. Simple market pressures which had existed in the late Victorian Age and helped give birth to the Modernist wave of fine printing began to disappear by the early 1930s. Andrew Nash discusses a reconciliation between what Q. D. Leavis had famously labeled "high-brow" and "low-brow" literary tastes:

The transformation of the Hogarth press into a commercial publisher, the appointment of T.S. Eliot to the board of Faber & Gwyer, and the publication of a trade edition of Joyce's *Ulysses* are examples of how the work of modernist writers was drawn back into the main channels of publishing and became more widely available to the reading public. (Nash 335)

The need for small, privately owned presses to supply authors with publishing venues safe from moralizing book clubs and libraries decreased in the wake of the economic depression and growing acceptance of High Modernism's avant-garde into the old guard. Seizin could go two directions: toward commercial viability, like Hogarth and its 4s standard editions, or end its existence as an independent, small press.

As I write this, there is a note on the on-line bulletin board for Robert Graves's website which states that the Crown Albion Press used by Riding and Graves some 80 years ago has been replaced on its original blocks in Canellun, their former house on Majorca. This serves as a reminder that Seizin Press had another life beyond Laura Riding. When Graves returned to Spain after World War II, he began again to hand print works under the title of the New Seizin Press. The Crown Albion press remains a revered item for Graves's fans and scholars. In this sense, the well-preserved Seizin Press went a third direction, its memory and productivity reduced to a literary artifact, like the books it produced.

If works produced by and around Seizin Press represent a certain type of modernism, then Laura Riding in her role as editor and collaborator serves as the architect of this particular modernist construction. Studying works from this era in Riding's career not only reveals information about a neglected period of Riding's life, but uncovers a branch of modernism as well, with far reaching influences into the post-

modern period. The press, begun out of nostalgia and rebellion, became an instrument of clarification for Riding, whose involvement with the press would become the proving ground for her dedication to truth above aesthetic, economic, and political concerns, a dedication which would eventually lead to her disavowal of poetry. Despite that dramatic epilogue to her poetic career, I would argue that Riding's importance to the modernist movement lay beyond her eventual denial of the modernist movement and the poetry she produced as part of it, and instead lay in her work at Seizin. Before she could reject her art, she first tried to claim and reclaim it through controlling the means of its production at Seizin Press.

Chapter 3: The Poetic Road to Seizin: Language and Control in Riding's Evolving Rhetorical Poetics

The intellectual community at Seizin was far from the first artistic network in which Riding had taken part. Before Seizin, Riding, Robert Graves, Nancy Nicholson, the infamous Geoffrey Phibbs, and T. H. Lawrence, among others, had loosely formed professional and personal associations with varying degrees of success in London. In New York, before her long relationship with Graves began, Riding ran with Hart Crane and met Edna St. Vincent Millay. Yet the Fugitive group which Riding associated with during the early and mid-1920s was the first intellectual community in which Riding officially participated, and in many ways, the most significant for its impact on Riding's later career, particularly her conception and creation of the artistic community at Seizin. *The Fugitive* provided an early sounding board for the linguistic theories which would not only drive a wedge between Riding and her fellow Fugitives but form the basis for many of Seizin's projects.

The Fugitives, the southern literary association which sprang up around *The Fugitive* magazine published at Vanderbilt University, operated a thousand miles away from Riding's collegiate stomping grounds at Cornell, and even further away, philosophically, from the traditional, domestic life she adopted after Cornell with her first husband, Louis Gottschalk. Nonetheless, Riding's poetry caught the attention of

Fugitives Robert Penn Warren, Allen Tate, and most notably, the Fugitives' nominative leader, John Crowe Ransom. Beyond Riding's daring modernist poetry, what really drew the Fugitives to Riding, and vice versa, was a mutual concern for language as it was used in poetry. Through her work with Tate and Ransom, Riding's beliefs about language's relationship to truth through art began to form. Studying her time with this little magazine creates an understanding of her initial reliance upon metaphor as a cornerstone for her poetry while simultaneously observing her growing suspicion of metaphor as an instrument of truth. Such an understanding becomes paramount for appreciating Riding's decisions as editor and collaborator at Seizin Press.

The idea that rhetorical poetics involves lying haunted Riding's early poetry and informed her prose in her later career. Years later, writing under her married name Laura (Riding) Jackson, she reiterated this belief that poetry involves lying in her prose explanation for her 1941 disavowal of poetry:

When . . . I comprehended that poetry had no provision in it for the ultimate practical attainment of that rightness of word that is truth, but led on ever only to a temporizing less-than-truth (the lack eked out with illusions of truth produced by physical word-effects), I stopped. (*The Failure* 178)

And she did. With only a few exceptions, Laura Riding stopped writing poetry for fifty years from 1941 until her death in 1991. Riding's growing certainty that poets function as liars within the literary community was literal and sincere. For Riding, this suspicion began long before her time at Seizin Press, but did not become certainty until then.

Grounding a discussion of Riding's language theories in analysis of her poetry makes clear her shifting point of view. This shift in turn leads us ultimately to young Laura

Riding who constructed the Seizin Press community, a young woman whose experience within artistic communities began with the Fugitives.

At the root of Riding's quarrel with poetry lies the classic Platonic/Aristotelian divide over the obligation of poetic language to literal truth. Whereas Plato threw the poets out of the Republic for their inability to properly represent truth through *poesis*, Aristotle redeemed the art in his *Poetics*: ". . . [P]oetry is something more scientific and serious than history, because poetry tends to give general truths while history gives particular facts" (1451a). Rather than seeing *poesis* as always already failed in delivering true *imitatio*, Aristotle changed the stasis of the debate between truth and language and created a new situation where truth was no longer bound by literal representation (history or philosophy) but rather by possibility. In this realm, a poet's function outranked that of the philosopher because he performed in the liminal space between literal truth and aesthetic representation, a midwife of poetic expression.

In her career as a poet throughout the 1920s and 30s, Riding both celebrated and questioned this role of poet as truth's midwife. Certainly, by her Seizin years, Riding had moved beyond simple celebration to address the more complex role of the poet as both liar and revealer of truth. Her poem, "The Courtesies of Authors" provides an example of her belief in the poet's ability to reveal truth to her reader, even if it means rejection:

Now that you have read of,
You will want to see.
I can only take you to the spot
And let you not see.
Then you may choose freely
Between my book and your eye.
You will undoubtedly prefer your eye

To not see for yourself. (*Collected Poems* 173)

And yet the lines also suggest Riding's awareness of the limitations of language to fully entrance the reader. This "failure" of poetic language would eventually lead Riding toward the Platonic conception of poetry, one in which the poet merely throws up shadows which obscure the "real things." Riding's conception of poetic language as inherently misleading lay in direct contrast to an Aristotelian awareness of the possibilities of language through its metaphoric uses. In fact, of all rhetorical devices, it is metaphor specifically which Riding came to regard with the most suspicion, the very device which Aristotle praises so highly in his *Poetics*. But Riding's change of opinion regarding the legitimacy of the poet's function cannot be completely understood solely within the context of classical rhetoric. Rather, using classical rhetoric, one can make connections among Riding and her contemporaries among the Fugitives such as John Crowe Ransom and Allan Tate. When considered within the context of rhetoric, both classic and modern, analysis of Riding's poetry provides insight into the influence her shifting rhetorical poetics exerted upon her roles as collaborator and editor at Seizin Press. She sought to wield a similar control over her projects at Seizin press as she exhibited over her own poetry.

Riding published nearly 30 poems in this little magazine during 1924 and 1925. Ransom found Riding's early poetry so impressive that he proposed she become an honorary member of the Fugitives, a traditionally all-male group (Stewart 82). Her impact on the group remains greater than any other woman with whom they associated. When Riding died in 1991, *The Washington Post* declared her the "last surviving

Fugitive.” Yet the Fugitives and Riding gradually became ill at ease with one another. Some may blame that on Riding’s contentious affair with Tate, and while interpersonal relationships certainly hinder any groups’ interactions, they do not explain the fundamental differences which resulted in an impasse between Riding and Ransom in particular. Whereas Ransom believed in the possibility of poetry to elevate through mimesis, Riding grew to believe in the duty of poetry to communicate absolute truth. Despite Ransom’s affinity for Riding’s poetry, the two disagreed over the role of rhetoric in poetic language as well as Riding’s brashness and overbearing manner (Stewart 82-83). Riding’s most active time with the Fugitives ended officially in 1924, but she continued to correspond with them until after her move abroad in 1926.

Of all the Fugitives, it was Allan Tate with whom she shared the most contemporary rhetorical and personal ground. An example of their poetic affinity also demonstrates Riding’s and Ransom’s opposition. Both Tate and Riding had already begun to shift from an Aristotelian understanding of language to a more objective sensibility. For example, both Riding and Tate believed that the poem was a whole, indivisible unit of meaning, and that a poet’s chief occupation should be to produce this object of meaning as a holistic work of art, impervious to analysis and dissection. During the early *Fugitive* days, however, to what extent Riding influenced Tate and Tate influenced Riding is difficult to determine. What is clear is that by the time Riding was working with the Fugitives, she espoused the belief in the poem as achieving its own independent, objective authority. John Stewart describes Tate’s philosophy in his book *The Burden of Time: The Fugitives and Agrarians* that Tate and Riding both espoused the

belief that a poem functioned as a sacred whole, and therefore could not be dissected (Stewart 347). Poems transmitted truth through osmosis rather than explication. As Ransom pointed out in argument with both Riding and Tate, this belief amounted to idolatry of the poem, for, through it, the poem achieved mystical status (Stewart 82). And just as icons and fetishes serve to connect the worshipper with another entity or world, the poem as talisman transports the reader. In her early poetic career, partly thanks to shared language theories with Tate, Riding and understood poetics as language in the service of the poet's will to affect his or her reader through this act of transportation. The poet creates these transfiguring qualities of the poem through elevated language, specifically, metaphor, a literary device upon which Riding depended but still mistrusted. Her perception and employment of metaphor provides a concrete example through which to describe her fundamental split with Ransom.

Of all the available means by which to elevate language, Aristotle located the seed of genius in the metaphor, perhaps the most celebrated of poetic devices: "By far the greatest thing is the use of metaphor. That alone cannot be learnt; it is the token of genius. For the right use of metaphor means an eye for resemblances" (1458b). From this Aristotelian description of metaphor as dependent upon resemblances, our modern notion of metaphor as a transfer of meaning from one object to another grows. Metaphor suggests movement between systems. I believe it is no coincidence that in order to achieve the poetic function of transportation so highly valued by classical and contemporary rhetoricians, one must employ a device based upon the transference of

meaning, i.e. metaphor. And it is this transfer of meaning that both fascinated and repulsed Riding as she moved from her *Fugitive* period to her Seizin Press period.

Riding's continual editing of her own work provides us with an ideal opportunity to observe the shifts in her rhetorical allegiance and her subsequent distrust of metaphor as her career progressed. The following poems were either published in the southern literary magazine *The Fugitive* or the anthology in which that magazine culminated *Fugitive: An Anthology of Verse*. Because of this singular connection to a specific modernist style, the poems' original forms suggest a unified aesthetic, and their subsequent alterations in Riding's 1938 *Collected Poems* provide a similar touch point for comparison. Analysis of Riding's rhetorical poetics, specifically metaphors, and their later excisions speaks of Riding's changing poetic ideal which certainly influenced her interactions with her poetic peers. By analyzing these pairs of poems, we observe Riding's shifting poetics as well as professional transformation from *Fugitive* contributor to editor and author at Seizin press.

The first specimen, "The Poet's Corner," was originally published in *The Close Chaplet* (1926) by Adelphi and Hogarth in the U. S. and Great Britain respectively. This poem's connection with *The Fugitive* comes later, when Donald Davidson, the editor of the magazine and a long-time colleague of Riding, requested that she submit some poems for a new anthology by former *Fugitive* authors. Riding obliged because the anthology fit her high standards for a literary anthology, being more than a simple condensation of previous works, and representing the spirit of the now defunct literary magazine.

The poem, as found in *The Fugitive* anthology, consisted of 28 lines arranged in three stanzas and opens metaphorically in Yeats' rag and bone shop², situating poetry within the context of mortality, and imagining its transcendence beyond that mortality:

Here where the end of bone is no end of song
And the earth is bedecked with immortality
In what was poetry
And now is pride beside
And nationality,

Here is a battle with no bravery
But if the coward's tongue has gone
Swording his own lusty lung.
Listen if there is victory
Written into a library
Waving the books in banners
Soldierly at last, for the lines
Go marching on, delivered of the soul. (87)

To read this as merely praise for the immortal possibilities of poetry misses Riding's deeper ambivalence about language, ambivalence which was already present even as she began her poetic career in the early 1920s. While the "end of bone is no end of song" does recognize the transcendent qualities of poetry, Riding questions the value of those qualities in the latter half of the stanza by shifting the initial metaphor from one which celebrates the continued usefulness of organic material in the service of poetry (paper made from bone becomes song) to one in which poetry surpasses mortal transience, seeming to abandon human input altogether. Military language such as "battle," "victory," and "soldierly" leads to the final line of the stanza as poetry goes "marching on, delivered of the soul." Certainly, these military metaphors color the initial

² The first line is evocative of Yeats' poem "The Circus Animal's Desertion," "Now that my ladder's gone,/ I must lie down where all the ladders start/In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart" (lms. 38-40).

comparison of poetry as the re-invigoration of old bones. Something almost sinister emerges, an army of undead language which marches forth unrestrained by its creator's intent, delivered both by the soul, and thus, free from the soul that delivered it.

In the first stanza, Riding's use of metaphor embodies Aristotle's definition of metaphor as transference (1457a). Her comparison of the material process of paper-making with the transcendence of the poet's song transfers the quality of immortality to the poem through negation of the bone's material mortality. Thus the martial metaphors of the latter half of the stanza gain power through the shared connotation of perpetual life and energy. Whereas at one time in the history of rhetoric, the poet might have controlled the poem, in the modernist era, it was the poem increasingly, and not the poet, which became fetishized and thus, powerful. Therefore, the poem, which is immortal, "march[es] on," leaderless, soulless. Riding's caution from the preface of *First Awakenings* seems relevant, for in a world where supreme authority is invested in text, one must be careful which text is declared authoritative.

When one examines Riding's metaphors from this first stanza in light of modernist rhetorical theory such as I. A. Richards', Riding seems imminently aware of the concerns with language and metaphor which shaped linguistics and rhetoric in the 1920s and beyond. From I. A. Richards' groundbreaking philosophical collaboration with C. K. Ogden, *The Meaning of Meaning*, the Fugitives became concerned with the relationship of words to meaning (Stewart 347). Riding no doubt absorbed some of this rhetorical theory. In her construction of a new system of comparison by combining older notions of bones as paper with military allusion, Riding presages Richards' later concept

that meanings change in context with one another. In 1936, he would write in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*:

To account for understanding and misunderstanding, to study the efficiency of language and its conditions, we have to renounce, for a while, the view that words just have their meanings and that what a discourse does is to be explained as a composition these meanings—as a wall can be represented as a composition of its bricks. . . . Bricks . . . hardly mind what other things they are put with. Meanings mind intensely (121).

Riding exploits this property of language as the first metaphor within the first stanza of the poem—“Here where the end of bone is no end of song” (87, 1)—lends its connotations of death and materiality to the second metaphor of power and dominance. The shared object of bones from both systems, one as a material for creation and one as the result of death in battle, establishes the connection for a larger metaphoric transfer, from one system to another, thus doubling the figurative meaning behind her images. When considered in light of another of Richards’ theories—the tenor and vehicle description of metaphors³—Riding creates extra tension by doubling the tenors affected by the vehicle “bones.”

Again, in the second stanza, Riding begins by employing metaphor in the classic Aristotelian sense, transferring traits from genus to species, or as I. A. Richards might say, tenor to vehicle. Here, Riding describes the fate of the words that soldiered on in the first stanza:

And happily may they rest beyond
Suspicion now, the incomprehensibles
Traitorous in such talking

³ Richards describes the transfer of meaning between words in a metaphor as that of a vehicle (the word receiving the transfer of meaning) and a tenor (the word contributing its characteristics). In “The Poet’s Corner,” the transfer would look like this: mortality (t) = bones (v) = military prowess (t) (Bilsky 152).

As chattered over their countries' boundaries.
The graves are gardened and the whispering
Stops at the hedges, there is singing
Of it in the ranks, there is a hush
Where the ground has limits
And the rest is loveliness. (87)

Words, once they have marched into immortality, become inviolable, in a way which, ironically when compared with the first stanza, resembles death. Whereas the first stanza relied on the double metaphoric system of bones both as product and symbol of death, this stanza relies on the old adage, "Safe as the grave." Words now "rest beyond suspicion," as their "graves are gardened" and "whispering stops at the hedges." Invulnerable, hallowed, and hollowed words define a dogma of "loveliness." Beauty places the poem beyond question, and simultaneously, beyond life. Through the dominant metaphor of the second stanza, the immortality achieved by the poem in stanza one becomes static and stultifying.

In the final stanza, Riding reconciles the two dominant metaphorical schemes in the first two stanzas by narrowing the focus from language at large to an individual's relationship to poetry:

And loveliness?
Death has an understanding of it
Loyal to many flags
And is a silent ally of any country
Beset in its mortal heart
With immortal poetry. (88)

The words "flags," "ally," and "country" recall the words from the first two stanzas: "nationalities" and "countries' boundaries." Left in their original context, these words fit within the dominant metaphorical scheme of their respective stanzas. "Nationalities"

further illuminates the combative tone of the martial language in the first stanza. Likewise, “countries’ boundaries” suggests the Shakespearean “undiscovered country⁴,” simultaneously conjuring death and immortality to heighten the “Safe as the grave” metaphor of the second stanza. However, the third stanza recalls these “citizenship” images in order to drill down to a single subject: the lone poet. The shift comes in the nouns and pronouns. Riding immediately juxtaposes the statement that “death” is “loyal to many flags” with the statement that “death” is the “silent ally of any country.” What was plural becomes singular. What was vague becomes specific. The individual mortality of each person—each poet—supersedes the generalizing nature of the previous images. To reinforce the private sense of the metaphorical system at work in stanza three—that the nation is the individual—Riding uses the singular pronoun “its” to identify the singular ownership of the mortal heart. Her awareness of the power of context to change the meanings of words predicts Richards’ “Proper Meaning Superstition,” which states that words’ meanings are only as stable as their contexts (122).

Riding relies on interrelated metaphors and shifting contextual meanings to express the central themes of “The Poet’s Corner”—the immortality of language and the mortality of the individual speaker—in its 1928 form. Her work in many ways anticipates the theories of linguists and rhetoricians of the 1930s, especially Tate and Richards. Yet by the 1930s, Riding was attempting to move beyond the use of metaphor in order to describe language. In the 1938 edition of her *Collected Poems*, she presents a

⁴ *Hamlet*, III.1.86

much-edited version of the poem “The Poet’s Corner.” By excising over two-thirds of the poem, Riding cuts more than words; she cuts metaphors. Just as her use of metaphor and exploitation of words’ slippery meanings in the first version of “The Poet’s Corner” indicate her awareness of and attention to rhetorical theory, her omissions of the same in the second version speak to her growing distrust of poetic language, particularly metaphor. Riding’s eventual language theories, the ones which shaped both the community and productions of Seizin Press, take her 180 degrees from theorists such as I. A. Richards in their results, despite their similar beginnings in the 1920s.

In the early 1930s, Laura Riding found herself at interesting cross-roads with I. A. Richards. Though long aware of his influence in her sphere of poetry and thought, she had never encountered the man until she came to London in 1926 as Robert Graves’ co-author for such projects as *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* and *A Pamphlet Against Anthologies*. With the Fugitives a continent away, she reconsidered Richards’ language theories, and that reconsideration resulted in a split which may have been hastened by personal as well as intellectual motives. In 1931, Richards had perpetuated a misunderstanding by his student William Empson that *Survey* had been written solely by Robert Graves, an oversight which had been keenly felt and sharply redressed by both Graves and Riding (Friedmann 97). It was only the beginning of a long and contentious relationship. As Richards’ theories veered more and more toward supporting the instability of sign and signifier, as embraced by the New Criticism as developed and purported by the Fugitives, Riding believed ever more steadfastly in the stable, consistent meaning of words (98).

The significant changes in “The Poet’s Corner” were concurrent with Riding’s reassessment of Richards, and first surfaced when Riding included the poem in her 1930 volume *Poems: A Joking Word* (Friedmann “Regarding”). In preparing what was to be her final book of poetry in 1938, Riding maintained these changes, which drastically cut “The Poet’s Corner” down to eight lines in one stanza, and changed the title from singular to plural. The single stanza version of “The Poets’ Corner” preserves some of the figurative language of the original, but few of the complex metaphorical systems:

Soldierly at last, for the lines
Go marching on.
And happily may they rest beyond
Suspicion now, the incomprehensible—
It was mere loveliness.
And loveliness?
Death has an understanding of it
Loyal to many flags.

Riding preserves the martial metaphor comparing words to soldiers who march, but without the “bone” reference, death no longer directly connects with language. Thus, the metaphor loses the soulless quality of the original image of “word soldiers.” Death does figure into the poem still, but this time only as it applies to the universal experience of the individual poet in lines six through eight, perfectly preserved from the original.

However, in this poem, Riding depends much more upon arrangement and diction than metaphor. By repositioning these lines to the end of the stanza rather than the beginning where they appear in the original, Riding places the emphasis on the central theme of this new poem: “loveliness” and its role in poetry. Her most striking and succinct phrase describes directly rather than figuratively the language of the “soldierly lines”—“It was

mere loveliness.” In this second incarnation of “The Poets’ Corner,” beauty becomes a liability rather than a guarantee of immortality. Not only does Riding qualify “loveliness” with “mere,” but the final image of the poem links loveliness directly with death. Although the original poem made this connection as well, Riding’s repositioning of the lines to the end of the 1938 version increases their impact, and completely omits the original’s quasi-hopeful message that immortal poetry comforts mortal poets.

The missing complex metaphorical systems of the second version of the poem speak through their absence about Riding’s shifting rhetorical poetics. For Riding, metaphor became dangerous for precisely the reason that Richards outlines in his aforementioned *Proper Meaning Superstition*. She writes in “The Matter of Metaphor. Addenda⁵,” that,

There is to consider how the resort to metaphorical devices of expression, in poetry, to an extent beyond the customs of the linguistic usual, seems, can seem to effect a greater exactitude of expression than is possible within the usual linguistic modes: the metaphorical can seem peculiarly fitted to effect the precision of expression that makes for *truth*. (*The Failure* 194)

Riding saw metaphors as uniquely seductive examples of poetic language which led readers away from the central purpose of poetry—truth—precisely because readers invested metaphors with too much faith. Similarly, but with far different implications, Richards also expresses his frustration with rhetoricians’ insistence on words having a one-to-one ratio with meaning, hence the “Proper Meaning Superstition”:

That is, the common belief—encouraged officially by what lingers on in the school manuals as Rhetoric—that a word has a meaning of its own independent of and controlling its use and the purpose for which it should be uttered . . . It is only

⁵ This was a supplementary essay to “The Matter of Metaphor” which appeared in her book *Rational Meaning*.

a superstition when it forgets that the stability of the meaning of a word comes from the constancy of the contexts that give it its meaning. (122)

The too literal interpretation of language and the overdependence upon static meanings of words concerned both Riding and Richards, but for opposite reasons. Richards believed in the elasticity of language to change and grow depending on context and usage, and was therefore disappointed in a rhetoric which sought to limit the possibilities of language. Riding, on the other hand, believed that words did have concrete stable meanings which could be quantified and used to determine a literal notion of truth. Any use other than that seemed a waste of a precious resource. Poetry, with its metaphors and figures, could no longer be trusted as a means to pure truth. Riding's decades long determination of poetry's viability as an instrument of Truth would culminate in her work at Seizin Press, where she could exert complete control over not only her poetry but that of others' as well.

A poem which seems to suggest this mistrust of metaphor in its very title, "Lying, Spying," also appears in a *Fugitive* publication as well as the 1938 *Collected Poems*. Laura Riding Gottschalk published four poems in the December, 1924, edition of *The Fugitive*, among them "Lying Spying." Her poetic output at *The Fugitive* would continue to increase until the magazine's demise in December of 1925. "Lying Spying" comes at the end of Riding's four poem set and includes over forty lines arranged in 10 stanzas.

Structurally and thematically, the poem works like a Romantic elegy. Riding establishes a six line stanza which she maintains with relative regularity when compared with her other poems in the issue. This regularity feels almost imitative of classic

elegies, such as Gray's "Country Churchyard," and yet the words suggest parody rather than strict adherence to the form:

Lying, spying what men say of dead men,
What men say of me—
I can't remember anything.
Why can't I remember
What I alive knew of death
I dead know nothing of?) (1-5)

The opening lines establish a deceased speaker bearing witness to the unfolding poem, in which other unnamed speakers discuss the dead man while gazing at his tombstone. In a move further reminiscent of Gray's ode to the humble workman, Riding labels her speakers as parson, cobbler, and mercer, even drawing on the antiquated term for fabric merchant to heighten the eighteenth century feel of the poem.

The poem shifts in point of view from first to third person as each of the three secondary characters recalls John's life. Riding records only the parson's exact words:

"John was a man of trouble,
Suffered life like a dear disease,
Cowered before cures that might be death—"

(Hush, death is the word!)

"Love was a light headache,
Just the right headache for his condition--"
(Oh love, love, love, love, love . . .)

"God he refused as antitoxin and medicinal,
Oh John, John, John, John, John . . ." (7-15)

The words separated with parentheses from the parson's speech, lines 10 and 13, suggest the speaker's commentary upon his eulogy, yet these words fall on deaf, non-dead ears.

Riding explains that the parson, cobbler and mercer cannot continue further their “lying, spying” (27). The dead keep their secrets, even from themselves:

Damned dishonorable honorables
That won't be spying on yourselves.
Will you never, never, never,
Get up, get up,
And find yourselves and all the selves,
All together, all together,
Not a thing to tell each other.

In death, there is silence. The dead cannot editorialize their own condition. That is the job of the elegiac poet. In the elegy, to the extent which one controls language, one controls the legacy of the dead. If Riding is indeed referencing the art of elegy with “Lying, Spying,” then she brings into question the purpose behind elegy: the act of reimagining the dead through words (Hartman 222). Such an act need not occur in such a literal place as a graveyard in order for the effect to be achieved, but the elegy always brings special awareness of writing's relationship to mortality. As Geoffrey Hartman writes of elegies in his essay “Wordsworth, Inscription and Romantic Nature Poetry,” “A secondary consciousness of death and change associates itself with the very act of writing.” In its discussion of death, the written word, and immortality, “Lying, Spying” treats themes similar to “The Poet's Corner.”

Whether Riding intended this poem as a mock elegy or not, it brings into consideration the role of language in communication. The eulogy and the whispering dead work as interrelated metaphors for language's limitations as the parson discusses the unnamable things which the dead John can no longer remember, and the dead turn to each other with empty mouths (lins.5, 40). In the poem, if elegy stands for

communication through language, then its complete failure to capture the ideas, the very “things” of the dead, in the Platonic sense, represents language’s failure to function for the living as well. Furthering this sense of impasse, tautology drives both the first and final stanzas of the poem. The first stanza ends with the grammatically circular lines, “Why can’t I remember/what I alive knew of death/I dead know nothing of?” (lns. 3-5). There is even a closing parenthesis without an opening one—suggesting that we have entered John’s thoughts *in medias res*, the full context of his story lost to the reader. The final stanza finishes this sense of loss as the repetition of words which began with the line, “(Oh love, love, love, love, love)” reaches a crescendo. Lines 39, 40, and 42 consist primarily of repeated words and double negatives, twisting the literal meaning of the stanza. The inability of the dead to communicate is driven home by the stanza’s circuitous language, furthering the metaphor of language’s futility.

Just as she did with “The Poet’s Corner,” Riding significantly trimmed “Lying Spying” for the 1938 edition of her collected poems where it consists of only 26 lines arranged in five stanzas primarily six line stanzas. The elegiac elements remain, and in fact, may be heightened by the regularity of the remaining stanzas. As in “The Poet’s Corner,” the content of the lines omitted from “Lying, Spying” contributed to the complex metaphorical structure of the poem. Their omission, while not removing metaphor from the poem completely, serves to limit interpretative possibilities, distilling Riding’s meaning for her readers. For example, the parson’s eulogy, which functioned metaphorically as a representation of language’s futility, has been significantly shortened to a simple refrain, “Poor John, John, John, John, John,” (7). Here, Riding’s shortening

of the parson's speech clarifies the metaphoric purpose by literally turning the parson's speech into nothing more than repetitious naming, as though naming the dead could re-imagine them and allow communication. The futility of his speech might have been obscured or misinterpreted in the original "Lying, Spying" but reduced to one line, the purpose behind the metaphor—the difficulties of communication through language—becomes clearer.

One other striking omission from the original is the final stanza. The 1938 version of "Lying, Spying" ends with a reorganization of lines 32-34 of the original: "Lying, spying/John, John, John, John, John,/Parson, cobbler, mercer, parson." Riding deletes the last eight lines of the original poem, including the labyrinthine final stanza with its double negatives and purposefully hollow repetitions. Just as she does with her omissions in the parson's eulogy, riding uses this trimming of excess language to refine metaphoric meaning. Whereas in the original final stanza, the dead were left unnamed and en masse, in the 1938 version, the final stanza identifies the dead through the repetitious use of John's name, even specifying their vocations: "Parson, cobbler, mercer, parson." Of course, classifying the dead as she does, Riding removes a layer of metaphoric possibility by making them concrete and therefore, limited. The dead in this new version of "Lying, Spying" do not function as a metaphor for the difficulties of language in communication; they are simply the dead. The dead are no longer an abstraction. They are the characters of the poem; we are the dead.

The streamlining of metaphorical intention or the omission of metaphors altogether in Riding's revisions of "The Poet's Corner" and "Lying, Spying" highlight

Riding's shifting rhetorical poetics. Her understanding of the way metaphor functioned in language did not change, but her beliefs about whether that function was appropriate for a poet's purpose—the pursuit of truth—changed dramatically. With this shift, her consideration of I. A. Richards and the dominant theories of linguistics in the 1920s changed as well. A brief quote from Richards' work *Meaning of Meaning* captures Riding's dilemma perfectly. Appropriately enough for a chapter devoted to summarizing the current state of linguistic study, Richards uses Wordsworth to open the eighth chapter of *Meaning of Meaning*: “O wondrous power of words, by simple faith/Licensed to take the meaning that we love. . .” Richards' only comment upon Wordsworth's verse is, “Thus the poet” (160). The tremendous faith placed in poets to create meaning for readers increasingly became unjustified for Riding. What instigated the break with the Fugitives—Riding's shifting language beliefs—would become Riding's inspiration for many of her decisions at Seizin Press as her growing belief in the stability of sign and signifier translated into greater control of the Press's projects. These decisions, in turn, would presage Riding's eventual rejection of poetry entirely.

Critics such as John Nolan have stated that the preface to the 1938 edition of *Collected Poems* gave no sign of the coming sea change in Riding's career.⁶ Perhaps Riding had already begun to express her changing view of rhetorical poetics and its obligation to truth in the poetry she selected and edited for the edition. Her treatment of “The Poets' Corner”—her omissions and more literal language—indicate her growing

⁶ Nolan writes in “Background Statement on a new edition of collected Poems—Laura Riding (1938), planned for 1979, authorized and edited by Laura (Riding) Jackson” that “There was no sign in this preface of any questioning by her of her long-sustained faith in poetry as a sure course of redemption from the loss of the spiritual potential of language . . .”

dissatisfaction with poetic language. For the rest of her life, she worked to no longer pursue Gorgias' "lying discourse." Instead, in the late 1930s, she turned to compiling a dictionary that would, as she described it, include "24,000 crucial words of the English language to be defined in such a way as to erase any ambiguity that might have accrued to them over years of improper usage" (Jackson, *Rational Meaning* xii). Interestingly, it was I. A. Richards himself who encouraged the Oxford University Press to refuse the project. In the end, Riding published *Rational Meaning* posthumously as Laura (Riding) Jackson in 1997, a full sixty years after she envisioned the project. Tellingly, the *Dictionary* is not a dictionary at all, but rhetorical and linguistic theory. Riding's years at Seizin Press then, describe the middle passage in her journey from rhetorical poetics to literal meaning.

Chapter 4: Poetic Collaborations

In order to describe Riding's collaborative and editorial decisions and procedures during her time at Seizin Press, one must first determine the differences between those two types of work. Riding, for her part, in her daily activities in Deià probably would not have drawn a distinction between collaboration and editing. Riding considered both activities simply a part of her role as a working poet and publisher. To some extent, Riding regarded all of her work with other artists—poets, graphic artists, and cinematographers— as a fantastic opportunity to experiment with and refine her final ideas about the capacity of art to support truth, particularly her singular definition of linguistic truth. She writes in the first introduction to *Rational Meaning* that,

Where language is converted into the mere instrument of an art, it loses its virtue as the expressive instrument of humanity. In so far as the characteristic virtue of language is preserved in speech into which the uses of art are introduced, such speech will to that extent transcend the linguistic deviation in it that is of the character of art. But questions of poetry and language, poetry and art, art and language, are of a difficult delicacy. (23-24)

For Riding, her time at Seizin provided an ideal laboratory to test the limits of language's capacity for truth through multiple media by hitching her poetic star to the projects of almost everyone in the Seizin sphere of productivity.

No matter how pretentious Riding's personal motivation might seem to outsiders, it was never primarily out of a desire to increase her own literary merit that Riding

worked with others. While one goal of her forming close literary alliances was to bring other authors awareness of her philosophical ideas about poetry, her intense investment in other authors' works frequently proved thankless. Often, Riding's work with other artists came at the expense of her own and with little formal credit for her efforts. What she imparted to others was her growing belief in the stability of language which dictated its appropriate use in poetry. What Riding asked in return for her ministrations was her collaborator's confidence in her abilities to determine how language could best be used in his/her work. Yet, despite the narrowness of her personal and professional vision for others' work, Riding was not selfish. As a result, on many of the works which riding edited, she also collaborated unofficially, and vice-versa. Thus, the distinction between her collaborative work and editorial duties blurs.

Therefore, the division I make in Riding's work at Seizin Press between collaboration and editing is largely arbitrary. Traditionally, one might consider collaboration as shared authorship, where the co-author joins the primary or other co-author at multiple stages of the writing process from conception to final product in a shared vision of the project. Editorship of a given work traditionally encompasses duties involving oversight either of the front-end organization and revision of a project or line editing of the final copy. As the editor of a very small press, riding often fulfilled both roles simultaneously. For the purposes of this study, I have separated Riding's work with individual authors as either an collaborator or editor for the projects of individuals from her work as editor of larger collections. The best way to study Riding's collaborative relationships at Seizin is to begin with the relationship which begat the press in the first

place: Riding's highly productive working relationship with Robert Graves. As authors they produced seminal modernist works such as *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* and *A Pamphlet on Anthologies*. On most *Seizin* projects, the two are listed as co-editors. Their 13-year relationship and literary contributions provide an evolving sample of Riding's shifting role as collaborator and editor in light of her developing language theories.

Yet studying Riding's and Graves' relationship within a vacuum can become dangerous, as many Riding and Graves scholars have found. The scandalous details of their shared biographies can overshadow the significance of their collaborative contribution. While some details of their working and personal lives are germane to this study and will be considered as briefly as possible, Riding's collaborative relationships with other poets provide context from which to study the literary impact of not only Riding's collaborative relationship with Graves, but with other authors as well, and the interrelated effect her language theories and position at *Seizin* had on these relationships. For this reason, I endeavor to study Riding's work with James Reeves as collaborator on *The Natural Need*, a *Seizin* production in which Riding also served as editor. To focus on Riding's collaborative activities in a work where she also served as editor raises issues of the relevancy and accuracy of the terms "editor" and "collaborator" in the modernist period, specifically when the intensity of that editorial relationship went beyond the standard expectations of the time period for an editor's involvement in the production of a literary work. The intersection of these functions allowed Riding greater room for

influence, and as a byproduct, greater room to test her developing understanding of language as it related to poetry.

The unique environment of Seizin Press meant that Riding became much more involved in the daily construction and reconstruction of a given work than one might expect from the typical editor. Thus, even though Riding's name does not appear with Graves' or Reeves' on the title page of their respective books of poetry, the weight of Riding's influence suggests a collaborative rather than a merely editorial relationship. The notion that collaboration might occur above and separate from editorial work is, in itself, a modern one. Editors traditionally changed what they liked with a work without regard to the author's opinion or after the author was no longer an active participant. Consider the differences in the editorial/collaborative work of say Emily Dickinson's early editors Todd and Higginson who famously set her poems to regular beats and excised inappropriate material after her death to the highly collaborative style of Max Perkins' work with Tom Wolfe. Both editorial scenes involved tremendous input on the part of the editors, but only the Perkins/Wolfe relationship could also be examined as collaborative influence. Riding's work with her authors both as Seizin's editor and as an independent collaborator put her on the forefront of the Modernist re-imagining of authorship.

Further complicating the process was that when Laura Riding took another individual poet in hand, be it as editor or collaborator, she expected a transformation involving more than poetry. What makes a comparison between Riding's work with Graves and Reeves worthwhile is each author's reaction to Riding's transformative

process. Despite 13 long years with Graves, Riding never felt that he understood her poetic obligation to truth. Reeves, however, seemed to (relatively) quickly assimilate and produce the Riding method of poetry. Historically, we know that both poets eventually rejected Riding's aid and point of view after the Seizin Press years. Initially, however, Riding's collaborative influence over Reeves far outweighed her influence with Graves, which leads one to wonder to what extent Riding's position with the press lent power and legitimacy to her poetic precepts. Did editorship affect her collaborative impact, fostering the control she would become so famous for? The purpose of this chapter will be to determine, if possible, why Riding's collaborative system which ultimately failed with Graves succeeded with Reeves, even if only for a short time.

Arguably, Riding's work with Robert Graves constituted her most important collaborative relationship. When considering Riding's poetic and editorial careers, Graves looms large. He was certainly a dominant presence throughout the majority of her poetic career and her time at Seizin Press. For these reasons, a brief biographical recapitulation of Graves' and Riding's relationship during the Seizin Press years proves necessary in order to understand the unique dynamics of the press. Just as the tensions between Virginia and Leonard Woolf shaped Hogarth, and Margaret Anderson's outlandish personal style and lesbianism affected *The Little Review*, the controversial and at times bizarre nature of Riding's relationship with Graves shadows Seizin Press. Understanding the nature of influence within the primary interpersonal relationship of the press proves essential for understanding the conditions of production.

Critical understanding of the direction of the influence of Riding as collaborator in relationship with Graves changes depending upon the critic and the decade of the criticism. In the 1960s and 70s, critics assumed Graves to have been the influencer and Riding the influenced. After Graves' death, the well-bolstered line of the Graves' camp which had always maintained Riding's dependence upon Graves began to falter, no longer sustained by his living presence. What's more, after the death of Schuyler in 1968, Riding (now Jackson) re-entered the literary community, albeit tentatively. Friends and fans alike began to restore the balance to the collaborative history of her collaborative relationship with Robert Graves, which had slipped into myth, featuring Riding as mere muse and Graves as Apollo. In the past decade, critics such as Amber Vogel and Ella Ophir have worked to reverse the perception of Riding as Graves' protégé with marked success. This reversal has, unfortunately, created an atmosphere of taboo around discussion of Riding and Graves as collaborators in any terms other than those which are sanctioned flattery to Riding, featuring her as a patient master and Graves as a desperate and dependent student. I believe this image is equally as damaging to Riding as it is to Graves, and that this mind-set of the relationship between Riding and Graves as benefactor and undeserving dolt will prove as damaging as the former myth of muse and poet. Both perspectives deny observers the proper objectivity from which to view the actual relationship between Riding and Graves, and prevent critics from taking into account the shifting dynamics of that thirteen year relationship. To speak of the entire collaboration in immutable binary terms limits our understanding of one of the most productive working relationships of the modernist era.

In the interest of avoiding such binaries and blind spots, the span of the relationship which I will discuss occurs from roughly 1930 to 1933. These are the middle years of the Seizin press, and the first years of its installation in Deià. Not only had the physical location of the press shifted, but the personal dynamics of its chief editors had shifted as well. When their literary partnership began in 1926, Riding was the lesser known of the two authors. Nonetheless, Graves and his wife Nancy welcomed her into their home as an equal. Riding wrote to Harriet Monroe upon her arrival in London, “My coming has a simple explanation: that recognition takes place between people of the same time for other reasons than mere contemporaneousness” (letter to Harriet Monroe, 03 Mar 1926; qtd in Friedmann 179). Although correspondence makes clear that Riding did not accompany Graves and his family to Egypt in order to receive Graves’ mentorship, but rather as an acknowledged full partner in a literary enterprise which was to become *A Survey of Modernist Poetry*, certain factors in that initial relationship determined the role each author played in their personal and professional relationship (Friedmann 78-79). The first factor was money. Financially, Graves, or more significantly and more often, his parents, bankrolled all of the family’s projects. Graves as financier proved ideal, for he was generous and reasonably well established with publishers to receive substantial advances. However, tension naturally arose when Alfred Perceval and Amy Graves, Robert’s mother and father, were called upon to support his family. And as Graves and Nicholson had four, often ill children, this occurred frequently (Graves, R. P. 13). One point of tension between father and son was the role which Riding played in both Graves’ work and his household. This brings us to the second factor determining the nature of the

collaborative relationship: Laura Riding's shifting personal significance in the life of Robert Graves.

It would be difficult to characterize the relationship between Graves and Riding as ever strictly platonic. Certainly, by the summer of 1927 both had acknowledged that they were lovers as well as collaborators. Supposedly, this did not jeopardize Graves' marriage as Nicholson seemed at least initially content with the arrangement (Baker 136). The early collaborative works of Graves and Riding, such as *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (1927) and *A Pamphlet Against Anthologies* (1928) were composed at the beginning of the couple's romantic as well as literary affair, often while abroad, creating a sort of honeymoon atmosphere. Elizabeth Friedmann characterizes these early days thus,

In Robert Graves, Laura believed she had found the perfect companion, in both the professional and the personal sense . . . As writers, they learned from each other and shared a vigorous disdain for contemporary critical fashion. Sexual intimacy was a natural expression of the growing devotion they felt for each other. (94)

Unfortunately for Riding and Graves, the honeymoon did not last.

The final shifting factor in Riding's collaborative relationship with Graves while editors of *Seizin* involves the press itself. While the press was located in London, from 1927 until 1930, the scope of *Seizin* projects remained small (Mason 403). Both editors worked to learn the printing trade and finish projects owed to other publishers. Only three *Seizins* were published in three years, a rate that seems a snail's pace when compared with the press's highly productive period of the 1930s. Until the editors relocated the press to Spain, other priorities continually dominated their work and

personal life. For Graves, those priorities were his children and his autobiography, *Goodbye to All That*. For Riding, those priorities were her poetry and a growing obsession with an Irish poet, Geoffrey Phibbs. Ironically, as Nancy Nicholson ran away with Geoffrey Phibbs, two of Riding's and Graves' respective distractions eliminated each other.

So in the move to Majorca, these three factors—finances, personal relations, and Seizin Press obligations—changed dramatically, impacting Riding's and Graves's collaborative relationship both as editors and authors. Graves' official separation from Nancy Nicholson (divorce would not follow until a decade later), while not relieving him of his financial obligation to his children, clarified that obligation, and Nicholson's affair with Phibbs proved detrimental to her pleas for more money from Graves's parents, freeing up funds for Graves himself. What is more, his autobiography *Goodbye to All That* proved a smashing success with its allure to a generation of World War I veterans (Graves, R. P. 136). Graves enjoyed a level of professional as well as financial prestige unknown to him before the book's publication. The upshot was that for a brief while in the early 1930s, Graves' chronic money woes eased. He was freed to become the monetary force behind Seizin publications.

On a personal note, however, tensions rose between Riding and Graves. The Phibbs affair and her subsequent suicide attempt had left Riding emotionally and physically distant from Graves. Riding's relationship with Graves shifted during this time between her suicide attempt of April 1929 and the press's installation on Majorca sometime in the spring of 1930. Out of physical and emotional necessity, Riding became

both more and less than an equal partner in her duties at the press and in her collaborative relationship with Graves. Certainly, physically, she was somewhat dependent on him for daily care. Intellectually and emotionally, however, witnesses and letter accounts demonstrate an opposite change. Baker writes of Riding's recovery thus: "But in the months following her suicide attempt, Riding appeared to gain in vitality, incorporating her fall into her sense of herself as endowed with uncommon and transcendent purpose, entering a period of intense and remarkable creativity" (229). Though Graves held the money and the influence with the outer world, increasingly Riding held Graves' devotion and faith as the superior poet.

The final shifting factor in Graves' and Riding's working relationship concerned the changing conditions at Seizin Press itself. Various reasons contributed to the onrush of projects for the press when it moved to Majorca. First and foremost, the new location of the press to a balmy Spanish island attracted more of the authors' friends for visits. Furthermore, the significantly reduced cost of living in Deià meant that more friends (and collaborators) could stay longer. For example, both Norman Cameron and John Aldridge, two of Riding's collaborators, stayed a year or more at Canellun, the first Riding/Graves compound on the island. Such visits meant that the original Riding/Graves collaborative duo was frequently interrupted or halted altogether while other projects took center stage. Those other projects are the second piece of the Seizin Press factor in the shifting nature of Riding's and Graves' collaborative relationship. Both authors adjusted their focus away from joint works when they moved the press to Majorca. As the unofficial primary editor of Seizin Press, Riding planned and executed

several long-term, multi-author projects such as *Everybody's Letters* and *Epilogue* once the press moved to Majorca. Not coincidentally, Graves, rather than simply being a contributor to these projects, became their sole financial backer in many cases. As a result, the early 1930s found Graves working on books such as *I, Claudius* which, although extremely popular, amounted to little more than pot-boilers in the eyes of more serious modernists, like Riding, who described the work to James Reeves as “dreary” (“Personal Letter to James Reeves”). A separation in aesthetic principle had begun between Graves and Riding.

When the two principle editors of Seizin Press did find time to work on projects jointly during this period, those projects belonged primarily to Graves. Much has been made of Riding's devotion of time to Graves' work, as biographers such as Friedmann and critics such as Susan Schultz intimate that such time took away from Riding's other projects. However, from a bibliographic standpoint, Riding's production pace during the early Seizin Press years remained steady when compared with the rest of her time at the press, and prodigious when compared to her output after the press ceased to exist. Only when one compares Riding's output during the early thirties to her early years with Graves does the number seem low. Riding never matched in volume the rate of publication which she achieved from the years 1926-1928. This slow down might be attributed to multiple causes, but it was consistent for the remainder of her time with both Graves and the press. It seems more plausible that after an initial flurry of productivity, the two authors settled into a more stable routine in their mutual working lives. What can

be observed about the relationship during the early years on Majorca is the subtle shift in Graves' level of dependence upon Riding in matters of poetics and presentation.

Seizin Six was a book of Graves' poems entitled *To Whom Else?* The work bore Riding's collaborative stamp in two ways. As a product of the Seizin Press, the work was arranged and designed by Riding. The cover was supplied by the graphic artist Len Lye working in conjunction with Riding's requests (Friedmann 179). It featured a fan shaped imprint in black and cream with falling geometric shapes. The slender book consisted of 20 pages, with a stark frontispiece featuring the title, bold and enlarged, above Graves' name, and then in plain type, "The Seizin Press" without watermark or insignia. The type had been newly selected when the press left London, as Riding had determined that it would be best if the editors controlled their own setting and printing (Ford 394). There is a plainness about the book which suggests the tidiness of Riding herself, whom an observer once described as neatly prim as Graves was gawky and unkempt (Graves, R. P. 171). In presentation, the austere little book bore Riding's physical, aesthetic influence.

Beyond controlling the bibliographic presentation of Graves' poems, Riding seems to have had significant influence in the poems of *To Whom Else?* From press records, we know that Riding line edited each poem, as well as discussed them with Graves in daily morning sessions (Baker 257). Perhaps the best place to observe the impact of Riding's presence on Graves work is in the title poem:

To whom else other than,
To whom else not of man
Yet in human state,
Standing neither in stead
Of self nor idle godhead,

Should I, man in man bounded,
Myself dedicate?

To whom else momentarily,
To whom else endlessly,
But to you, I?
To you who only,
To you who mercilessly,
To you who lovingly,
Plucked out the lie?

To whom else less acquaint,
To whom else without taint
Of death, death true?
With great astonishment
Thankfully I consent
To my estrangement
From me in you. (32)

Not surprisingly, these lines were written by Graves to Riding. In the first stanza, he celebrates her otherness, something more than mere femininity. That separateness allows the saving action of the second stanza: “plucked out the lie.” The hand which plucks out the lie must restore truth, and the figure of truth throughout Graves’ poetry of the period was Riding. Richard Perceval Graves writes,

Consciously, Graves believed that it was Laura who had ‘Plucked out the lie’: or (as they both appear to have understood these words) it was Laura who had removed his inclination to embroider the truth for artistic reasons and had replaced it with a fixed determination to tell the whole truth as clearly as possible in his poems. (193)

Riding seemed to have felt something other than acceptance of the line, as Friedmann records that Riding was never comfortable with the idea that she had removed the lie from Graves’ work. She always hoped Graves would do it for himself (Friedmann 146).

Yet Graves' dependence upon Riding for her critical perspective is something neither author's biographer can dispute.

Among the multiple causes for this deepened dependence were the circumstances surrounding the couple's flight to Majorca: Riding's failed suicide attempt and its legal and professional consequences. The fascination with what Graves considered Riding's resurrection—her miraculous recovery—explains his willingness to hand over his consciousness to her: "To whom else without taint of death true?" Graves' devotion suggests a complete investment of himself in Riding—physical, intellectual, and most importantly for events at Seizin Press, artistic. However much Graves might have longed to devote himself to Riding, it seems Riding made some effort to refuse the offering. Riding's response to the poem's final form was one of caution. Graves' biographer writes that Riding never seemed satisfied with Graves' work. Perhaps a more accurate statement might be that Riding never felt at ease with the level of dependence Graves increasingly placed upon her. It would not have been enough for Graves to have believed that Riding was an emissary of truth; he had to find his own truth through language. That was what Riding most wanted to communicate to her collaborators during this period. Some accepted this and performed accordingly; others, like Graves, could only mouth the catechism. Riding felt the difference.

By the early 1930s, Riding's lifelong love affair with truth was in full swing. However, her conversations with Graves about her growing philosophical concerns with poetry never quite satisfied her that he understood her point of view. Instead, she sensed that Graves wanted her to provide truth to him. Riding, however dominant she might

have become through her position at the press, was never comfortable with the role of muse and even goddess in which Graves, at least poetically, placed her (Friedmann 146). This tension would eventually destroy their relationship. In “Revisiting a Collaboration,” Charles Mundy and Patrick McGuinness describe the collaboration which produced *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* and *A Pamphlet Against Anthologies* as “passionate,” “practical,” and pioneering. Little of that characterization fits the collaborative relationship of Graves and Riding during the middle period of Seizin Press. Graves appears doting and sentimental, while Riding grows exacting and subsequently frustrated.

Not all work at Seizin Press was of strict aesthetic standards. Despite Riding’s disdain for commercially driven ventures, she and Graves did produce one collaboratively written novel during this early period which might best be described as a penny dreadful. Graves had been approached by Jonathan Cape his longtime publisher to write a novel brazenly entitled *No Decency Left*, “because a novel with such a title should sell a million” (Friedmann 179). What began as Graves’ novel quickly became a joint effort. Richard Perceval Graves described the venture thus, “[B]y mid July Robert’s first unsatisfactory draft of *No Decency Left* had been almost totally rewritten by Laura, and sent off to Cape, with the request that he publish it under the pseudonym of ‘Barbara Rich’” (161). This was a deeply flawed novel, by Graves’ own admission, and not alone in its existence as an example of the type of work that the collaboration produced when pressed for time and money. Fast on the heels of *No Decency Left* came Riding’s semi-autobiographical play *14A* (edited by Graves) and Graves’ Dickensian update *The Real David Copperfield*. Under pressure to keep themselves and their press alive, Riding’s

and Graves' collaborative relationship devolved into rank commercialism. The "passionate" collaboration of the early years of Seizin Press did not survive the practical tensions of running the press itself.

Perhaps to fill the void left by the once all-consuming collaborative spirit Riding had felt with Graves, Riding collaborated with a number of fledgling poets during her time at Seizin in the 1930s. Deborah Baker comments upon the sheer volume of Riding's collaborative efforts in *In Extremis*: "There were also novels, published and unpublished, and countless unfinished book ideas, articles and moneymaking projects . . . [T]he results of these artistic collaborations were impressive more for their quantity than for their integrity of vision" (257). One of the most successful of her prodigies would be James Reeves, a British poet who later gained acclaim as a children's author and literary critic. With Riding's help, he published *Seizin Fifteen*, his first book of poems, entitled *The Natural Need*. For this project, Riding served not only as official editor, but as unofficial collaborator.

As a physical artifact, Reeves' book bears marked differences from Graves' *To Whom Else?* Whereas Graves' book was printed and distributed solely by Seizin Press, by 1935, the small press had entered a relationship with a larger publisher. Seizin Press produced Reeves' *The Natural Need* in conjunction with Constable & Company. The actual printing of a small set of copies was accomplished in Palma, Majorca by Riding's associate, A. Sabater Mut. Of particular interest to the student of textual studies, there are three errata in these copies printed on Majorca. Riding attached an Errata slip to the table of contents, and then hand edited the three affected poems. The last minute changes

reflect the ongoing revisions in which she and Reeves engaged until the last possible moment.

Due to the assistance of the larger publishing firm, the books produced by Seizin in this period could be considerably larger than before the arrangement. While *To Whom Else?* was a mere 22 pages, Reeves' volume contained 27 poems in 67 pages. Larger projects such as *The Natural Need* and *Epilogue* were now possible through the assistance of an outside publishing firm. The frontispiece was plain, like Graves' *To Whom Else?*, with no insignia or embellishment. However, the cover of *The Natural Need* was plain as well. By 1935, Len Lye and John Aldridge had both left the Marjorcan community, taking with them the services of a resident graphic artist to design covers for Seizin publications. In these ways, *The Natural Need* bears the hallmarks of the later Seizins: larger format, plain covers, and a more impersonal feel. Although Riding's editorial functions had been reduced with the partnering of Seizin with Constable, her role as collaborator seems to have become more all-pervasive.

Beyond changes in the physical artifacts of Seizin books, the collaborative presence of Riding changed as well between the publication of Graves' work and *The Natural Need*. Riding increased her influence over Reeves or perhaps Reeves was more appropriately receptive to her influence. Not only does she include a preface in Reeves' work, (something she does not do for Graves) but the preface is poetic. A poem as a preface to a book of poems might be highly appropriate in certain circumstances, but for Reeves' work it seems an odd choice. After all, this work was Reeves' first poetic publication. As Reeves' editor, one would expect Riding to provide a preface that

introduces his poetry to the reading public. Her poem-preface does not do this. Rather, Riding works within the structure of a poem styled like Reeves' (or are Reeves' poems styled like Riding's?) to impose her own thematic scheme upon his book. The poem, while not what one would expect from an editor, is what one would expect from a collaborator:

The ways to the happy understanding
Which is not the child's short mind
Nor reason's bearded length of thought
Nor the hero's brawny dream,
A grin of muscle-sense on waking,
Nor the monk's gluttonous dispassion
Nor the madman's starving rapture—

The ways to that late habit of speech
Which is a wisdom-time of nature
Flesh in feeling ripened word-frank:
They are through matted forests trembling . . . (7)

Here Riding presents her philosophy for a "happy understanding": words, unfettered by the various states of the human condition. All the characters—innocent child, aged sage, brave youth—return to a pristine "wisdom-time of nature." They peek through the forests of books down through the ages to emerge now at our hour of need. Thus a few stanzas later she writes, "For this the natural need, At living's doom-prime" (8). Riding celebrates, in poetry, humanity's "natural need" of language. The theme echoes many of Riding's other poems which deal with the power of language and the need for purified expression such as *The Poet's Corner*. Yet the poem does little to reflect the topics of the majority of the poems within the volume, most of which deal with interpersonal relationships. With this "preface," Riding seems to be resisting the traditional role of

editor and inserting her own interests into the work as one might expect from a collaborator. She constructs the lens through which Reeves's readers interpret his work, furthering her own "linguistic agenda" of poetry's obligation to truth with Reeves's work.

Riding's exceptional exhibition of editorial control extended even to the title and cover of the book. That the poem's line "the natural need" became the title of Reeves's book seems to have been Riding's idea as well (Friedmann 218). She included a blurb on the jacket flap explaining the link between her title and preface and Reeves's poems since it would not have been immediately obvious to most readers:

A poet should not be especially commended for the enjoyment he takes in being a poet, since in being one at all he is presumably, satisfying a natural need. But it is proper to stress this element in James Reeves's poems: it is the clue to the serenity, and the background of their intelligence. (Preface, *The Natural Need*)

It was not enough for Riding to name the book; she wanted readers to *know* that she had named the book. Beyond the title, Riding chose Reeves' authorial name as well. Reeves had apparently considered the styling J. M. Reeves, but under Riding's guidance had settled on James Reeves (Freidman 219). This level of intervention, which Riding exhibited with several other authors, earned her the reputation of being controlling and manipulative, or—since the majority of her mentored authors were men—seductive.

The relevant biographical information for Riding's and Reeves' collaborative relationship seems much simpler when compared with her relationship with Graves, and it lends a refreshing light to the old rumors that Riding "seduced" all of the men she worked with, rumors far more suited to the myth of the White Goddess than Riding herself. Riding and Reeves began writing to one another after being introduced via letter

by Jacob Bronowski in 1933, and they worked together on Reeves' poetry from early in their correspondence (260). Throughout most of this time, Riding was not officially Reeves' editor, as Seizin only decided to print *The Natural Need* in 1935. She worked with Reeves as a collaborator, strictly by correspondence, and occasionally sent him her poems as well (262). However, the focus of their intense correspondence was primarily Reeves' poetry. Contrary to the myths surrounding Riding's correspondence with men, her letters from 1933 to 1935 to Reeves do not strike one as "seductive." Riding emerges in her correspondence as forceful, even narcissistic, but not sexual. She writes to Reeves's in 1934 of her two responsibilities to mankind: the first to "gather into positive reality what has been to man myth or abstraction"—and two: . . . which is to make basic reality available to beings born of human reality, as in their minds they are in varying degree able to supersede their own humanity" (letter to James Reeves, 29 May 1934, qtd in Friedmann 263-264). What is clear from the letters was that Riding had the ability to make others want to please her. Her criticisms were keen, sometimes strident, and her praise was rare. Rather than shying away from Riding's overbearing ego, Reeves responds in kind, stating, "In order not to be abstract I will speak of myself as you did of yours[elf]. . . I always felt, when very young a sense of responsibility which I expressed in some such form as that of 'saving the world'—" (letter to Riding, 04 June 1934; qtd in Friedmann 265). As the proximity of the dates in the letters above demonstrate, Riding maintained intense relationships with her collaborators. The most exceptional and probably most effective element of Riding's tutelage was the sheer energy and volume of her attention. Once Riding took on a poet, she dedicated hours to his work

A discussion of the intense collaborative process which Riding shared with her workmates begs the second question one might ask of the preface: Is this a Riding poem or a Reeves poem? The same aesthetic principles which guided Riding's composition guided Reeves' works throughout the volume as well. Reeves shared a love of the hyphenated phrase and oxymoron as in "Then more-than-morning quiet" (48) and "Eastward-smiling towers familiar-new" (56) with Riding, as well as semi-regular stanzas and modest line lengths. Reeves also adopts Riding's frequent use of apostrophe in "To You Who Came With Me" which reads remarkably like Riding's poem from the early thirties, "The Unthroned Oracle." Furthermore, although the subject matter of Reeves' poems is more romantic than that which Riding's poetry typically presents, some similar elements seep through such as supernatural and pastoral allusions in "The Mirror and the Painting" and "Ghosts and Persons." Upon analysis, Reeves' early poetic style closely resembles Riding's poetic style to the extent that certain poems in the volume could have been written by either poet. For example, consider the following two excerpts from each of the authors' works:

So long—from extinct monster-wing,
That never flew, to the etherealest feather
That floated back from far, forgetting
What too-heavy auspices were hung
There on its thin prophetic claw.

and . . .

Never a chant and never a symphony
Conceived in human soul but rose reborn
Out of the tangled element until
It seemed the element itself cried out
To be relieved of all that harmony.

Both excerpts contain references to the natural world, and the metaphoric trope of flight. Also, both demonstrate a controlled rhythm with irregular syllable counts which still maintain approximately identical line lengths. Most striking is both sets of lines' attention to diction, which is the hallmark of a Riding poem. For further comparison, one could consider Graves' poem "To Whom Else?" again. The silky words and breathy lines do not resemble these two excerpts. The influence of Riding's style of poetry on Reeves seems undeniable.

Since such a clear line of influence exists between Riding and Reeves but not between Graves and Riding, the comparison of the two collaborative relationships yields important observations about Riding's collaborative role while at Seizin Press. Her shifting relationship with Graves resulted in a changing collaborative result. When the pair wrote *A Survey of Modernist Poetry*, the work was supposedly a "word-by-word collaboration." Indeed, both *Survey* and *A Pamphlet Against Anthologies* appear seamless productions. There are no parts that seem written by one author or another author, and never one author's personality suffused by another's. These books demonstrate a collaborative ideal: two or more authors working together to produce a work which neither could produce alone. Yet by the 1930s, this ideal had disintegrated. The reasons for that disintegration have already been dissected. The question now becomes why Riding's collaborative relationship with Reeves succeeded. Or was it a success? And to what extent did Riding's role of editor play into the success or lack of success of the collaboration?

Part of Riding's disillusionment in Robert Graves lay in his inability to understand her new relationship with truth. She did not want to be Graves' muse, nor did she want to be his conduit to truth. What she wanted was for Graves to join her on his own personal journey toward truth as a poet. This was anathema to the creative process for Graves whose poetry was steeped in myth and emotion. Riding's truth was not Graves' truth. According to both Riding's biographers Friedmann and Baker, Reeves' personality was a closer match to Riding's. He accepted Riding's philosophies and reproduced her poetic style because it suited him. These are valid observations, but Riding's and Reeves' relationship differs from Riding's and Graves' relationship in enough significant ways to indicate that more than personality determined the success of each couples' collaborative enterprises.

Whereas Riding and Graves were relative equals in both their careers (in experience if not success) and age, Reeves was decidedly Riding's junior. He was almost a decade younger than Riding and had never published a book of poems when he began writing to her. Her imposition of her own tastes and creeds on his poetry met with little resistance. Their correspondence shows he often accepted her corrections with no argument, corrections which changed the diction and cadence of his poetry. As a result, his first book of poetry resembles much of Laura Riding's poetry. Furthermore, Reeves understood from the beginning of his correspondence with Riding that his book might be published with Seizin Press. Therefore, not only did Riding's age and experience overwhelm him, but her position as editor must have impressed him. The opportunity to publish was not to be squandered over a quarrel about a poem, and Reeves discovered

early in their correspondence how easily quarrels could arise with Riding. Not long after Jacob Bronowski introduced Riding to Reeves, she cut off contact with her good friend over his choice of mate. She wrote to Reeves explaining the schism this way: “And people who work with me either ‘feel’ that which is there and know it for something so true and natural that the question of its ‘personality’ does not arise—or as with Jacob, they betray their purer intents in quarrelling with it” (letter to James Reeves, 29 May 1934; qtd in Friedmann 264). From Bronowski’s example, Reeves learned fast that in order to get published, he needed to respond appropriately and willingly to Riding’s suggestions for his poems. Whether or not Riding would have refused to publish him had he not followed her designs might be debatable. However, what matters is whether Reeves believed she would. The “success” of their relationship at least in part lay in Riding’s power as editor of Seizin Press. Reeves seemed a convert to Riding’s beliefs about language and truth, yet his criticism from later years demonstrates that he developed his own linguistic sensibilities which did not resemble Riding’s. In Reeves, Riding found a willing acolyte who sought his own truth, a truth that would ultimately be very different from her own. No work better expresses that difference than Reeves’ critical book, *Commitment to Poetry*, published nearly thirty years after Riding had ended her poetic career.

Reeves went on to publish nine books of poetry, many children’s books, and much literary criticism. He worked intensely with Riding on *Epilogue* and joined her League of Literal Morality in 1938. However, when Graves and Riding split in 1939, Reeves sided with Graves. Ironically, as a result of his later association with Graves,

most of Reeves' critics list him as a disciple of Graves or part of the "Graves School."

The intersection of Riding's influence as editor, collaborator and budding linguist resulted—at least twice—in broken relationships and failed poetic experiments.

Chapter 5: Language, Image and *The Life of the Dead*

In her article, “The Laura Riding Question: Modernism, Poetry, and Truth,” Ella Zohar Ophir writes, “The will to achieve a condition of autonomy directed all of Riding’s strenuous thinking about poetry . . .” (91). Given that Riding’s formidable independence is a basic assumption of this study, discussions of her collaborations with other artists might seem counterproductive. However, the nature of these collaborations becomes paramount to an investigation of Riding’s working habits and provides unique insight into the monopolizing character of her independence. When Riding collaborated with another individual on a work that would bear her name, her influence became even more pronounced, as would be only natural. What might not be expected is the use to which Riding put her collaborator’s energies for the furthering of her linguistic theories.

We know in the 1930s that Riding was generating the experiential data that would lead to her disavowal of poetry and ultimately, to her linguistic tome *Rational Meaning*. What began with her desire to function with autonomy as a poet would become her belief that language alone, not the poet, had true autonomy. In the late 1960s, to support this theory, she wrote, “Language, certainly, externalizes something: a governing human Conscience, a universal force, of reason. It functions however, as itself autonomously, and can be directly believed in and relied upon as what it of itself is” (*Rational Meaning* 71). Yet in 1933, the year she published *The Life of the Dead* with John Aldridge, Riding

still persisted in the belief that the poet, not just the poem or more accurately, the language of the poem, functioned autonomously. Just what “autonomous” might have meant to Riding deserves exploration.

Perhaps the best way to explore autonomy in the sense of Riding’s work and her work with others is to place Riding’s theories and practices from the 1930s into terms of modernism versus postmodernism. Despite the ambiguous meanings of terms like “modernism” and “postmodernism”, Jerome McGann defines Riding’s work in these terms in his essay, “The Life of the Dead: Laura Riding and the History of Twentieth-Century Poetry.” There he characterizes Riding as one of the first great post-modern thinkers:

[T]he postmodernism I name after Laura Riding . . . It appears alternately played out and savage, pure or cynical, embrained and fantastic, and it even has a distinguishable academic presence . . . Drawing attention to its disfigured features, the work constructs a special kind of writing against writing, an often morbid anti-aesthetic. (128).

In many of Riding’s works from the mid-1930s, one senses that she strives to free art from art, and writing from writing. The anti-aesthetic which McGann describes might also be termed a radical autonomy of the word in Riding’s poetry in which rhetorical poetics and aesthetic considerations no longer hold sway. McGann labels Riding’s systematic practice of anti-aestheticism in works such as *The Life of the Dead* as post-modern. Yet the verbal precision of her poems when combined with the graphic starkness of Aldridge’s woodcuts seem not so much anti-aesthetic as carefully constructed. By using Aldridge’s woodcuts, Riding attempts to limit more strictly the scope of her poems, narrowing rather than expanding language. Thus, collaboration

further tightens rather than widens artistic scope for Riding. In *The Life of the Dead*, her insistence upon verbal control feels far more antiquated than post-modern.

Arthur Barker of London published 200 copies of *The Life of the Dead* in late 1933. Publication of the large book was paid for by Riding and Aldridge through subscription. The two sandwiched work on the project between other commitments for Seizin's little magazine *Epilogue* (for which Aldridge wrote and illustrated) and Riding's editing of *Everybody's Letters*. Because of the sheer size of the book (in length and width, not pages) and the overwhelming number of projects waiting for attention from Seizin press, Riding determined to have *The Life of the Dead's* publication outsourced. As Barker handled small runs of both Riding's and Graves's work, the firm readily accepted the work, but only after Riding agreed to pay for the cost out of pocket. Graves's funds were tied up elsewhere.

Not only does *The Life of the Dead* represent an aberration in the publishing history of the Seizin community, its existence as an outsourced document from a small press speaks to the limitations of such presses and the ambitious publishing agenda of Riding. Riding's attention to detail remained despite the distance between author and publisher. Once the pages were printed in London, Barker shipped them to Riding in Majorca for her approval and signature (Friedmann 190-193). The final page of the volume read, "Two hundred numbered copies of 'The Life of the Dead' have been printed on Basingwerk Parchment in 14-point Pastonchi by Messrs. Hazell, Watson and Viney, Ltd. Each copy is signed by the author and the illustrator," beneath which are Riding's and Aldridge's scrawled signatures. The text of *The Life of the Dead* consists of

a brief preface, accurately titled “Explanation,” and followed by ten poems, presented twice, once in French and once in English. Interestingly enough for a quasi-Seizin production, the font of the title for each poem is script, and is capitalized throughout, in contrast to the press’s typically plain style. Each pair of poems is followed by a woodcut illustration which corresponds to the subject of the poems. The 200 copies commissioned by Riding and Aldridge did not recoup the cost invested to print them. The Times Literary Supplement found *The Life of the Dead* guilty of the solipsism and radical autonomy which Ophir later cites as the Achilles heel of its author. The work fails, as one reviewer questions, “But we are left wondering, noting her skill, what weariness or accident has turned her from the objective, sensuous world of poetry to explore the inarticulate deserts which she calls death” (Buchanan 318). Beyond this commentary, and perhaps because of this inauspicious, initial reception, the work remained essentially buried, hidden from the literary community’s scholarly view for over half a century.

The Life of the Dead has gained a second wind in Riding studies in the past decade. Jerome McGann, as mentioned before, has dedicated an article to the project as well as alluding to the rich bibliographic codes of the work in his seminal textual studies book *Black Riders*. Deborah Baker devotes a chapter of her biography *In Extremis* to the poem’s explication, and Elizabeth Friedmann chronicles the long-term collaborative relationship between Aldridge and Riding. However, despite the efforts of these few, *The Life of the Dead* remains one of the most neglected works of the 1930s when compared to the potential for analysis that it presents. Not only does it reveal key insights into Riding’s habits as a collaborator and her developing language theories, but it represents a

tantalizing example of literary and graphic cross-pollination in the late modernist era, an era already rife with tension from the cultural shifts brought about by the intersection of literature and cinema. Just such an encounter—literature and film--would set the stage for the Aldridge/Riding collaborative relationship.

Riding met Len Lye, a New Zealand filmmaker, in 1927, and *Seizin Four* had been Lye's automatic writing experiment, *No Trouble*. He regularly designed covers for Seizin works, and he collaborated with Riding on a number of projects including a never completed masque and a fledgling film *Quicksilver*. In his article "Len Lye and Laura Riding in the 1930s," Tim Armstrong describes the film's creation as a shared project: "[Lye's] collaboration with Riding produced a plan for a film, *Quicksilver*, in 1933: Riding wrote the script and John Aldridge did colour sketches and although the film was never made, it seems related to the Aldridge-Riding collaboration "The Life of the Dead'" (179). Although *Quicksilver* never made it beyond the preliminary planning stages, the project resulted in the publication of a now-missing pamphlet written chiefly by Riding entitled *Len Lye and the Problem of Popular Films* (179).

The problem of Len Lye and popular films closely resembled Riding's growing problem with poetry. As Armstrong details, Lye was an experimental film maker who specialized in a technique called "scratching." Using only a projector, as opposed to a camera, the filmmaker depends on lines, movement, and light to produce images without photography (177). This is pre-animation, sub-animation, primitive in the incompleteness of the images which suggest above all rhythm before meaning.

Armstrong casts a post-modernist interpretation on Lye's technique calling it Foucaultian:

“ . . .it might be said that this marks a radical epistemic shift: movement, perhaps for the first time in the history of representation, free of the direct trace of the human hand at the level of production . . .or of realism at the level of representation” (177). This belief that one could remove the artist from the canvas, the intention from the representation must have intrigued Riding. And although Lye, a proponent of automatic writing a la Yeats and Stein, might have hailed his removal from the scene of construction of meaning for increasing the visual ambiguity of his productions, Riding valued the removal of the artist from the scene for a different reason. Lye produced with a projector and images what she wanted to produce on paper: succinct, direct ideas, unhindered by further human intervention. Riding understood the difficulties in controlling reception; Lye’s experiments demonstrated the difficulties in controlling production.

The Lye/Riding collaboration produced no finished products. Like many of Riding’s working relationships in Deia, personal conflict halted the work. Lye married a woman with whom Riding did not get along, and letters between the two stopped in the mid-1930s (Friedmann 202). By far the most lasting contribution of Lye to Riding’s work was his introduction of her to artist John Aldridge while in Germany in 1927. Aldridge would be instrumental in the production of a number of Seizin Press projects such as *Epilogue* as well as providing the illustrations for the woodcuts which supplemented *Life of the Dead*. For this project, Aldridge filled the role Len Lye would not or could not by providing for Riding her own set of “scratchings,” like Lye’s films, to accompany her poems and further direct the meaning of her words.

For her part, Riding believed that she could “cleanse,” so to speak her side of the author/reader street through strict control of language. By stripping her poems of unnecessary poetic devices and what she termed “false words”, she sought to present her works as precise representations of her intended meaning. With *The Life of the Dead*, Riding used two new techniques to further limit the range of interpretations her readers might make of her poetry: Aldridge’s art and French translation. She states in the preface that,

The text illustrated by these designs was first written in French, in order that the English might benefit from the limitations which French puts upon the poetic seriousness of words. For French is a language better adapted than English to the rhetorical naïveté of manner necessary in a ‘literal’ account of the world in which the dead live—the precision of French being designed to create impressions, of English to convey meanings.

Riding’s use of French in the composition of *The Life of the Dead* could be studied at great length. However, what seem most germane to this study are the reasons why she employed this double-writing technique. Phrases like “limitations . . . upon the . . . words” and “rhetorical naïveté” suggest that for Riding, composing in a language that was not her native tongue, and not even a familiar second language provided a mechanical means by which to, at least superficially, reduce her poetic impulse to its most basic state, like Lye’s “scratchings.” Riding believed, whether functionally true or not, this translation process allowed her to communicate more directly with the reader through her poetry.

The same motivation resulted in John Aldridge’s woodcuts. The poem and its illustrations seem most likely to have been planned during Aldridge’s visit to Majorca in

the fall of 1931 (Friedmann 180). Composition was well under way by the summer of 1932, and by most accounts, Aldridge and Riding worked well together with few, if any conflicts (Baker 267). Perhaps this is because Aldridge was exceptionally amenable to Riding's suggestions; what she wanted in an illustration, she received, regardless of aesthetics or explicitness. Some of these pictures were even gruesome in their frank depictions of death. When the engraver for the woodcuts, a London based artist named R. J. Beedham, complained of the "morbidity" of the images, Riding tried to explain to him that the images were not of the literal dead, but of those that were spiritually dead (Friedmann 197). Even in images, metaphor haunted Riding; in seeking to create a more direct discourse with her reader, she incorporated another layer of figurative meaning through the illustrations.

Critical interpretations of *The Life of the Dead* have only been published a few times. Deborah Baker reads the poem as a roman a clef of Riding's sexual and intellectual exploits at Deià. Elizabeth Friedmann pays close attention to the French translation and illustrations, but only vaguely addresses the theme or meaning of the poems. Jerome McGann spends a great deal of time discussing the significance of the poems, but does not delve into an analysis with any specificity. For such an important work, *The Life of the Dead* seems woefully neglected.

For purposes of understanding how Laura Riding's language theories affected her collaborative relationships and vice versa, analyzing *The Life of the Dead* with a specific focus on the relationship between the woodcuts and the poems seems inevitable. First and foremost, one must consider the title. For Riding, "the life of the dead" is the life of

poetry. Just as the 1920's version of "The Poet's Corner" figuratively equated poetic language with a re-animated corpse army of words and the entire gruesome power attendant upon that image, *The Life of the Dead* continues to describe words and poetry in terms of death and decay. However, when Riding returns to the theme this time, she brings with her an expanded and more specific vision accompanied by Aldridge's illustrations.

The first poem in the series, "The Dry Heart", works as a preface, establishing the world of the dead as separate from other worlds:

The world where the dead live is a dry heart.
Every world is a heart, a rhythm spherical,
A rhythm of impossible intentions
That yet sings itself, imagining heard music.
The world where the dead live is a silent choir.
It does not hear itself, it sings itself not.
Its will has frozen into memory,
Black as still blood, without flow,
To the painless sorrow of death it throbs.

While other living worlds possess expression, even if only imagined potential, the dry heart of the dead is incapable of realizing the promise of expression, much less communication. The accompanying woodcut for the poem drives this point home, as it portrays a Valentine style heart, anatomically incorrect, covered in black veins. Riding's symbolic rather than functional design of the heart hints at the poem's larger implications about language: language in the service of aesthetics fails as communication. The dry heart is the world of the dead because it is the failing world of poetry. The countless veins extend from a central "root" at the top of the sphere which surrounds the heart like an amniotic sack. Yet these veins connect to nothing else, not even each other. They end

in isolation, forever frozen, reaching for connection and continually falling short. This failure leads to the second singular condition of the dead: lack of will. Autonomy, so vital to Riding's sense of poetry's value, has drained from the heart of the world of the dead. At the same time, as illustrated by the woodcut, interconnectedness has failed. The life of the dead is one of utter isolation and stasis, as described by the final lines of "The Dry Heart,"

The world where the dead live is a heart alive
In a body once alive.
The dead move neither into heaven nor hell.
Their afterwards is their before. . .

Stymied by symbolism, trapped without autonomous will, the dead linger in the dry heart. Their occupations and the implications thereof for poetry are the subjects of the poems in *The Life of the Dead*.

A discussion of *The Life of the Dead* would be difficult without addressing the second poem, "The Three-Men Spirits of the Dead." To the extent that *The Life of the Dead* functions as a narrative, the explication of that narrative lies in this poem. Yet beyond establishing characters and a simple plot, "The Three-Men Spirits of the Dead" works to further Riding's theme of the failure of poetic language. She wastes no time connecting death with poetry:

Over the dead bodies of the dead,
Over the too live minds of the dead,
Prevails the unknown goddess, death itself. . .
Romanzel, luckless poet of the dead,
Hovers on her soaring round in word-lust.

The few critics who have addressed *The Life of the Dead* frequently fixate on the portrayal of death as female. Riding's anthropomorphization of supernatural and symbolic entities as females occurs throughout her poetry, not just in *The Life of the Dead* and has inspired several studies. However, the significance of the gender assignation in this poem seems less noteworthy than the assignation of vocation.

Romanzel, complete with romanticized name, is a poet. He fixates on death in his "word-lust." In fact, "word-lust" seems to be what drives his obsession with death.

How would Riding define "word-lust"? In her collection of prose musings from the 1960s and 70s published in 2007 under the title *The Failure of Poetry, the Promise of Language*, Riding writes about the attraction of poetry:

The potential that poetry exploits is a capacity of human beings to speak from the vital center of being, with perfect trueness of relation therefore between speaker and the things spoken of, and through this, between the things spoken of themselves; and in a state of perfect active unity of being with all other human beings occupying their natural human placement of vital centralness of being. (113).

Poetry thus provides one the heady sense of interconnectedness with all humanity, along with god-like power to directly influence the thoughts of others. By the time of this quote, Riding had become too disillusioned with what she perceived as poetry's failure to deliver the results which "word-lust" seemed to promise. This sentiment seems to have root in "The Three Man Spirits of the Dead," as she writes, "To find a poetry of living death, resurrection/Of all that dropped down false in life, impossible—" (18-19).

Language as poetry is failing.

The second man-spirit of death, Unidor, works as a sculptor. Like Romanzel, he too fixates on a woman, Amulette. His fascination with Amulette works much the same as Romanzel's with Death, only Unidor achieves a certain amount of success with attaining his obsession. Through his art, he re-creates his love every day, despite Death's destructive powers:

With his blind eyes he builds the woman again
That death's veraciousness made nothing,
Even as in the lying sun she nightly faded
And each day must be anew stood up (25-28).

Unidor, whose name suggests unity and rejoining, recreates Amulette, a name rife with symbolic meaning as well, each day after her destruction. Tellingly, though, Amulette is only a reduced reflection of the goddess Death. Yet Unidor, unlike Romanzel, is at peace with his production and his function: "Though never has he looked on death, uttered the word. /Unidor walks an indifferent sea" (33-34). Once again, the significance of these characters to furthering the theme of language's role in poetry lies in their vocation, not their genders. As a sculptor, Unidor's art circumvents language. In the poem, *Riding* does not excuse Unidor from the same aesthetic hypocrisy, the word-lust, with which she charges Romanzel, but the equivalent crime for the visual arts does not carry the same consequences for Unidor. She writes that for Unidor's "lying eyes" and "artificing sight" Amulette is the "close image of the far obsession." (31-32). Unidor's hypocrisy in accepting a fake likeness results in, if not peace, then at least indifference. Unlike Romanzel who hovers in purgatory-like suspension above his beloved, Unidor daily

embraces a satisfying substitute. Thus, the condition of the sculptor appears preferable to the poet.

However, Mortjoy, the third and final member of the man-spirits of the dead earns the highest praises from the narrator. Like Romanzel and Unidor, Mortjoy is defined through his vocation and his relationship with the goddess Death:

Mortjoy is the man-spirit of the happy dead:
After live hours comes the longer time
Of narrowing hours, of scenes that hurry tears,
That move the lips with only 'And the next?' . . . (51-55)
How prospers death, the classic present,
Time before time and afterwards!
Mortjoy, the preferred at her side kneeling,
Makes play as might a knowledgeable child. (59-63)

If Romanzel is the poet, and Unidor is the sculptor, then Mortjoy is the universal patron, attendant upon Death and her interpretations through poetry and art. As a spectator, Mortjoy is blind, like Unidor, but richly rewarded by death for his efforts in ignoring the feast of life and instead making play with the pageantry of death: "Of such is Mortjoy's theatre, an earnest comedy/Complete of brief undoings, minute fatalities . . ." (47-48). Mortjoy has become satisfied with the life of the dead, and unlike Unidor, he does not enjoy it as a substitute for the "real" but rather as an engrossing end unto itself. As Riding writes, "[Mortjoy] is well advised that he is dead, and well pleased."

Whereas the illustration which corresponds with "The Dry Heart" creates new yet related symbolism to accompany the poem—the decorative heart and dangling veins—the woodcut which parallels "The Three Man-Spirits of the Dead" provides a literal translation of the poem into visual art. Nothing in the picture exists outside the poem.

Romanzel hangs above a robed female figure, while Unidor creates a miniature clay woman. Meanwhile, Mortjoy, like a child, sits at the robed figure's feet playing with his "once distracted dolls." The transparency of the translation of the poem into picture proves invaluable to understanding the content of the longer poem, something of which Riding as the designer of the illustrations would have been aware. Increasingly in the 1930s, Riding's poetry was criticized for its opacity and use of private symbolism which only she seemed to understand. Ophir describes this characteristic of Riding's poetry as inherent upon the extreme autonomy toward which she strove. That independence of intellectual association was also, in the words of Ophir, "her poetry's greatest liability" (104) Thus, Riding's inclusion in *The Life of the Dead* of illustrations served as visual cues to her poetry. This was a rare and somewhat out of character gesture for Riding to have made toward her reading public, and it speaks to the importance which she placed upon the theme of her work.

Understanding the characters of Romanzel, Unidor, and Mortjoy as figurative representations depicting the reception of graphic and verbal art opens not only the second poem of the series but the entire work to new interpretive possibilities which explain why Riding would have deigned to supplement her work through illustration. Through these characters, the action of the subsequent poems becomes self-reflective. This is meta-poetry and meta-visual art. McGann cites *The Life of the Dead* as not only one of the most important modernist works of poetry, but a clear precursor of post-modernism as well, and this self-aware quality is why. Riding condemns Romanzel even as she participates in his hovering word-lust. Unidor, in his indifference and ultimate

worthlessness, mocks the illustrations throughout the work, and Mortjoy seems a cheap shot at a witless and childlike audience who needs visual aids to grasp Riding's poetry.

The irony serves to convict the participants—poet, artist, and reader—of the abuses in the name of aesthetics which Riding saw in art. Of chief concern to her was the twisting and man-handling of language in the service of poetry. Such abuse resulted in poems which were not “true”, and a reversal of values where what was fake and decorative superseded the real and functional. Thus, the production and reception of such poetry produced a hazy, static experience, hence the metaphor of the life of the dead.

Riding continues to address the theme of reception and production in the next poem of the series, “Mortjoy's Theatre.” In this poem, Mortjoy holds dominion over a theatre of the mind where reality encroaches: “Surely is Mortjoy of the luckiest. /Just think: a theatre all his own! And there he rules, Prince of the Play . . .” (1-3). Mortjoy's theatre celebrates tired tropes and hackneyed themes. No one understands the dialogue or action; no one stays to the end of the play. The action stops abruptly:

. . . And to think
That everyone's gone home—the seats all empty
The programmes fluttering idle (not read through to the end)
Ebony sticks, theatre-glasses, the massive negro's trumpet,
All left behind alive, like trappings of the dance . . . (37b-40, 42)

The audience leaves the “living” bits behind in its rush to exit. Tellingly, what are labeled alive in this metaphor are not the actors or the art, but the physical debris left behind after a performance building on a meta-theme evaluating poetics. Throughout the poem, Riding employs ambiguous imagery to describe the effects of traditional poetics upon the mind of Mortjoy and the patrons of his theatre. Mortjoy's theatre could serve as

metaphor for Riding's growing concerns with the reception of her poetry, and the final analysis is not positive. As Riding writes, "But the metaphor falls short, the truth is tidier . . ." (44); the art offered in Mortjoy's theatre does not compare with truth.

The accompanying woodcut illustration feels as though Riding and Aldridge have broken out of the stiff confines which contained them in the first two pictures. This picture is the most richly detailed of any in the book. Layers of imagery combine to fill the page until places in the image appear black with design. From Mortjoy's richly ruffled theater box to the hieroglyphic symbols scratched into the theater walls emblematic of scenery, every opportunity for visual expression has been taken. Beyond profusion of detail, Aldridge, at Riding's request, played with proportion as well. Mortjoy towers above everything in a semblance of closeness, but somehow the perspective makes him simply seem large compared to his theatre. The leftover objects mentioned in lines 40 and 41 loom as large proportionately as Mortjoy, while the theatre seats over which they drape are miniscule. Perhaps this emphasizes the objects' importance over the patrons; perhaps the skewed perspective of Mortjoy represents his acceptance of fakery over truth. There are dozens of potential symbolic moments in this drawing, and that is the point. The over-encoding of symbols, exemplified by this painting, drives home the key line of the poem: "But the metaphor falls short. . ."

The failure of the theatre creates the artistic vacuum into which Unidor and Romanzel enter in the following poems, "The Transformation of Romanzel" and "Dead Birth." In "The Transformation of Romanzel", the value of verbal versus visual art

seems at stake. Riding uses a familiar device, the paradox, to describe Romanzel's condition:

Romanzel through deep heights rises: not to the sky.
In death no air like that soft earth-blue whose hollow climates
Poets long filled with secret universes
Where truth in plaintive multiple was not itself—(1-4)

Riding's dependence on paradoxes haunts much of her poetry, and even leaked into the poetry of her protégés. Phrases like "deep heights" and "earth-blue" highlight the ambiguity of Riding's theme, the illusiveness of truth. Since her theme is often recurring, so is her use of the device. In his quest for truth, Romanzel dives towards Amulette, the fetish statue of death. This action carries metaphoric implications as it describes poetry dying in its endless pursuit of truth, fixating incorrectly on lifeless objects. What seems even more appropriate or ironic (depending on one's perspective) for a hybrid work of graphic and verbal art is the contrasting role which Unidor plays in the poem? As the sculptor in the land of the dead, he has made Amulette as a substitute for the Goddess Death. Unlike Romanzel, however, Unidor's relationship with the fetish object is fulfilling and peaceful. Riding describes the relationship thus:

Near by sleeps Unidor: the privacies of Amulette
His purest dreams are, all like himself asleep there,
Save for the faint black fume which death white boredom,
In the untroubled mind of Unidor stirs up.

For Unidor, simulation satisfies. Creation and possession of the object fulfills the artistic mission. This suggests that there is no deeper drive toward intangible truth for the visual artist.

The metaphoric characterizations of visual and verbal art in “The Transformation of Romanzel” illustrate key points about Riding’s poetic and linguistic theories. One, for Riding, truth is absolute and abstract; two, for Riding, poetry seemed the most reliable method of accessing revealed truth; and three, for Riding in the 1930’s, poetry was failing at its most vital task. The illustration for this poem returns to the literality of the second drawing. In Riding’s strict adherence to visual representation of her metaphors, she almost mocks her audience. We become Romanzel, chasing after the fetishized object of fake truth, or worse yet, Unidor, peacefully content to look at the pretty pictures.

Of all the poems and pictures in *The Life of the Dead*, it is the fifth poem and picture, “Dead Birth”, which has attracted the most attention from feminist critics. To read the poem as something other than an indictment of male poets’ objectification of female muses breaks with a tradition upheld by the majority of Riding critics. The poem lends itself to such a reading easily. Amulette lies in a bed suspended from the ceiling, exhaling babies which fall to the ground and then run off to help their father, Unidor, build the city of the dead. The sensual imagery of phrases like, “To bubble babies lazily from her mouth . . .” (32) or the suggestive innuendo of “Indeed, one would not say her mind was on the business/More seriously than any woman’s on the cigarette/that gently ushers in the discipline of breakfast” (34-36) paint Amulette as the classically fetishized object which she literally is in the poem. However, while a feminist reading of the poem may be well supported and enlightening, it only reveals one layer of this richly nuanced poem. A second level of meaning lies beneath the superficial gender commentary. The symbolism and sensuality of the poem when read in context of *The Life of the Dead* as a

whole continue the theme of language's struggle with art, and the obligation of both to the Riding definition of truth.

The key to a non-feminist reading of "Dead Birth" lies in perceiving the character of Amulette as something other than a human woman, something other than a woman. In "The Three Man-Spirits," Amulette is established as a fetishized object representative of the Goddess Death. What drives the theme of the poem is not Amulette's gender so much as her function: a substitute, or more tellingly, a metonymy for the "real thing." What Amulette produces, the bubble babies symbolic of words, does not satisfy the conditions of Riding's truth. They cannot satisfy those conditions because even in their inception, they issue from falsity. And yet, Unidor, "off to city making" (28), builds his city with their aid, and it is suggested, possibly even their bodies, as their mother quickly kicks them out of the house:

But Amulette is impatient with fancy, or the colic.
"To the window, children, no dallying, out you go.
Be quick, papa's up there, waiting for you.
There, there now—that's a darling—run and help papa!"

These are obviously not literal babies, so why should we interpret Amulette as a literal woman? Symbolically, Amulette and her offspring represent the hollow substitutions art makes in the name of aesthetics. Unidor, the sculptor, builds his city with these facsimile materials. Does Riding suggest that visual art makes more concessions in the name of aesthetics than verbal art? The relevance and quality of visual versus verbal art was not far from her mind during the writing and designing of *The Life of the Dead*, as her work with Len Lye on *Quicksilver* suggests. The advent of film opened up new possibilities

for artists of all types. However, Riding's definition of truth did not welcome expressive possibilities.

In her article, "The Diversity of Performance/Performance as Diversity in the Poetry of Laura (Riding) Jackson and Eavan Boland," Seija Paddon describes Riding's poetry as participating in the "post-modern play in which meaning shifts and functions for changing but particular purposes." Riding participates in the post-modern shift through self-referencing, or what we have come to consider "meta" art. Paddon writes, "Jackson's . . . writing affirms its own representational play, thus how the performance aspect of it emerges from the way in which the language displays itself as both the medium and the subject of the discourse" (425). What Paddon does not mention is that while Riding participates in the paradigm shift which accompanies the late modern/early post-modern world of the 1930s, she does so with an eye toward controlling that shift and selecting those purposes. Thus, *The Life of the Dead* works on two levels. On the first level, which many critics have cited as its most post-modern characteristic, its subject is its medium. However, beneath the surface irony of a meta-text, *The Life of the Dead* functions primarily as a Jeremiad of modern poetry. Riding drives the theme of poetry's decaying condition repeatedly home to her readers by doubling her artistic presence through the use of Aldridge's images. For audiences who increasingly expected greater ambiguity between sign and signifier, Riding strove to close the gap between what she wrote and how others interpreted it.

The remaining poems and pictures function much the same way as the first five in their dependence upon the accompanying pictures for clarity and control. The most

noteworthy of the final poems, “Within the City: Daytime” and “Within the City: Nighttime”, seem almost an homage to Eliot’s “Wasteland,” except that specific references reveal the pair as parodies of the modern epic: “The city has, in some respects a mediaeval air--/ Gothic laughter, Gothic malignancy. In other respects it is a bigot of modernism . . .” (WTC: DT 16) and in oblique reference to Eliot’s tarot, “You must understand that the cards are mere cards . . .” (WTC: NT 32). The poems describe the violent and depraved activities of the inhabitants of Unidor’s city, a space reminiscent of Eliot’s unreal city but brutally literal. An entire scholarly article could be devoted to Riding’s commentary on Eliot’s Wasteland in just these two poems. However delicious the topic might be, it does not lie within this article’s province. It is clear from the poems that Riding considers Eliot’s work mere posturing, at odds with the essential function of poetry, the revelation of truth. In that sense, *The Life of the Dead* functions as a censure of High Modernism.

Of particular note, the artwork for “Within the City: Daytime” depicts the violence of the poem literally, as does the picture for the ninth poem, “The Galleries of Daybreak.” Figures are variously hung, dragged to their death, thrown off of balconies, burned alive, stabbed, trampled, etc. As Riding explained to her disturbed engraver, R. J., Beedham, the violence was metaphoric. According to Riding, this was the condition of poetry in the 1930s: murdered and murdering. However, according to Riding, part of what drove poetry to this state was its dependence upon metaphor and artifice. The difficulty with using subject as medium, as Riding has done in these poems, lies in the potential hypocrisy of using art to comment on the condition of art. Riding combats this

problem with the very violence of her images. The poems and the pictures seem aware of their excess, and carry a tone of black humor. Riding may be point out the decay and depravity of poetry, but she does so with ink stained hands, enjoying the revelry in the waste.

The Life of the Dead ends with a close-up of the Goddess Death, a cat wrapped in robes catching the rats at her feet. In the last poem, “The Goddess Death,” it is this creature’s heart which is revealed as the dry heart:

Thus beats, in false-earnest, a dry heart once a heart,
Rejoicing to be heart, however dead . . .
However ‘tis only Death’s jocose agitation,
However but the heart of a goddess at play
Pretending, in her large make believe of vesture
A heart like a world a-toss, a live heart,
A veinage of people like a live world seeming—
Seeming, like her, eternal. (28-35)

The many references to falsity—“false-earnest,” “Pretending,” “make believe,” and “seeming”—provide a final commentary on the condition of the *Life of the Dead*, the world of poetry. Constant pursuit of aesthetic perfection leads away from the attainment of truth, which for Riding remains the one legitimate obsession. Thus, the inhabitants of the city of the dead continue in a cycle of creation and consumption which blinds the eye and perverts the taste.

In *The Life of the Dead*, Riding deliberately and forcefully uses not only poetry but illustration to communicate as thoroughly as possible her concerns for language and poetry. Aldridge might as well have been Riding’s third hand so seamlessly did his work meld with hers to deliver her essential message. There seems little room in either the

poems or the illustrations for freedom of interpretation on the part of the reader. Yet Paddon views Riding's work as comfortably exploiting the shifting nature of language and McGann credits her with ushering in the postmodernism which brought us the language poets. This book functions as more than a post-modern fusion of visual and verbal art; *The Life of the Dead* is an indictment of the modernist poetic establishment, and as such, it participates in the modernist tradition of masochistic self-awareness. In doing so, Riding reveals herself as much susceptible to the pitfalls of modernism as those her "parable of modernism" (McGann "TLOTD" 136) seeks to reprimand.

Chapter 6: *Epilogue*: Editorial Collaboration and Control

It should come as no surprise that the little magazine *Epilogue* was to be a vehicle for the same abstract and subjective truth which had come to dominate Laura Riding's poetry, such as in *The Life of the Dead*. In one of the few critical studies of the magazine, "'Epilogue': How Poetic Authority Became Authoritarian," Joyce Wexler writes that, "In *Epilogue*, [Riding] invoked her poetic authority to change society" (134). However, by 1935, truth increasingly involved more than poetry for Riding. Contrary to Wexler's assessment, Riding was critiquing and using language in general through her collaborative literary vehicle, *Epilogue*, not poetry specifically, to effect social change. Her authority stemmed from her self-proclaimed connection with what she believed was the inherent truth imbedded in the correct use of language. To Riding, this correct use of language involved poetry less and less as evidenced by the all-encompassing purpose of *Epilogue*: to effect social change to the betterment of mankind through a right understanding of language. While the political nature of that social change remains debatable, the manner through which Riding hoped to achieve the effect must be understood first and foremost as a radical shift in the way artists first -- and then, hopefully, everyone else -- used language. She wrote decades later in 1967 of her plans for *Epilogue*:

In my own writing in *Epilogue* and elsewhere, in my poems themselves, I conceived my activity in terms of the furtherance of an identification of general complete human self-realization with a general human responsibility of spelling-out the finalities of truth lodged unspoken in the universe . . . (TFOP:TPOL 165)

Her plan to accomplish this shift in language usage toward the previously “unspoken” truth deeply influenced her collaborative and editorial work with *Epilogue*.

Begun in 1935, *Epilogue: A Critical Summary* was to have been a bi-annual book length literary magazine published by Seizin in cooperation with Constable Press in London. It was Riding’s most ambitious collaborative project to date. However, only three volumes ever appeared. The project, conceived as *The Critical Vulgate* in 1932, did not entice publishers. Riding contracted with Arthur Barker at first to publish the work in conjunction with Seizin. In February of 1933, Riding turned over a 200,000 word manuscript to Barker. The publisher, already concerned about the marketability of other Seizin works, backed out of the publishing deal, even after Riding revised and shortened the manuscript (Friedmann 197-221). Thus, Seizin Press and Arthur Barker, Ltd. ended their association, which had begun as a mutually beneficial relationship between two fledgling enterprises. Ultimately, Riding decided to offer the work to a larger publishing house that could better support Seizin’s efforts. By the time the first manuscript of the newly revamped *Epilogue* appeared, Riding and Graves had severed most of their professional ties with Arthur Barker and embarked on a new publishing partnership with Constable of London (Ford 399). Constable was an old lion of British publishing that had brought Sir Walter Scott’s Waverly novels to the UK market (Feather 143). The joint partnership of Constable and Seizin published three volumes of *Epilogue*

successively in 1935, 1936, and 1937 (Ford 400). A fourth volume published in 1938 and separately titled *The World and Ourselves* might be considered the last work from Riding's Seizin Press period.

As little magazines go, a copy of *Epilogue* does not feel very little or very much like other literary magazines. Its antithesis in both style and philosophy might be the flamboyantly presented *Little Review*, or the slap-dash style of the early *Poetry*. These smaller magazines bunch poems and advertisements together, creating direct tension between art and commerce, while their tables of contents collide with their covers. In contrast, *Epilogue* spreads its contents over several hundred pages within each Issue. Every new item begins on a fresh page, and only poems by the same author share pages. The cover is hard, broad board, and the title, subtitle, and editor's names all rank a separate line and bold, block script. In size, *Epilogue* resembles an early issue of *The Criterion* (the kind Eliot produced before splitting with his patroness Lady Rothmore), consisting of roughly 200 pages (Silet 116-20). However, *The Criterion* conserved cover space with content and used small fonts to pack in as much literary material as possible, with good reason. Its writers list reads like a who's-who of British modernism: Lawrence, Pound, Eliot, and Proust among others (124). By contrast, *Epilogue's* use of visual space suggested minimalism when in fact it contained an excess of written material, and its stable of writers would feature few memorable contributors.

Perhaps the best contextual twin for *Epilogue* might be Wyndham Lewis' *Enemy*, which, like *Epilogue*, also only published three issues. Both Lewis and Riding wrote the majority of their respective little magazines' content and to a large extent, both do so in

an effort to propagate their own understanding of truth. However, each author's understanding of truth wildly differed from one another, as Riding addressed in her book *Anarchism is Not Enough*, where she chided Lewis as a "pamphleteer of anarchy": "The basis of anarchistic individualism is not authentic individualism, but snobbish. Mr. Lewis's impulses to anarchism are political—for the sake of the ride. . ." she chides, explaining her essential argument with what she perceives as Lewis's blindness to truth (89-90).

Despite their epistemological differences, Riding and Lewis further shared a basic distrust of faith in institutionalized history which propelled their little magazines. Laurence Coup describes Lewis' paranoia in his article, "The *Enemy*": "Lewis detects a massive conspiracy among educationalists, politicians, journalists, artists, and philosophers to foist onto the people a facile faith in what he calls 'the world as history' and 'history as truth'" (162). Eight years later, Riding would make the hallmark of her preface to "Epilogue" the idea that "All the historical events have happened." Although at its root each magazine's purpose identified with the modernist impulse to break with the past, the difference in tone between *The Enemy* and *Epilogue* sets Riding's venture apart from Sinclair's iconoclastic collection. With the calm and callousness of one who is assured that the worst has already happened, Riding creates an *Epilogue* for a discussion about language which, although finished in her mind, was not yet over for the majority of the literary world.

Yet despite Riding's lofty, almost fanatical purpose, *Epilogue's* unique structure and content reinforce the suggestion made by Robert Scholes in his article, "Small

Magazines, Large Ones, and Those In Between,” that the question of what comprises a so-called little magazine has to do much more with any given example’s reflection of and involvement with the modernizing forces of commercialism, urbanization, and the avant-garde than any arbitrary expectations of size or content. He echoes Pound’s discussion of the subject in “Little Magazines” when he writes,

Pound was right, no doubt, that what we now recognize as little magazines emerged from this combination of elements: the rise of mass magazines with their emphasis on advertising and their consequent need for marketable writers, artists and texts—and the contrary pressure felt by many writers and artists to find new forms in which to represent this new world. (219)

For a writer like Riding who was chronically caught between the desire to be published and the inability or refusal to produce what interested publishers, the opportunity to create her own artistic venue provided her with another means to explore and record her passion for truth, a passion which increasingly moved away from poetry. Yet even the editor of an independent literary magazine had to eat. Other large-format, little magazines such as *Criterion* had the luxury of major publishing houses (Faber and Faber for the last decade of the *Criterion*’s run) or much larger circulations. *Epilogue*’s prohibitive cost of 7 pence 6 shillings demanded not only a serious reader but one with a decent disposable income as well. The price was in part determined as a method for courting a readership which would have significant buy-in to Riding’s style and theories.

Tellingly, *Epilogue* contains no advertisements, neither scattered throughout like the larger, independent literary reviews such as *Criterion* nor buried in the back after the fashion of smaller magazines like *Poetry*. The complete refusal of Riding and Graves to participate in the common practice of supplementing subscriptions with paid advertisers

occurred for one reason, but resulted in two different effects. Graves bankrolled *Epilogue* out of his personal finances. Fresh from several successes such as *I, Claudius* and *Claudius the God*, Graves could afford to indulge Riding's vision of a magazine utterly free from commercialism (Graves, R. P. 221-223). Obviously, this depended upon the continued commercial success of Graves, a fact upon which Riding both depended and for which she often derided Graves.

According to some biographers, Riding viewed Graves's commercial viability as evidence of the immaturity of his work (234). Both Elizabeth Friedmann and Richard Percival Graves discuss the tension ever present in the Graves-Riding compound during the final stages of *Epilogue I*'s production. Friedmann prefers to view Riding's influence as one of clarity and purification for Graves: "Robert Graves, however, did not suffer loss of identity by his association with Laura Riding. The products of his imagination were literary, and stories and poems flowed. For Laura, Vulgate work took precedence over imaginative endeavors . . ." (234). While the Riding camp maintained that Graves' "stories" resulted from his inspiration and mentor's example, the Graves camp viewed Riding's financial dependence on Graves as nothing short of parasitic. R. I. Graves discusses the frantic pace his uncle maintained while Riding worked on *Epilogue I*:

. . . [M]uch of his time was being spent on ill-fated or comparatively minor projects. While writing *The Fool of Rome*, for example, which took him until the beginning of July, and was never published, Graves also worked for Korda on a screenplay of *I, Claudius*, which was never used; corresponded with Korda and others about a possible screenplay based on the life of T. E. Lawrence which came to nothing . . . (232-233)

The lovely, “literary” stories which Riding felt beneath her attention when compared with the lofty work of *Epilogue* appeared as nothing more than pot-boilers from a man desperate to support both a family (Nancy Nicholson had been abandoned by her lover, leaving Graves’ four children in need) and a mistress with an expensive passion.

Nevertheless, Graves’ contributions made it possible for Riding to launch a little magazine outside of the direct influence of advertisers. Yet this dependence upon Graves’ personal financing also left the magazine vulnerable to the ups and downs of Graves’ monetary situation, and that situation was rarely stable. Graves’ financial security, such as it was, allowed Riding to exercise a level of authority over the magazine which most editors would have found rare, especially when one considers that Riding achieved that authority through her dependence on Graves, a partner who did not insist on equal editorial authority even as he financed the project. Compared again to its contemporary *The Enemy*, *Epilogue*’s editor had similar editorial authority without financial responsibility. Although not self-published, *The Enemy* still owed some of its bank roll to its editor, as its small publisher and small circulation demanded. *The Enemy*, a direct challenge to democratic capitalism, also contained no advertisements (Coupe 164). In Lewis, then, resided both the editorial and commercial authority. To reference Scholes, Lewis achieved, albeit briefly, independence from commercial and market constraints. He could (and did) fill his little magazine with his own work without a second thought to popular authors or opinions. Riding achieved the same by essentially using Graves as a commercial filtering system. So long as Graves works remained commercially viable, her magazine did not have to bend to the will of the market. To

what extent Riding bent to Graves' will is a question for their respective biographers. Both Friedmann and R. I. Graves agree that Graves believed in the almost sacred necessity of Riding's work, although they differ in their assessment of what extent that faith was justified. For the purposes of *Epilogue*, though, the actual text of the magazine shows the influence of Riding and Riding alone. Graves' monetary contributions did not seem to purchase him the same authoritative privileges that other benefactors enjoyed, such as Eliot's Lady Rothmore (Silet 114). Thus, the insular nature of the magazine's financing accounts, in part, for the insular nature of the magazine's content. The instability of Graves's finances also explains the nominally bi-annual magazine's run of three issues in three years.

If, as Scholes contends, the little magazine phenomenon remains at its heart a question of artists' involvement with modernism as expressed through commercialism's tension with the avant garde, then *Epilogue* becomes a stunning specimen of ambitious intent curtailed by not only the literary marketplace but by the political reality of encroaching world war. Yet when one considers the longer runs of magazines like *Criterion* (1922-1939) beside short-lived magazines such as *The Enemy* or *Epilogue*, the breadth of cultural and textual information provided by longer-run periodicals dwarfs that of smaller-run magazines like *Epilogue*. After all, a magazine published only over the course of three years cannot furnish the scope of information about changing times and tastes which a longer run little magazine might provide. Even a little magazine specialist like Ian Hamilton cites the perfect run length for a small magazine as 10 years: long enough to accomplish its purpose and still remain relevant (9). *Epilogue* falls far short of

that mark. However, a magazine like *Epilogue* provides a different sort of information through its relatively quick origination, production and demise than the study of a longer-run magazine, even if studied for the same duration of time. The reasons for *Epilogue*'s fruition and failure elucidate the time and circumstances of its existence and reflect the tensions, both personal and political, which plagued its editor and collaborators. And for the study of the effects of Riding's language theories on her editorial and collaborative style, *Epilogue* represents the best pre-1941 example of her belief in language's influence on artists and the world at large.

Riding's language theories and her belief in their impact on literature and politics resulted in a decidedly "hands-on" approach. To some, Riding's collaborative and editorial style within *Epilogue* seems bizarrely intrusive. Joyce Wexler writes of Riding's editorship in her article, "Epilogue: How Poetic Authority became Authoritarian" that, "Riding insisted on editorial independence, but she did not grant contributors comparable freedom. Instead of moderating the journal's individuality to include allied points of view, Riding created *Epilogue* in her own image" (133). For example, in *Epilogue I*, Riding is the author or co-author of nine out of 20 articles. In an article by James Reeves entitled "The Romantic Habit in English Poets," Riding writes 10 sizeable footnotes for the 20-page work. In yet another editorial trick, Riding creates a mock conversational essay in which she responds to Tom Matthews' posted questions, resulting in little more than an interview of the editor. Add to these anomalies of typical editorial style the fact that Graves financed the venture, and one starts to suspect *Epilogue* was a boutique vanity production designed to increase the cult of personality

which many have already accused Riding of running at the Seizin Press. After all, many of the contributors -- Reeves, Matthews, and Honor Wyatt -- were Riding's mentees. However, to dismiss the dominating style of Riding's editorship of *Epilogue* as mere megalomania neglects the content of her intrusions and the consistency of those intrusions with the stated purpose of her editorial style. Something else was at work in *Epilogue* than merely Riding's self-interest, as Wexler proposes (133). This "something else"—Riding's language theories and their agency through her editorial practice—reveals itself most tellingly in *Epilogue I* where she most succinctly lays out *Epilogue's* purpose and her editorial vision.

Close examination of Riding's introductory essay, entitled "Preliminaries," reveals Riding's editorial theory and her belief in language's key role in that theory. She describes *Epilogue* as a quasi-journalistic survey of all thought, discriminating against nothing. She defines the magazine's goal as one of sifting, to separate truly wise thought from ideas, which she categorizes as "emotional interpretations of truth" (1). What troubles critics such as Wexler most about *Epilogue's* mission statement is that it proposes to proceed with analysis of thought ahistorically. Riding writes, "All the politicians who are going to be elected have been elected; and all the artificial excitement in events which no one really regards as either very important or very interesting has been exhausted. All the historical events have happened" (2). For a little magazine which begins publication a short two years after Hitler comes to power in Germany, such postured ignorance of world events seems irresponsible. Wexler describes *Epilogue's* stated anti-political purpose as fascist in and of itself: "Writers who denied that they had

a political agenda inadvertently served fascism by ignoring the actual loss of life for the sake of symbolic meanings” (134). Certainly, in hindsight, stating that “all the historical events have happened” seems like asking for trouble.

Yet Wexler adopts a too-literal interpretation of Riding’s purpose with *Epilogue*. Her statement that, “All the historical events have happened” resembles the anti-historicism of Lewis’s *The Enemy*. I say “resembles” rather than “duplicates” because, whereas Lewis’s position bordered on anarchism, Riding’s ahistoricism seeks to remove cultural, historical, and political relevance from *Epilogue*’s evaluation of topics and analysis of truth in order to further distill language. Riding’s stated idealistic goal of a zero-degree analysis of every known topic in the realm of thought disguises a simpler, albeit equally impossible goal: the objective analysis of language as it relates to thought. An abstract and absolute definition of truth guides Riding, as it did in her major work of the 1930’s. Thus, allowing for the cultural or other relevance of a concept would not serve her goal of uncovering ultimate truth. *Epilogue* becomes Riding’s testing ground for what would eventually become her dictionary work, *Rational Meaning*. Riding’s policy of ahistoricity might seem at first glance to be the response of a timid or avoidant editor to tumultuous times, if she had not subsequently spent the rest of her life essentially applying the same policy to her pursuit of truth.

Because of the specificity of purpose which Riding saw for *Epilogue*, her editorial policy necessitated a hands-on approach. She made clear in her initial statement that submissions would not be welcomed. Each piece was to be designed and formed with

her assistance, or at least with the assistance of Graves, her assistant editor. She emphasized editorial collaboration as inherent in the very purpose of *Epilogue*:

Contributions must be the result of collaborative arrangement. Our activity is collaborative and there can be no collaboration without an adjustment of interest to a central theme. Our central theme is a time-surviving truth. We welcome contributors who will take pleasure in thus adjusting their interests, which is to say their work to a governing standard (5).

The nature of these collaborations was intense, but in most cases, they resulted in either debate-style articles in which each author maintained his or her own voice (such as the article “Germany”) or blended pieces which contained ample evidence of both parties’ input (such as “Filmmaking”). Correspondence from the period bears out this analysis, particularly letters to and from Lye, Aldridge, and Bronowski. Riding wrote to both Jacob and Eirlys Bronowski that, “This is what we feel in Deià about Vulgate enormousness: It must be big—bigger than any magazine could ever be, because it isn’t a magazine. It is much more dignified than a magazine” (personal letter 1933, qtd. in Friedmann 197).

As Riding’s letter indicated, what seems most significant about the collaborative side of Riding’s work in *Epilogue* is its sheer volume. While she might have been willing to let other artists have their voice, in most cases, Riding had the last word. Each artist who contributed to *Epilogue* worked extensively with Riding, either living at Deià, such as Jacob Bronowski and Len Lye, or communicating through voluminous correspondence, such as John Cullen. These contributors did more than adjust their “interests”; they adjusted their lives.

The demanding collaborative work and unity of purpose of *Epilogue* explains some other anomalies in Riding's editorial preferences which Wexler cites. Readers were not courted, and many found the size of the volumes and their cost -- seven shillings sixpence, the same price as a standard hardcover novel -- a considerable sum in the midst of a worldwide depression. These off-putting traits of the magazine insured that the readers were as much a part of the "thought" community as the artists and editor. From a rhetorical stand point, one could argue that Riding wanted to control every aspect of expression and reception. She collaborated on most pieces, inserted her editorial voice through footnotes, and insured a selective audience through price. In another odd decision during a time period in which many authors were free agents -- working to get as much published as they could wherever they could -- and editors generally supported this policy in order to increase their own readership, Riding discouraged her contributors from submitting work to other magazines (Wexler 137). Ostensibly, this was due to the intense collaborative process each piece required, but on the surface these policies seem bizarrely, destructively controlling. Riding herself describes her role at *Epilogue* thus:

My teachings in matters of words had behind them, thus, a broad intellectual experience, and were fired with urgent feeling on large human issues: . . . The work of general thought I describe had some public expression—for example, in the literary volumes of *Epilogue* (in which besides being editor and ubiquitous contributor besides, I was an invisible co-author in nearly all the contributions of others) and in the publicistic *The World and Ourselves*. (73)

So convinced was Riding of the immediacy of her language theories that she resorted to ghost writing. Yet, unlike Lewis who made no pretense to include other authors, Riding

demanded a collaborative project. However, Riding wanted her communal project to produce a singular vision: her own.

So why did Riding insist on working with others, only to wind up doing most of the work of *Epilogue* herself? The answer lies in Ridings understanding of collaboration and influence, which she details in a 1967 discussion of the collaborative nature of

Epilogue:

With this question of the ‘Who?’ human beings, waiting upon one another, loving the common pace (from kindness, strengthened often by timidity), have lingered much in the way, making one another’s company the leader. In *Epilogue* I tried to find a common pace that would be a pace of movement, not merely treading in one another’s standing-places. Though the “who” who are one’s others are the indispensable condition of one’s self-realization, since one must realize human existence as an entirety in order to realize oneself, one must chose one’s own movement, where there proves to be no common pace but that of waiting, waiting, for the other to move. (166)

Decades after the demise of *Epilogue*, Riding describes her collaborative process as one of waiting for others to catch up. In practical terms, this meant Riding often did the work of editor, author and publisher. Wexler asks in the title of her article when authority becomes authoritarian. While Riding’s editorial policy can be interpreted as authoritarian, it is important to remember that the lines between control and community remained clear to Riding. She simply had an impossibly strict standard for what constituted community, and only her vision — which extended to readers as well as writers — would suffice for *Epilogue*. Guiding this vision, as always, was Riding’s unwavering belief in absolute truth and the possibility of expressing it through language. Complicating this vision was Riding’s unwavering belief in herself as an intermediary between audiences, as well as other artists, and truth. This, coupled with her overly

zealous collaborative style, resulted in intrusions, almost omnipresence, throughout *Epilogue*.

Another sample from the first volume illustrates how Riding, with her select coterie of authors, proposed to deliver on her promise of a journalistic pursuit of absolute truth. In an interview-style essay which begins the first volume, Tom Matthews poses a list of questions which include such vague inquiries as, “Does God exist? In what sense? What is God’s relation to Space? To time?” and such leading ones as, “Has God sons? Daughters? Does the female principle come into God’s world?” (7) A clue to the true nature of the essay occurs in the title, “The Idea of God.” After all, ideas, according to Riding, are emotionally charged thoughts (“Preliminaries” 1). In order to sift out the “true” thought behind the concept of God, then, one must remove the emotion through analysis. Riding does this by addressing Matthews’s jumbled (purposely?) questions in an analytical manner which above all strives for objectivity, and in that effort, occasionally achieves rather ridiculous results. In one section of the essay, Riding’s love of analysis proves overly ambitious, as she attempts to explain the history of the Jews from Abraham to Moses through the Babylonian exile to the coming of Jesus in less than five pages (24-29). After a slap-dash romp through Judeo-Christian tradition, she arrives rather suddenly at the incredible statement that Aryan is evil, and women are the devil (29).

She makes the sarcastic tone of the previous statement clear as she leaps from this pronouncement to a discussion of gender as it relates to deification. In another section of the essay, she announces that Jesus is the complete “disconnexion of irksome dependence

on the female patron of origination” (28). The odd turns and tangles of Riding’s responses to Matthews begin to make sense when one realizes that for Riding the term God has been sullied by over-association with masculine traits. From a linguistic standpoint, Riding, who always seeks a one-to-one ratio of sign and signified in order to determine truth, considers the historical trappings and modern context from which the term God emerges as grime that must be cleansed from the original thought which was God. After an etymological analysis of the term through the Greek, Latin, and Anglo Saxon Sources, Riding stresses the importance of clarifying the term “God” as “the final distinction—the first distinction as that which obtains ultimately and to which other distinctions must relate” (39). For her, this clarification involves stripping off the masculine “vener” which clings to deism and reintroducing a feminine one, which one could argue equally distorts any literal interpretation of God. Yet Riding recognizes neither the hypocrisy of her analysis nor the impossibility of reducing words to their literal truth. Again, Riding’s 1967 recollections of her process in *Epilogue* prove poignant to describe the results of her analysis: “Eventually, we must leave behind everything that is not language’s own government of the Word which does not modify what-is-to-be-said, uniting in itself the universal and the human necessity of truth” (166). The impossible, almost mystical nature of *Epilogue*’s task escapes her.

Riding grants Matthews a rebuttal in “The Idea of God,” but she includes her own interjections. Tellingly, Riding’s replies are twice the length of Matthews’s. Perhaps Riding needs someone of tougher mental metal in order to clarify this term because Matthews repeatedly submits to Riding’s teachings, as if he’s interviewing a visiting guru

rather than engaging in intellectual debate. When Riding opens a two page reply with, “You agree, in fact that man fundamentally dislikes his birth-dependence on woman . . .” (42), Matthews does not reply or retract, but merely asks for clarification of a different point later in the essay. Naturally, Tom Matthews’s reply ends with Laura Riding’s restatement that the concept of God has been too closely associated with the male gender. Interestingly enough, after thoroughly trouncing Matthews intellectually, Riding chose to follow this “interview” with four of Matthews’s poems. For a reader, the juxtaposition of Matthews’s poems next to his meek performance in “The Idea of God” detracts from the artistic credibility of the poems. As an editorial decision, it seems odd to place these works so near the scene of Matthews’s evisceration. Her editorial decision hints at the way in which she regarded these articles and her own overbearing presence in them. That her treatment of Matthews might leave readers wondering why she published anything else by him never occurs to Riding the Editor. The emotional impact of her treatment of her authors was something which Riding rarely considered. In the quest for truth, no one — readers or authors — could be coddled.

“The Idea of God” exposes Riding’s self-perceived role as both collaborator and editor as inherently linked to her Platonic interpretation of language’s relation to truth and her unique belief that she could access this truth. Despite her claims to the contrary, her analysis of the term “God” does not achieve rational objectivity but rather furthers her own feminist agenda at that moment. Riding scholars generally shy away from calling Riding a feminist, as she did not participate in the political movements throughout her lifetime. However, in this article, her insistence on the re-integration of the feminine into

the concept of God might best be described as feminist, if not in intent, then certainly in tone and result. Other idiosyncrasies occur. In the article, Riding seems to believe that she has an innate understanding of everything from Jewish history to the spiritual state of the average Irishman (39). Her anger at the “devil” Irishman Geoffrey Phibbs emerges in her insistence on the atheism of all Irish: “To the Irish mind there can be no ‘something else’” (35). To what extent these beliefs and her insistence on their acceptance stem from an overestimation of her own intellect and importance cannot be determined, though critics such as Wexler believe that such absurdities poison *Epilogue* (134). Other critics, such as Peter Temes, cite her alarming ego as the reason for her failure as a poet. He writes in his article, “Code of Silence: Laura (Riding) Jackson and the Refusal to Speak” that, “Riding is the teacher, the priest, the high functionary in the service of all poetry’s reasons” (90). Riding might not have disagreed with that statement. However, if pomposity were an unforgiveable crime among literati, shelves would be empty. For the study of little magazines and Riding as an editor of such magazines, it is far more useful to understand that to a large extent, Riding’s beliefs and behavior grew from an unwavering interest in words, study of words, and her belief that words granted her a direct relation to absolute truth. The effect of the force of that belief on the contents of her magazine drives an example of unmitigated editorial control.

Ironically, considering the description of the editorship of *Epilogue* as control in the supposed service of one individual’s truth, one of the more controversial articles in *Epilogue I* involves an analysis of the German State in the 1930s, itself a study in totalitarianism. Despite her editorial injunctions to eschew all things historical and for

authors to only submit the very latest and most final of their work (the “epilogue” of all things), this article provides a dialogue about Germany which begins before the Nazi Revolution of 1933 and ends with an analysis of Nazism as a “social problem.” The 36-page article, one of the largest in the volume, features three authors, at least nominally: Laura Riding, John Cullen, and Madeleine Vara. A friend of a friend, John Cullen was on loan from Riding’s friend and collaborator Jacob Bronowski’s little magazine *Experiment*. “Madeleine Vara,” however, was in all likelihood a pseudonym for Riding. Although Graves at one time claimed that Vara was a “house name,” meaning any one at Seizin may have used the pseudonym, evidence from later letters by Riding suggests that when it came to *Epilogue*, Vara belonged to Riding (*Denver Quarterly* Interview). What this means for the article “Germany” is that Riding both introduces and concludes the subject matter, much as she does other major articles in the volume. Beyond co-authorship, her editorial presence appears in lengthy footnotes for everyone’s contributions, even her own.

It is because of “Germany” and other articles with a similar tone that Joyce Wexler condemns the *Epilogue* experiment on moral grounds. She cites Riding’s categorization of Germans as cowardly pain-mongers (98-99) and as being “offensive and irresponsible” (141). Indeed, for twenty-first century readers, some of the essay is difficult to stomach. In one footnote explaining the Roman scholar Tacitus’s observations of the German Barbarians, Riding as Madeleine Vara writes, “The Greeks, also a fundamentally cowardly race, laid the same emphasis on the loss of the shield. . .” managing to categorically denounce two nationalities at once (112). In another example

of racial profiling, Vara emphasizes the rumor that Nietzsche died of venereal disease and glibly states that “guzzling and sousing is the natural German habit” (114-115). Riding seems to make her most outrageous pronouncements as Vara, leading Wexler to conclude that she does so out of shame (141). However, the idea that Riding was hiding behind Vara does not make sense, as Riding vehemently fought to be credited as the sole author behind the pseudonym in her “Some Autobiographical Corrections of Literary History” in 1974. Also, to conclude that Riding hides these remarks under the name Vara suggests that Riding understood them as something of which she should be ashamed. Shame was not an emotion which Riding seems to have entertained often. A far more likely motivation for using Vara to speak the most shocking comments was to point up the bizarre nature of the statements themselves as they represented the extremes of the article’s analysis.

As uncomfortable and inconvenient as the racial comments in the article prove to be for scholars, they often result from merciless linguistic analysis. For example, in Vara’s analysis of Nietzsche, she includes a recitation of the history of Germany’s name from Tacitus:

It is noteworthy that the four chief names for the race — *Deutsch*, *Allemand*, *Teuton*, *German* — convey this sense of congenital relatedness. *Deutsch* and *Teuton* are derived from the same word—meaning ‘the people’ in a corporate human sense. The Roman name for the race, as distinct from particular tribes, was *Germani*, which means ‘the related ones’ . . . *Allemands* or *Alemanni* is *alle menne* or ‘all men’ or ‘the humans’ . . . (113).

Vara uses the idea that these names are interrelated to further the thought that homogeneity exists within the German race itself, providing the rationale (though shaky)

for describing Germans as a group sharing the same unflattering characteristics. For Riding, the name of an object or an entire people could determine its characteristics. In this sense, she practiced a sort of linguistic essentialism.

Riding's dependence upon a seemingly rational system of linguistic analysis to generalize about an entire nation takes cues from other works of the era which feature analysis of evidence — either subjective or objective — to determine a race or nation's merits and faults, as well as potential dangers. Although certainly not as purposely malevolent as something like Hilaire Belloc's 1922 book, *The Jews*, in which he compares European Jews to aliens who must be eliminated or segregated (1), Riding does seem to revel in racial stereotyping, a common topic for the era. For example, she cites the recent German fascination with Hindi religion as evidence of the race's "spiritual unsubstantiality" (94). Her gross generalization regarding an entire people based on a cultural fad connotes questionable analysis more so than racism. Her assumptions seem closer in tone and intent to Johan Huizinga's *America* volumes (1918 and 1926), although Huizinga's historical scholarship far outstrips Riding's, a fact made all too evident by Riding's repeated dependence on the brief cultural impressions she made in her visits to Germany in 1927. Whereas Huizinga's *America* volumes show careful attention to American history and culture, featuring everything from rare quotes from John Adams to analysis of course catalogues at American universities, Riding's statements of evidence — religious fads and her belief Jews are the moral compass of any country — do not adequately support her thesis that the German people need to rise out of their idealism or

be left behind by the world (94, 102, 129). As a result, her article is neither as shocking as Belloc nor as convincingly terrifying as Huizinga.

Part of the problem with the tone of the piece is that Riding gets caught up in the gender implications of her linguistic analysis. Through analysis of Germany and Germans, Riding's nascent feminism is also recast in racial terms. Repeatedly, Riding uses the term "man-German" when assigning general characteristics to the race, but she never writes "woman-German." Rather, she simply writes "German women." The different references signify Riding's belief that "man-German" includes the female half as well, but without active presence or volition on the part of the female half of the race. German women are not exempt from Riding's and Vara's assault, but their faults are interpreted through the dominating lens of "man-German":

Women, that is are the something else — other-than human reality — as it is immediately present to action directed toward or against it; they exist only as vehicles of sympathy with male grievances against fate—against the reality that eludes their will. German women are, consequently, the most grotesquely masculine-seeming of women, while fulfilling the functions of women in their most invidiously conceived, feminine, senses. They are the dramatic results of the insensitivity of 'man-German' . . . (104)

For Riding, this singular domination of the male over the female which she views as inherent in the German race must be represented by a change in labels which she uses to describe the two groups. German women through the change in designation do not partake in the full sense of German-ness, which, considering Riding's and Vara's descriptions, may be a good thing. Regardless, the non sequitur into feminist philosophy weakens Riding's thesis. The impulse to define everything might have been at the heart of *Epilogue's* purpose, but in practice, it often proved distracting.

As the “third” author included in “Germany,” John Cullen’s work proves the most subdued and traditionally analytical. His first entry into the dialogue, the second section of the essay, occurs chronologically immediately after Riding’s 1932 introduction, which includes the infamous line, “Germans are a cowardly people.” In sharp contrast to Riding’s racial stereotypes, Cullen wages a clean, intellectual battle against Nazism. He carefully assigns negative commentary about the current German State to its political leaders, namely Hitler. He also attends to linguistic concerns by noting German propaganda, and pays close attention to the irony behind the title of the “The National Socialist German Workmen’s Party.” He notes that despite the name, Hitler has “very few workmen in his party” (99). As the author of section four, written immediately after the Nazi revolution in Germany in February 1933, Cullen illuminates his concerns for the German state through his analysis of the term, “gentleman,” which was then a popular English word in Germany. For Cullen, the irony of the use of the term in Germany provides the background for one of the few racial generalizations that he makes: “The only characteristic of the ‘gentleman’ which escapes the German is his ability to act without informing you that he is one” (107). He notes the German dependence upon appearances, specifically the cult of the gentleman, as a national effort to convince themselves of their superiority (111). In Cullen’s analysis of the German state, language plays the central role in the collective delusion of the German people.

Cullen’s work placed in the context of Riding’s (as herself and as Vara) proves most enlightening in regard to the puzzling racial stereotypes which Riding uses. Early in his first essay, Cullen calls the Germans out for this very practice:

The cultural aims of the Nazis are, in general, a ‘flowering of all knowledge and fine art on the basis of a politically free, economically sound state’. This is to be achieved by removing the harmful influences of Jews, Bolsheviks, feminists and those unpatriotic members of the community who endeavour to undermine ‘the great tradition of the German spiritual life’. The movement . . . tries to substitute race-consciousness for class consciousness. (100)

Cullen’s comment recasts German racial policy as a substitute for Marxist theory. In the German mind, it is not so much the worker that must rise up against the aristocracy as the German who must rise up against the Other. What makes his statement significant is its proximity to Riding’s obvious and crudely drawn racial stereotypes. Authors wrote articles for *Epilogue* in close collaboration with Riding, so she would have been aware of the potential for some readers to read Cullen as a condemnation of her own writing. Riding’s decision to leave this portion of Cullen’s essay intact suggests one of two things: either she felt comfortable with a dissenting view by one of her coauthors or she did not view Cullen’s commentary as directly addressing her assumptions. The first possibility seems unlikely given Riding’s editorial habits; she would have either addressed Cullen publicly in a footnote or omitted the portion which cast her words in a damaging light. Since she did neither of these actions, then the second possibility seems more plausible when one considers the concentration of offensive remarks in Vara’s work, an effort to emphasize rather than hide the effect. For Riding, analysis of language, no matter how random the method or preposterous the result, could not result in anything but the truth, and she did not feel a need to defend or hide her conclusions.

As an *Epilogue* article, “Germany” proves typical in its dependence upon Riding’s authorship and strong editorial presence, as well as its inability to operate

ahistorically, as promised by Riding in her introduction to the magazine. In all fairness, the quest to operate out of time, to provide a final “epilogue” to all things, was an impossible dream, and most readers understood that. However, “Germany”’s incorporation of blatantly “of the moment” pieces — the first two essays are dated to give the reader a sense of their place in time before the Nazi Revolution — seems to fly in the face of the magazine’s mission. They represent the stubborn nature of Riding’s collaborative and editorial policy. Originally begun as an article for *Epilogue* in 1932 when the magazine was still in the preliminary stages of organization, this conglomerate piece literally witnessed the world change around it. Rather than begin fresh in 1934 and jettison the older, irrelevant pieces, the authors clung to their now woefully outdated work. This example would become a metaphor for much of *Epilogue*’s content and for the *Epilogue* experiment in general. In a quest to provide the final word in everything, the little magazine often seemed out-dated and cumbersome.

The problem of history’s inherent relationship with language as it pertained to *Epilogue*’s quest for finality actually proved enlightening when Riding turned her attention to media other than literature. Despite its idealistic trappings, *Epilogue* excelled in analysis of visual art, most notably film. In Riding’s article “Filmmaking,” which she co-authored with Len Lye, she explores the relationship between language and movement through film. The pair viewed movement as an antidote to the static forms which clutter visual reality. Much the same as I. A. Richards once warned against the too literal investment of faith in signs to absolutely represent ideas, Lye and Riding caution against relying on stationary objects to communicate the truth about the external world. They

explain their theory thus: “The history of any definite form is the movement of which the form is the result. When we look at something and see the particular shape of it we are only looking at its after-life. Its real life is the movement by which it got to be that shape” (231). Their theory would naturally have appealed to Bronowski, who in his work at Cambridge with the little magazine *Experiment*, had come under the tutelage of Richards’ associate William Empson (Price). Despite Riding’s eventual distaste for Empson, she constructed her theory of film in his lineage through both Bronowski and Lye. For Riding and Lye, an art form which could capture movement would necessarily allow viewers greater access to original meaning, and through that, truth. The access to truth was always foremost in Riding’s critical analysis of any art form. Riding had no formal training in cinema or visual arts in general. Her close association with both Lye and Bronowski provided her the needed context to work effectively as a critic and analyst.

Riding and Lye review multiple types of cinema in general terms throughout the article. Of the most highly valued is experimental film, such as the genre in which Lye primarily worked. They cite narrative films, fictional or historical, as dangerous because such films (their examples include *Henry VIII*, *Catherine the Great*, and *Christina of Sweden*) attempt to force meaning on to movement. They write that, “The language of the film . . . becomes the language of hysteria; people have been trained to go to the cinema to enjoy respectable hysteria, not to know physically and soberly ‘life’” (233). They view the medium as melodrama, and as such, capable of dangerously preoccupying

viewers, distracting them from their true reality. In this sentiment they presage critics of melodrama such as Peter Brooks, who writes in his *The Melodramatic Imagination* that,

The origins of melodrama can be accurately located within the context of the French Revolution and its aftermath . . . The moment that symbolically, and really, marks the final liquidations of the traditional Sacred and its representative institutions (Church and Monarch) . . . Melodrama does not simply represent a 'fall' from tragedy, but a response to the loss of the tragic vision (14).

Lye's and Riding's article suggests that narrative film has the potential to be used against the viewer as a means of emotional control. The over-inscription of meaning onto movement results in a false association of truth.

Riding and Lye do not dwell on the political implications of such films, or on the significance which such repackaging of meaning into emotionally charged forms has in the volatile climate of the mid-1930s. Instead, they turn their attention to the experimental films which do work and why such films work. Not surprisingly for a writer who eventually abandoned poetry because she found it too contrived, Riding praises films which maintain a simplicity of purpose, namely to present "a variety of life manifestations" or motions (233). Both Lye and Riding's preferences in films favor silent successions of motion, preferably "etched" but acted as well. They encourage the viewer to watch with an open-mind, even a blank consciousness to allow for maximum "receptivity" (233). Ideally, a film's reception requires very little on the part of the viewer:

Consciousness of movement may be purely receptive, as a passive sensing of the vibration-pattern: so that we might speak of a sense of movement just as we speak of a sense of telepathy, meaning a receptive intuition of other people's thoughts, or a theosophistic sense, meaning a receptive intuition of things unknown. (234)

Willful interpretation on the part of the viewer might result in an over-inscription of meaning, and lead back to the same problems witnessed with narrative films.

Riding saw in Lye's films a correspondence with her own language theories. She believed that the word and that which the word stood for could have a one-to-one ratio, and that (to borrow Richards's terms if not his intent) symbol and the referent were meaningfully related (*Meaning of Meaning* 11). For Riding, a word literally might resemble what it meant. In experimental cinema, Riding saw her linguistic intuitions come alive as motion resembled life exactly. Movement equaled reality just as language equaled truth. Riding and Lye write, "Movement is strictly the language of life. It expresses nothing but the initial, living connotations of life. It is the earliest language." (231). The problem with narrative film then, according to Lye and Riding, was that it tried to ascribe truth to movement. This was a function which both agreed lay solely with language.

Lye and others like him worked with experimental films as a means first and foremost of expression, and Riding's language theories resonated deeply with his philosophy of filmmaking. He would rely on Riding throughout the 1930s to collaborate with him on his various experimental endeavors (Friedmann 314). Lye found his type of cinema to be the most directly linked to the preservation of the cinematic art through its close association with movement and life. In an article compiled almost thirty years after his work with Riding, Lye discusses his belief that experimental — "art" — films, must take precedence over any other type of filmmaking as a means to keep the medium tied to its generative roots:

If the screen is an important image for entertainment . . . and for education . . . what you're dishing out, the manner in which you are dishing it out should be worthy of the medium. The educationalists and the entertainment people should realize that they have got to find their development through the basic research and discovery which the creative film boys are doing . . . (Interview 1967)

Just as Riding valued truth over aesthetics in poetry, Lye valued clarity of expression in film. Because of their complementary artistic philosophies, Lye and Riding achieved a degree of ease in their collaborative relationship unlike any other collaboration in which Riding had participated since her early years with Graves. Ironically, although it endeavored as a magazine to determine everything to finality through language, the greatest noted success of *Epilogue* remains its analysis of the visual arts. Riding's powers of linguistic analysis seem sharpest when directed at media without words.

The stated purpose of *Epilogue* was to provide a final analysis for everything, the "epilogue" of all thought. However, in spite of the finality of its mission, the primary effect of *Epilogue* was generation. Contrary to what Wexler suggests in her article, Riding's overbearing editorial style did not damn the magazine; it defined it. The varied causes of *Epilogue*'s demise, which will be discussed at length in Chapter 7, had little to do with the authoritarian nature of Riding's editorship. But as Laura Riding's vehicle for her own brand of linguistic analysis, *Epilogue*'s brief existence speaks for a rarified time when a literary magazine could cater to its editor rather than its contributors or readers. It stands as a witness to the power of Riding's personality and the persuasiveness of her linguistic theories. Her unwavering belief in the link between language and truth drew authors to her long after *Epilogue* ceased publication. Even after the Seizin press was disbanded due to the Spanish Revolution, Riding assembled the largest group of

collaborators yet from across Europe and America to participate in *Epilogue IV: The World and Ourselves*. Ultimately, Riding saw her original purpose with the magazine, which, in her words, was “to subject the confusion of values in which human beings have lived from age to age to an ordering which was not a new layer of sophistication . . .but an ordering in depth, and an ordering in height and breadth” (“In Conversation”), begun with *Epilogue*. The little magazine allowed her to clarify much about her collaborative style and her language theories. While *Epilogue* proved short-lived, it provided Riding with the testing ground she needed in order to begin to seriously consider her dictionary work. It would take the remainder of her life to complete the linguistic tome which grew out of *Epilogue*’s vision, *Rational Meaning*.

Chapter 7: *The World and Ourselves:*
Editorial and Collaborative Control Writ Large

If one considers Riding's time at Seizin Press as the latter half of a developmental process which began with her work with the Fugitives and continued until her disavowal of poetry in 1941, then comparative studies of similar projects from the beginning of this period and the end of this period provide ample data from which to chart her evolving sensibilities regarding language, art, and politics. Such studies also highlight changes in Riding's work habits—her demands on fellow artists, her attention to bibliographic detail, her tolerance, or intolerance, for dissention—which, when coupled with her ever-growing distrust of poetry, complete a picture of an editor and artist who was deeply committed to her purpose as artist and linguistic theorist and yet constantly changing what that commitment might look like or necessitate from herself and others. What emerges is a picture of a controlling editor and a difficult collaborator; what that image fails to communicate, however, is the depth of determination behind Riding's efforts and beliefs, a determination which governed every decision she made as both collaborator and editor and led to her

ultimately using every opportunity Seizin afforded her to refine her theories of language and its poetic uses. She believed and acted with complete surety of purpose, even as that purpose evolved over two decades, moving her artistically along a continuum from Aristotelian to Platonic rhetoric, toward a literal, non-symbolic theory of language.

One can witness this shift in the many letters Riding wrote throughout her career. Letter writing occupied much of Laura Riding's time, both professionally and personally. At Cornell University where her papers and personal effects have recently been deeded, over a hundred boxes containing multiple files house her extensive collection of received and returned correspondence. Throughout her time at Seizin's remote location on Majorca, she maintained long-distance friendships with literary, artistic, and scientific notables such as Gertrude Stein, Len Lye, and Jacob Bronowski primarily via letter. Not only did Riding participate in letter-writing as a means to promote her professional and personal ends, but she studied the practice of correspondence as a linguistic event as well. Two works which book-end her time at Seizin Press deal primarily with letters—*Everybody's Letters* and *The World and Ourselves*. Taken individually, these works demonstrate Riding's editorial ethics. Considered together, they reflect her changing linguistic sensibilities and growing distrust of her collaborative opportunities within the community she once formed at Deià. This distrust occurred simultaneously with Riding's increased insistence on editorial and artistic control of projects such as *Epilogue*. For Riding at least, what began as a collaborative effort became more and more the cooperative (or coercive)

development of her own artistic vision. As the turbulent decade which was the 1930s drew to a close, that vision for Riding became increasingly political as well as linguistic.

Studied together, *Everybody's Letters* and *The World and Ourselves* track Riding's shifting artistic sensibility as well as her increasingly demanding editorial style. More than merely internal factors such as Riding's crystallizing language theories or her deteriorating relationship with Robert Graves were to blame for these changes. Politically, the world of 1938 looked very little like the world of 1931. Some of the desperation which flavored Riding's responses in *The World and Ourselves* no doubt came from the immediate political crisis to which she was responding, to which she was asking so many of her colleagues to respond. The contrast in Riding's tone between the playful *Everybody's Letters* and the strident *The World and Ourselves* owes something to the position of the editor: exiled from her home, uncertain for her future. Beyond tone, the two works vary startlingly in composition style. Riding seemed much more willing for others to take the reins in *Everybody's Letters*, which was primarily composed by others. By contrast, Riding wrote the bulk of *The World and Ourselves* on her own, in response to others. Her mission by 1938 became too important to trust to others. However, both works shared an innovative format which influenced other works at the time. Riding took the epistolary novel, blurred the lines between fiction and non-fiction, and delivered a new and interesting genre, one with the potential both to entertain and persuade.

Riding first hatched the idea for *Everybody's Letters* in late 1931 (Friedmann 165). The work would contain letters from a variety of sources, collected over the course of more than a year. The impetus for the project came in part from her increasing desire to link language with truth. For Riding, letters represented words without specific artifice. They were something other than stories or poems. Just how closely letters could be linked with her abstract and absolute notion of truth was something Riding hoped to discover through the project. Her working title for the book—*A Compendium of All True Letters*—reflected her intentions with the project. There seemed to be an almost childlike naïveté guiding Riding's hope for the work. For one, she did not foresee any potential legal or personal problems stemming from publishing private correspondence, and two, she began the project under the assumption that what was written in letters might be closer to truth than any other type of writing. This belief came more from her disillusion in poetry than her esteem for letter writing. Certainly, by 1931 the bloom was off of the poetic rose for Riding. Although she continued to write poetry, she frequently turned to epistolary forms of writing both as inspiration for content and as structure for her works. For example, her play *14A* which dealt with her tumultuous relationship with the Irish poet Geoffrey Phibbs drew much of its plot and some of its lines from letters exchanged among Riding, Phibbs, Robert Graves and his wife Nancy Nicholson (210). Composed of imaginary letters never sent to Graves' eldest daughter, Riding's epistolary work *Four Unposted Letters to Catherine* borrows both form and purpose from Riding's interest in letter writing. For a brief time while she was at Seizin, Riding seemed to have

placed as much faith in letters as she once did in poetry. This was a faith which would waver professionally but continue in private for the rest of Riding's life.

Like most projects which Riding undertook while at Seizin Press, getting *Everybody's Letters* published proved harder than one might expect for the editor of a small press. Deemed too large of a work for Seizin to publish, the 250 page compilation was shipped to Arthur Barker's publishing house as one of the first offerings produced by his alliance with Graves and Riding. Barker released the book on February 20, 1933. Generally positive reviews followed, although some of them were planted in the London Observer by Eirlys Roberts, Jacob Bronowski's significant other (Friedmann 196). *The New York Times Literary Supplement* ran a review by Geoffrey West (Geoffrey H. Wells) in mid-March of 1933 which cited the general interest of the work, but noted Riding's odd if somewhat simplistic interpretation of the significance of letters in her conclusion. He wrote,

In her 'editorial postscript' Miss Riding goes a long way round to arrive at a simple conclusion. Her views on letters and letter writing are very decided, though a little peculiar. . . Letters and literature are, however, essentially contrasted. Letters are vehicles of personality; literature is escape from personality. (180)

For this reviewer, Riding's interest in the function of letters did not necessarily result in an interesting work of literature. His final assessment of the book's readability intuited a basic flaw in Riding's concept:

Yet while there is truth in Princess Antoine Bibesco's remark that 'we should all like to read other people's letters,' the basis of such desire is usually the wish to know more of the people of whom we already know something. A random postman's bag, where we knew none of the correspondents concerned

would almost certainly prove very intermittently engrossing and the case of the present volume is to some extent the same. (180)

People were not generally interested enough in the mundanities of strangers to spend the hours required or money needed to read the book. What drew Riding to the letters—the intimate knowledge of their authors and the act of letter writing itself—did not exist for her readers, a typical pitfall of a myopic and somewhat controlling editor of a small press. However typical it was, Riding’s failure to consider her audience’s level of engagement with her own interests proved costly. Barker covered the publishing expenses for *Everybody’s Letters* as part of his initial 1932 contract with Graves and Riding in which he also agreed to publish several books of poetry and prose by both authors. They received five hundred dollars a year for royalties (Friedmann 193). However, *Everybody’s Letters*, like many of the other books sent to Barker by the two authors, turned into a dismal failure. Only around 100 copies were sold and Barker made no more than five pounds off of the venture (210). This financial failure and others such as Riding’s *The Story Pig* and Graves’ *The Real David Copperfield* quickly soured the new relationship with Arthur Barker.

For the reasons stated above, *Everybody’s Letters* is tedious to read. Even though Riding included some of her own letters in the book, as well as contributions from friends and family, for legal reasons, she changed all proper names and places in order to insure anonymity for the letters’ authors. Riding carefully masked her own letters, even an innocent one from “Jimmy” to “Mummy,” written by Riding to her own mother (*Everybody’s Letters*, 120-121). In other letters from her adulthood, she

employs an old pseudonym from her poetry, Lilith Outcome, to address Norm Cameron who became “Cyril” (Friedmann 239). John Aldridge became the “James” addressed in the opening letters from “Cecil” who disguised Eric Kensington. Without some painstaking research, many of the letters’ true authors remained unrecognizable to the average reader. As a result, most of the letters operated without context, void of the specific personality which created them. In letter writing, however, the personality who created the text becomes integral to the function of the letter, so much so that in a project such as *Everybody’s Letters*, the removal of the author’s identity strips the text of the context needed for legitimate comprehension and interpretation. What becomes most intriguing about the book, then, are not the letters themselves but the multiple levels of production and reception which their presentation in collective form represents.

From a rhetorical angle, the reception of a letter changes when it shifts from private to public, as all of these letters have done. In that shift from an intended audience of one or two specific individuals to one of unknown identity and proportion, the letter ceases to function as communication and begins to function as performance. This begs the question to what extent every letter functions as communication versus performance which echoes the difficulties Riding began to encounter in her poetry, and ultimately, her split with Aristotelian poetics as a whole. She wrote in *The Failure of Poetry, the Promise of Language* that,

Aristotle distinguished three voices of poetry, the voice of the lyric, and that of the poet as composer of drama . . .and that of the poet as narrator. . .The structure of analysis collapses in on itself because the distinction between the

voice of the poet in the lyric, and the voice of the characters in the drama dramatizes the lyric, and the distinguished narrative voice . . .dramatizes the narrative. (169-170)

Riding read Aristotle's analysis as inherently flawed because every form of poetry, even the private lyric, becomes performance. Riding's disagreement with Aristotelian poetics became poignant to *Everybody's Letters* as she played with the line between performance and private discourse. At the heart of that interplay laid Riding's own need to control the final product, a supposed collaboration of sorts, making an unorchestrated, "private" presentation impossible. Riding's control of the project suggested complicity with the performance aspects of language she would later eschew.

One example of Riding's control revealed itself in her creation of fictitious situations in the self-styled "true" project. The most notorious example involved a rumor of stolen letters. According to two of Riding's biographers, Richard Percival Graves and Deborah Baker, Riding received some of the letters from a woman called Elfriede whom she met on Majorca. Elfriede supposedly provided a number of stolen letters which were in the possession of Norman Cameron at the time. The clandestine nature of publishing stolen, private correspondence provides another angle from which to consider Riding's discussions with Gertrude Stein about the nature of public and private literature, which she neatly summarized in her dedication to Stein in *Four Unposted Letters to Catherine*, a book of unsent letters filled with advice for Graves' young daughter: "Dear Gertrude/ The function of Opinion is to be that which does not get posted. Hating Opinion and loving All That Gets Posted as you do, you must

applaud my not posting these letters, however much you deplore my writing them.”

With *Everybody's Letters*, Riding sought to extend the same control she had over *Four Unposted Letters to Catherine*, despite the fact that she had not written all of the letters herself. To some extent, her editorial control demonstrated her determination to create a private sphere of communication within performance. At the very least, she still wanted to discover if Aristotelian sensibilities could be salvaged.

Before the demise of their friendship, Riding had solicited Stein's help with *Everybody's Letters*, despite the two authors' differing opinions regarding the nature and purpose of epistolary prose. Logan Esdale details Stein's involvement with *Everybody's Letters* and includes an interpretation of the dedicatory lines to *Four Unposted Letters to Catherine* in his article “Gertrude Stein, Laura Riding and the Space of Letters.” He writes,

Riding anticipates Stein's disapproval of her writing and publishing what should have been spoken privately—opinion and advice. To “post” requires that you have addressed a specific person or group of people, while opinion has an open addressee and can be mentioned by anybody. Riding does attempt to use Catherine and Stein as addressees, but admits that the four letters are not true letters: they are Unposted because, having ultimately an open addressee, they are unpostable. However, this makes the letters publishable. (103)

While Esdale muddied the issue of opinion versus advice in his explanation of Stein and Riding's interpretation of private versus public expression, his point regarding open and specific addressees proves salient to a discussion of letter writing and letter publishing for Riding. The original title of *Everybody's Letters* was *All True Letters*, and the word “true” carried significance for Riding in her growing belief in language's one-to-one ratio with truth (Friedmann 165). The act of letter writing, as relatively

non-performative, should have removed one layer of artifice between the composer and the recipient. Yet ultimately, Riding found traditional letters, with a specific addressee, to be lacking in Truth, with a capital T. Her change of title from *All True Letters* to *Everybody's Letters* indicated this. I believe the secret of this issue lay in Riding's basic distrust of the concept of the individual, at least when it came to its expression in writing.

Riding began *The World and Ourselves* in January of 1937 after abandoning Deia and Seizin Press at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War in 1936. Chatto and Windus published the largely epistolary work, which reached over 500 pages (Friedmann 293, Ford 399). At the time, Graves continued to solicit Constable and Co. for his projects, which, on the whole, continued to prove more popular and profitable. Riding also simultaneously prepared her 1938 edition of *Collected Poems* for Constable, even as she shifted *The World and Ourselves* to Chatto and Windus. The decision to use Chatto and Windus for *The World and Ourselves* suggests that Riding was aware of the unusualness of the work. Riding depended on the reputable, yet progressive firm (which would eventually purchase Hogarth Press in 1946) to not only lend credence to her project but tolerate her authorial peculiarities (Scneller). There would be only one edition until a 1969 re-print, and both printings suggest economy of material and text space. Unlike Seizin projects published in house, which were often characterized by an almost luxurious use of page spacing, Chatto and Windus set Riding's work with narrow margins and fine print. Because of the nature of the book, multiple authors appear on the same page, and little marks

these shifts visually. Riding's control over bibliographic codes within the book appears to have been reduced dramatically from the first issues of *Epilogue*.

If her bibliographic control had been reduced, Riding made up for it in the dominating way in which she organized the collaborative effort. She composed and "circulate[d] personally" a statement which expressed her assessment of the current world political situation (Riding, TWAO, 13-14). For such a verbose author, Riding's "A Personal Letter, With a Request for a Reply" seemed remarkably short. It was not, however, concise. The letter bore the hallmarks of Riding's later prose style: circuitous language, vague references that appeared to refer to specific things which lay just beyond the reader's comprehension, and a marked disdain for figurative language to the point of debilitating tautology. For example, she describes the dilemma which intelligentsia found themselves in at the dawn of World War II as one of muddled contrasts between the sexes:

The quality of the inside world—the world inside the houses and the minds—is, in the wide use of the word, female: concerned with ends rather than with means, with a final goodness of life rather than with physical instrumentalities for their own sake, the sake of the momentary excitement they give. The quality of the outside—the world of political and diplomatic traffic—grows more and more harshly male, more and more inimical to the inner happiness which men and women have together formulated (13).

Her analysis (which at its root seems uncomfortably close to the classic rationale that men start wars and women clean up after them) relies on Victorian notions of the "domestic sphere" and the "public sphere." However, her solution, does not involve a predictable plea for women to partake in the public sphere, but rather for men of good conscience to join the women in their world of the houses and the minds.

By way of leading her reader to her solution, Riding posed the following question as the crux of her dilemma: “What is wrong, and what shall we do about it—we, the women and the men of inside sensibilities, and the inside selves in many outside persons which lean away from the outer realities toward the inner ones?” (16) A cogent reply depended upon accepting and understanding Riding’s definition of “inside” people as women in general, and the few men with feminine sensibilities, a sort of essentialism of temperament. Each participant had to, if not accept, then at least acknowledge Riding’s definition of this essential duality. In this way, Riding demanded that participants in this open letter dialogue met her on her terms. For Riding, her collaborators were not so much fellow, participating artists as actors whom she was directing in a script she had prepared.

Riding had already begun laying the foundation for her beliefs about the essential differences between men and women in her work *The Word Woman*. Lauded by current critics for its pre-de Beauvoir discussion of essentialist feminism, *The Word Woman*’s basic thesis maintains women should not embrace “feminism” any more than they should want to be men, for men were already coming to a realization that women, in their own spheres, held power and importance. Riding writes,

It is, in fact, man himself who invented feminism, not woman; for woman is not embarrassed by her difference. The notion of woman’s equality results from man’s relaxation from the strain of artificial solitariness. It is an assertion, the first crude assertion of, of a sense of necessitous togetherness with woman. (“The Word Woman” *Reader* 105)

When one views “Letter with a Request for a Reply” through this lens of nascent essentialist feminism, the gendered question of “inside” females and “outside” males

and their responsibilities to one another becomes somewhat clearer. Unfortunately, *The Word Woman* was not published until 1993 as it was abandoned at Deià with the coming of the Spanish Civil War. Although some of Riding's "feminist" ideology had informed her writing of "The Damned Thing" in the mid 1930s, most of Riding's addressees would have not been entirely aware of her special definitions and terms as she discussed them in "A Letter." It was as though Riding wrote in her own private language, complete with its own referents and signifiers.

Although the question of essentialist feminism and its role in world affairs appeared to be the primary question of "A Letter," other self-referencing points demanded response as well. In order to address the world political situation, respondents would have had to accept Riding's description of "international affairs" as "the least significant kind of contact that may be between people" (15) and that the "outside people" had become dehumanized. The question that drove the letter became how to humanize the people Riding had decided were dehumanized, and she purposely left the identity of those people a mystery: "I have refrained from naming public persons, countries, parties, particular disasters or dire situations. It is not so much of the immediate victims of international unhappiness that I am here speaking as of the nature of the unhappiness" (18). A specific victim herself, exiled from her home and adopted country, her wish to speak in general terms may have been an honorable gambit to avoid infusing her letter with self-pity which she regarded as a hallmark of the language of the individual. Riding wanted to move away from associations with the individual and individuality because she viewed such invocations as too relative to

quantify truth. However, her insistence upon anonymity to the point of individual erasure played poorly in a context of late 1930s European politics, when the suffering of the individual would soon count little. Although her peculiar doctrine had little to do with right-wing politics, her devotion to her own singular notion of truth irrelevant of the individual has led some contemporary critics such as Joyce Wexler to label her a fascist (see previous chapter). While Riding's politics never ventured toward Fascism with a capital "F", certainly her iron-fisted control of *The World and Ourselves* project proved representative of Riding's need for complete dominance even in a forum.

Riding intended this extension of control. Indeed, she did not try to hide her design as she described the project in her forward:

It is a long book: it is a large world and its unhappiness is great. I have tried to neglect nothing that might be said for our stimulation to a clearer and more active being of us since in this lies the world's only chance of happiness. What I have to say overshadows in quantity the material contributed so that this is not a symposium (X).

For Riding, too many voices threatened truth, or more precisely, her prescription for a better world through better language. She wanted to deliver this prescription alone before a backdrop of failed ideas. To that end, what Riding's "A Personal Letter, With a Request for a Reply" accomplished was dependent upon its vagueness. Riding set up her respondents for failure, and through their failure, she created another level of control as she then address their replies from a position of omniscience. Some of her targeted respondents probably understood the position in which they had been placed, and some cleverly avoided a direct reply.

The third section of the book details how the various artists and professionals who received the letter responded. Riding gave respondents six months to reply. Two popular women writers of the time, Rebecca West and Storm Jameson, put Riding off due to pressing book deadlines. They received Riding's veiled censure, and she cited them as examples of what was wrong with the world at large (21). One wonders if they, like other non-respondents, smelled the trap before it closed. A respondent did not have to submit something for publication to be subjected to Riding's editorial opinion. She singled out an acquaintance, Mary Somerville, as having been incapable of considering Riding's points without rational analysis, an insult against the spirit of Riding's request (26). Her response was not included. Also of note, one targeted respondent, Dorothy Sayers, poet and journalist, turned the tables on Riding, and ran her letter as an article in a weekly paper using it as an example of bad style (28). Riding dismissed this tactic, and focused on the majority of her respondents' sincere attempts to address what Riding saw wrong with the world. According to Riding, the vagueness and difficulty of the letter in no way impeded her respondents' replies. She purposely removed the "well-padded crutches of Allusion" in order to set her collaborators off balance (30). As a result, Riding could enter into the dialogue of the book a second time, as the balancing force with direct responses to the letters she received. She constructed a scene of correspondence that on the surface appeared to carry the benefits of non-performative literature while performing the final act herself.

With *The World and Ourselves*, we witness Riding's level of editorial and authorial control rise to new heights as she attempted to influence her readers'

reception of her participants' replies directly. Riding's obsessive need for control of reception, which became overt in projects like *The Life of the Dead* and dominant in *Epilogue*, reached its peak with *The World and Ourselves* as Riding did more than provide illustration for her own work or reply to another's statement as she did in the previous two works. In *The World and Ourselves*, Riding repeatedly dissected and evaluated each participating artist's response to her initial letter. Her evaluations were made more poignant by the construction of letter-writing which surrounded her project. She used the contrary expectations of public and private communication to heighten the critical tension she created in her replies to the participants. What resulted was a community project which left little space for anyone else's voice but Riding's. The best way to observe this effect is to trace Riding's solicitation of and response to the replies of former Seizin Press community members within *The World and Ourselves*. While *The World and Ourselves* contained replies from members outside the network of artists involved at Seizin, focusing on Riding's treatment of Seizin Press community members allows for a comparative analysis of Riding's growing distrust in not only poetic language but discourse in general to communicate adequately the urgency of her linguistic goals, especially as the global political situation worsened. Whereas Riding's control stretched beyond editorial in *Epilogue*, it extended beyond collaborative in *The World and Ourselves*.

Everybody's Letters and *Epilogue* stand as points along a continuum toward a level of unprecedented editorial and collaborative control in Riding's career at Seizin demonstrated in *The World and Ourselves*. One clear example of this progression can

be observed in Riding's treatment of Tom Matthews, a long-time guest at Deià and collaborator in *Epilogue*. As discussed in Chapter 6, in *Epilogue I*, Matthews seemingly moderated a discussion of the nature of God, only to have Riding become the sole arbitrator in a thirty page tract detailing her discomfort with the Judeo-Christian concept described by the term "god." For *The World and Ourselves*, Matthews constructed a brief reply which detailed his own discomfort with Riding's use of the terms "inside" and "outside" people. Matthews pointed out a legitimate flaw in Riding's essentialist terminology: its inability to describe the majority of people who are not essentially "inside" (feeling, artistic, feminine) or outside (thinking, political, masculine). He succinctly stated his position:

But for myself, and for most of the people I know, who are neither one thing or the other, who live largely 'outside' lives but are sometimes painfully aware of a 'inside' conscience—not necessarily their own but to which their own responds—the problem is personal (TWAO 262).

Matthews understood the terms which Riding has confined him to in her original letter, and refused to accept them. In doing so, he moved beyond her letter and constructed a more relevant question for the time, one which eliminated the boundaries of "outside" and "inside," of "us" and "them": "The problem then becomes, in our terms, not 'What can we do to help the outside people?' but 'What can we do to help ourselves?'" (262) Matthews eliminated Riding's suggestion that the "outside" people were any different from the "inside" people, and in so doing, eliminated the apriori assumption that "inside" people were superior to "outside" people. For Matthews, the personal problem was also a universal problem, and no one

group held the answers. His short, two paragraph reply was ultimately stronger in tone and logic than anything he produced for *Epilogue I*.

Surprisingly, Riding did not address Matthews's central point, his eradication of the "inside" and "outside" categories. Instead, she condescendingly swept discussion of the proposed invalidity of her terms under the rug with a subtly backhanded compliment:

But to feel oneself thus not wholly inside is merely to put a modest estimate upon what one can accomplish or initiate by oneself, on one's own authority of an inside kind. The writer is really saying that he feels guilty at not being a more effective inside influence: that he has not much confidence in his own inside force (262).

According to Riding, Matthews not only had misunderstood his own character, but he lacked the confidence to work beyond that confusion. She gently handled his other points, hollowed out by her refusal to accept his most powerful assertion: that "inside" and "outside" people are labels which did not fit. Her tone befits a gentle teacher helping an erstwhile dunce. While her replies to Matthews's *Epilogue* pieces frequently condescended, the condescension could be excused because Matthews's submissions rarely provided a cogent point against which to argue. Here, we witness Matthews's growth as a thinker and writer, and through her inability to respond to his most salient point, we witness Riding's progressive inability to construct responses to others who did not accept her unique point of view, a point of view grounded first and foremost in language. The terms "inside" and "outside" came from Riding's own strange, feminist lexicon. Because language for Riding was absolute, her definitions

for those words as they applied to essentialist categories of people represented absolute truth. There could be no room for a discussion of terms.

Riding performed a similar rhetorical trick on James Reeves's reply. As discussed in Chapter 4, Reeves had been a close collaborator or mentee. His printed reply to Riding's letter consisted of three pages in which he related the vagueness of Riding's statement to specific terms. As he stated, "I could not answer your letter honestly and avoid using such words as 'industrialism' and 'fascism'" (240). In pinning down Riding's nameless concerns, he also echoed Matthews's discomfort with the broad categories of Riding's "inside" and "outside" people: "For we are not concerned only with ourselves on the one hand—the articulate 'inside' people—and with the inarticulate 'outside' people—the diplomatists and politicians—on the other. Between these two groups there are the inarticulate nations" (240). Reeves's concern became how to best preserve the individuals within these nations from the "isms" he named and went on to describe. Reeves's letter remains one of the most cogent and succinct in the entire book, and his description of industrialism's effects on the masses, one of which he lists as fascism, proved quite compelling.

Riding's response to Reeves suggests that she too recognized the power of his reply. She began by stating, "A letter like the above is something more than a contribution of comment: we feel in it an achievement of serene insideness and quieting power" (241). Sensing the persuasiveness of Reeves's work, she immediately claims it for her own by declaring it innately "inside," despite the fact that Reeves voiced some disagreement with the term. Furthermore, just as with Matthews, Riding

again refused to discuss terms, to enter into nitty-gritty, detailed discussion of what constituted fascism, for instance, or industrialism. Nonetheless, she refused to accept the terms, calling into question multiple aspects of Reeves's reply by writing, "Some points are sketchily made and some terms sketchily used—and some assertions would surely have been differently phrased if its writer had considered their implications more closely" (242). In an analysis which is only a paragraph long, such a statement proved damning, but not to Reeves. Reeves explained his terms clearly. Which begs the question: with which terms did Riding disagree and why wouldn't she address them? Her ostensible answer was that she did not wish to detract from the power of Reeves's statement, but by simply including her own vague doubts she appeared to desire just that. Why did Riding, always so quick to explain the smallest verbal disagreement to the greatest length, hold her pen here? The answer lay in Riding's own growing discomfort with terms which she could not uniquely define. Throughout the course of Riding's time at *Seizin*, her beliefs about language and the stability of the sign and the signified had become increasingly adamant. Her inability to process or address words which she could not fit to her own unique system of signification—specific, complex words such as 'fascism' and 'industrialism'—demonstrated her growing dependence on a highly individualized use of language, one which would eventually consume her editorial as well as poetic energies.

Robert Graves's reply is significant for its insights into Graves's own character as much as any powerful message for inter-war Europe. To the extent to which his character had been molded by Laura Riding, his reply sheds light upon the results of

an ongoing collaborative relationship with her. Riding and Graves had lived and worked collaboratively together for over a decade when Graves responded to Riding's letter. Her influence governed many aspects of his reply: he eschews "isms" and reverently calls upon the feminine influence to save the world (120, 125). However, not all of Graves's lengthy reply demonstrated Riding's tutelage. Graves expressed an anti-paternal sentiment which can be traced through much of his other work to his simultaneous worship and disdain for his own father, the famous and influential Alfred Percival Graves. "The way of the world is, when you look closely at it, based on a sentimental glorification of paternity. History proper begins everywhere with the supersession of matriarchal culture by patriarchy, of poetic myth by prosaic records of generation—," he wrote and based the remainder of his five-page argument on this principle (122). He demonstrated repeatedly the superiority of women who, from their "insiderness," held the last, best hope for saving the world from over-bureaucratization and its counter-part, war.

Riding regarded this letter as an emissary from a kindred spirit. In her interpretation, Graves demonstrated his uncomfortable "maleness" while acquiescing to a need for "femaleness"—a valuation of "inside" people over "outside." She praised Graves for thinking in a manner similar to her:

I can thus take honourable pleasure in the correspondence of this letter with the tendency of the results so far. I can regard it as an omen that inside-minded men will not find the character of recommendations mysterious or have a reaction of masculinism to them as 'feminist' . . . (126).

Her reaction indicated a growing weakness in her ability to interpret and respond to the words of others. While Graves, more so than most of the replies, used her words correctly to mean what Riding has designed them to mean, the spirit behind his use of the words “inside” and “outside” took on connotations specific to Graves alone. For example, when Graves attacked patriarchy, he did not attack “maleness” as Riding interpreted it, as the essentialist understanding of unique and generalized characteristics shared by men. Instead, Graves indicted his own father. This is obvious in his description of the decaying power of the father within the family:

We are now living at a time when, in liberal countries like England and the United States, the paternal principle has for a number of reasons been losing ground. Inside the house the father is still a respected but no longer a dominant figure. Not feeling the power of God at his back, he does not resort to force to make his wife and grown-up children obey him; he would be ashamed to anything so crude. But outside the house he is still comparatively free to express his latent pride in paternity by acting as the family’s official representative . . . (123-124)

Graves’s words described both his troubled relationship with his controlling father, who wielded power with harsh words and a check-book, and Graves’s relationship with his own estranged and maturing children by Nancy Nicholson. What he described using Riding’s terms was the frustration of the increasingly emasculated male, and he did so with a surprisingly personal example.

Riding interpreted these words as a reaffirming testament to the discomfort of an “inside” male in the “outside” world. She wrote, “The chief interest of Robert Graves’ letter is, I think, in this: he is here voicing the discomfort that men feel in isolated maleness” (126). She either chose to remain blind to Graves’s glaringly

personal interpretation of her terms out of respect for his privacy, not wanting to drag the Graves's family laundry through the mud, or she did not recognize the hi-jacking of her terminology. Evidence does not support the first suggestion. Graves had regularly aired his grievances toward his father in both his poetry and multiple autobiographies. Most knowledgeable contemporary readers would have picked up on Graves's personal attachment to the anti-paternal interpretation of "outside" men.

Something else spared Graves's use of Riding's terms from her highly critical eye. Whereas Matthews questioned the definition of the terms, and Reeves took Riding's terms to the literal and specific level which threatened their necessarily abstract quality, Graves accepted the limits of Riding's terminology and worked within those limits to create a highly personal reply which bordered on the psychoanalytical. This is the sort of individualization which Riding ordinarily railed against. That she could not recognize it in Graves's work may simply have been a case of not seeing the forest for the trees; she and Graves's had worked together for years. However, it also indicated a developing tendency for Riding to accept her own terms at face value, a flattening of her interpretive abilities. Many readers have cited that Riding's work became progressively difficult to understand as her commitment to her language theories solidified. I would further argue that she increasingly misinterpreted others, as well, as her belief in fixed meanings for words developed.

The conversation between Riding and Graves recorded in *The World and Ourselves* deserves study for its implications beyond the impact of Riding's language theories. Here we see the artful dance between the two which would become fodder

for Graves's *The White Goddess*. That Riding held a place in Graves's life beyond collaborator and partner seems obvious from his repeated invocations of women to save the world in his letter. Despite her later protests at being referred to as a dehumanized muse and goddess, Riding does not argue with Graves's estimations of female superiority. "Women have greater reserves of energy than men, because it is more comfortable, less violent, to be a woman than to be a man," she wrote at one point in her reply. Yet in 1948, when Graves finally published his history of the female myth and inspiration in poetry, Riding condemned it, even as critics cited her as one of the White Goddesses herself. By then, a decade of bitterness and separation had created a gulf between Riding's terms and Graves's interpretation. Ultimately, though, Graves's growing disillusion with Riding echoed the dissent throughout Riding's formerly loyal circle. After *The World and Ourselves*, her grasp on the firm control she had always exerted in collaborative relationships seemed to be slipping.

The New York Times reviewer, Paul Bloomfield, found *The World and Ourselves* on the whole entertaining and worthwhile reading. His most salient criticism questioned the book's self-important tone: "Perhaps the chief criticism one might make of the book is that it keeps us waiting too long before recognizing that the prophets and saints of three millennia have already faced this problem of the world and ourselves" (751). Like many other critics, Bloomfield found the book engaging but failed to grasp the urgency behind Riding's particular cause as any more compelling than the countless other attempts to address the same questions Riding broaches. If anything, the very reason this project proved so important to Riding

became its greatest liability: language. Riding's use of the "inside" versus "outside" dichotomy, which was, at heart, her description of those who understood language the way she did, could be too easily reduced to feminist propaganda. Riding herself fostered this misunderstanding with her own assertions that women held the last and best hope for humanity. Bloomfield wryly noted, "One great change, to be sure, is noted (and indeed illustrated) by Miss Riding. Women used to be officially in the world's camp. Today, many of them are conspicuous on the side of angels" (751). Despite multiple, generally positive reviews on both sides of the Atlantic (Friedmann 310), the book sold poorly. Its denseness and high cost of 15s at a time when most books sold for 4s and the most expensive *Seizin* sold for only 11s proved too deterring to the average reader (Nash 327). However, in spite of its neglected status in Riding studies and the Modernist cannon, *The World and Ourselves* provides another level of context from which to observe the interrelation of Riding's crystallizing language theories and the global chaos which marked the later decades of the Modernist Era. Against a backdrop of personal tragedy—the loss of her home and livelihood on Majorca—caused by political upheaval, Riding's ideas about language and its proper uses became increasingly black and white.

When compared with 1931's *Everybody's Letters*, *The World and Ourselves* demonstrated Riding's growing distrust of language in anyone else's hands but her own. Whereas Riding as editor of *Everybody's Letters* worked to cultivate interest in the words of others, to preserve the private scene of letter writing for public communication, Riding, as editor of *The World and Ourselves* seemed no longer

willing or able to allow others to speak for themselves. Her heavy editing of her respondents and her exhaustive replies come across as manipulation in the face of the tremendous pressure her literal interpretation of language demanded. The playfulness and collaborative spirit of the early Seizin days had disappeared by 1938. The sobering effect her editorial and collaborative style demonstrated in *The World and Ourselves* owed something, no doubt, to the gravity of the political climate which ostensibly was her chief cause. However, we can no longer attribute her cause solely to external, political concerns, because for Riding, those concerns were inherently linked to her overriding beliefs regarding the stability of language.

Chapter 8: Conclusion: Language and Control after Seizin

In a sequence of events more dramatic and bizarre than even Riding's *The Life of the Dead*, the artistic community which surrounded the Seizin Press unraveled in the late 1930's. The first harbinger of the coming schism was the demise of the press itself. Seizin Press officially ceased its Majorcan operations in the summer of 1936 with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. The collaborative relationship between Laura Riding and Robert Graves which gave birth to Seizin Press did not long survive the press itself. After fleeing to France, the couple made their way to America by way of England. The tensions of their tumultuous life wore on the pair, and by late 1939, Riding had left Graves for Schuyler Jackson, the *Time* magazine poetry critic and self-styled "gentleman farmer" from Pennsylvania (Baker 372). Together, they would undertake Riding's most ambitious project yet, the dictionary which would become *Rational Meaning*, and sink into relative and seemingly welcome obscurity. Graves, having finally divorced Nancy Nicholson, married a woman two decades his junior, Beryl Hodges, and went on to father four more children, his fame and imminence as a poet only increasing with time and age. From the wreckage of what was once his union with Riding, Graves claimed the old Crown Albion Press, the heart of Seizin, as well as all of the former couple's belongings

which had been abandoned on Majorca at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War (Graves, R. P. 324). The Seizin Press period of Laura Riding's life ended, and she moved into the final and longest phase of her career which primarily involved self-exile and theoretical lexicography. Yet the overwhelming need for control which increasingly dominated Riding's editorial and collaborative enterprises at Seizin Press did not end with the demise of the press, and in fact only intensified as she became further convinced of the validity of her language theories through her work with Schuyler Jackson.

Although the exact date of Riding's disavowal of poetry remains fuzzy, scholars like Elizabeth Friedmann point to sometime after the beginning of her relationship with Jackson, and after the demise of Seizin Press. Friedmann cites new poetry from as late as 1941, so in all likelihood, Riding's official split with her primary artistic outlet occurred in the early 1940s. Contrary to some literary rumors, it was not a sacrifice demanded by Schuyler Jackson or an acquiescence on the part of Riding to ease the insecurities of her new husband. Instead, the root of Riding's disillusionment in poetry lay buried within her language theories, and those theories had matured and solidified during her work at Seizin Press. In this way, the press became a conduit through which the young, idealistic poet passed into her later disillusion with poetry, a disillusion which would in turn become her all consuming ambition for language. From her frustrated collaborations to her dominating editorial style, Riding's work at Seizin had proven one thing to the poetess: that words, as the majority of authors used them, could not be trusted. So, in the early 1940s, she set out with Jackson to revamp the English language. Her exit from the literary world seemed a forfeit of the field; Riding slowly lost contact with her Seizin

circle of friends, and those who had not immediately sided with Graves in the initial split eventually found him a more available and at times amenable friend. Riding remained stoic and relatively silent in rural Florida, scrounging for definitions and oranges. Thus, Graves and his growing circle of literary admirers established an alternative history (as all one-sided histories are) of the events of Seizin Press and Riding's eccentricities.

Whether the decades of misinformation disseminated about Riding from the Graves camp resulted from malice or misinterpretation, the result was the same. By the late 1960s, few studied Riding's poetry or considered her work at Seizin Press with any sincerity.

Yet Riding's disappearing act was not wholly a trick performed by Graves and his allies. Riding had a hand in her own burial as well. After publishing the 1938 Collection of poetry, Riding not only did not publish new poetry, but she refused to allow her older works to be reprinted (Temes 87). The strong desire for control of the material word which she had exhibited as editor of Seizin Press became obsessive during these decades. Despite the harm to her career and in spite of extreme financial need, Riding kept her silence. What continues to puzzle critics is why. Scholars such as Peter S. Temes maintain that Riding's bizarre publishing policy during these decades was little more than a misguided attempt to increase her work's prestige by making it rare. He writes in "Code of Silence" that, "By disavowing her poetry, [Riding] also disavowed implicitly all who would attempt to interpret it for they would have to begin by assuming that in it lay at least some value" (87). Other critics focus on the fact that Riding could not abide misinterpretation of her work, and in an effort to prevent its falling into lesser literary circles, Riding hoarded her poetry and other writings from both her Fugitive and Seizin

periods. Michael Masopust remarks that Riding's uniquely Platonic linguistics as further isolating her from her audience. He writes in "Laura Riding's Quarrel with Poetry" that, "[Riding's] objective is to express the whole of truth . . . According to this view, practically any omission of the original thought is an important loss" (46). In both these scenarios, Riding retreats from poetry because she cannot bear to face her reception and misperception any longer.

These critics come closer to the truth than theorists such as Susan Schultz who state that Riding giving up poetry to please her husband, but they still miss the connection that her work at *Seizin* and its bearing on her developing language theory provides for her later disinterest in re-publication. For one thing, Riding had never relished the idea of anthologizing her work, and the *1938 Collection* seems to have been an anomaly which she would only repeat once more before her death. Anthologies, as she and Graves stated *A Pamphlet Against Anthologies*, only harm poetry as a whole:

The anthology meets with two different kinds of reactions in living poets. They will either write toward the anthology or away from it. Anti-anthology poets often overreach themselves, inflicting protective distortions on their work—as parents in old Central Europe often deliberately maimed their sons to save them from compulsory military service (Riding and Graves).

Poets either simplified their works to appeal to an audience who purchased anthologies, or purposely made their work obscure to rise above such an audience. Perhaps a post-modernist analysis of this argument would be that Riding considered anthologies as one more artificial layer between the poem and the scene of its creation. Each time the poem is removed from its initial impetus—be it the post modern notion of a "scene of writing" or as Riding would have called it, "the author herself"—something is lost. The text

becomes vulnerable to misinterpretation, but not in just a general sense of “what the poem means.” Rather, each word, the building block upon which Riding built all of her poetry, becomes vulnerable to something which Riding throughout all of her language queries had come to dread more than anything else: ambiguity.

It is this fear of ambiguity which held Riding back from entering the poetic fray, at least in these intermediary decades. Riding’s supreme discomfort with ambiguity, caused in no small part by her desire for complete control of reception, as critics have argued before, made it impossible for her to participate in the establishment of her poetic legacy. What this study demonstrates as different from accepted Riding lore is that this hyper-control and its resulting self-annihilation began long before Riding’s split with poetry, or her split with Graves. The seeds of her discontent were sowed even before she met Graves, before she published at *Seizin*, and before she married Schuyler Jackson. From her ground work on the *The New Criticism* and her arguments for Platonic principles against Cleanth Brooks, to her eventual iron-fisted control of contributors for *Epilogue* and her seeming inability to hear and accept contrary arguments for *The World and Ourselves*, Riding’s artistic sensibility developed into a personal war against the instability of the written word primarily. Riding’s time at *Seizin* provided her the perfect controlled environment where she could test the extent of her ability to control reception and production, and ultimately conclude that poetry was simply too volatile to bear truth. While her recognition of the artistic possibilities of such instability should have placed her on the van guard of mid-twentieth-century poetics, her refusal to see such ambiguity as anything other than threatening to her work and the work of poetry in general bordered

on the medieval. For Riding, words only held truth when they became stable signs, but in that process, her poetry--her words--became mute.

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