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**“Does it seem I ... poet-wit? Shame on me then!”:
Laura (Riding) Jackson’s Refusal to Play
the Game of Poetry**

Je est un autre.
–Arthur Rimbaud

As of the beginning of the twenty-first century we can certainly speak about the revival of Laura (Riding) Jackson’s work. In 2001 Persea Books published a revised edition of her 1938 *Collected Poems*. The first years of the new century also saw *Anarchism Is Not Enough* (University of California Press, 2001), her seminal collection of essays, and two works she co-authored with Robert Graves: *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* and *A Pamphlet Against Anthologies* (Carcenet, 2002). Younger scholars have started to take interest in this once controversial figure, and for good reasons. This article aims to show how (Riding) Jackson’s awareness of the difficulty of objectifying “I” in the poem, awareness that she gained through the process of writing poetry, contributed to her dismissal of poetry as a decorative rhetorical strategy and how her *practice of poetry* proved this very assumption wrong. (Riding) Jackson’s *poetic practice* stems from a paradox: suspicious as she became of what poetry was in fact capable of expressing, she could hardly articulate these concerns outside poetry. Hence, she proved poetry, a *truthful lie*, to be a coherent and successful metacritique of itself and its own limitations and possibilities.

The fact that (Riding) Jackson had argued against poetry long before she finally renounced it, as Michael A. Masopust notices (48), and that it was precisely poetry that provided a territory for that struggle means that (Riding) Jackson’s poetry was very much in concert with the modernist project, which, as philosopher Charles Taylor argues in his work *Sources of the Self*, defied the nineteenth-century romantic vision of the self placed within nature and defined in relation to what was empirically available to the subject (848). Modernist writers, starting from Baudelaire’s times, presented nature as an amoral force, strange to the subjectivity of the self. In order to find the truth about the self, they tended toward the exploration of the internal realm and the extent to which comprehending it was dependent on language. Also, they realized that their experience of what was external to the self was never direct, but rather mediated, and inaccessible in its

entirety. Taylor argues that these factors gave birth to the epoch of the decentralization of the subject (850). Yet, modernists were aware of the contradictions inherent in their thinking about the subject: they still wanted to somehow relate the textual construct “I” they laid bare to the empirical reality, already knowing that not only did they perceive the world through the forms they themselves created, but that it was precisely those forms that enabled them to experience it (870). Out of such a conflict, there emerges a tension that underlies the nature-self-text axis. Laura (Riding) Jackson’s poetry explores this tension.

I read (Riding) Jackson’s *Self* in the context of the Self-world, and subsequently, Self-text conflict. As a poet, she is primarily concerned with the question of the poetic subject as *never quite the Self*—in other words, she identifies poetry as the process of (re)writing the Self, the result of which is always an approximation of the Self, a certain textual performance. According to her philosophy in the period preceding her rejection of poetry, “[a] poem [wa]s an uncovering of truth of so fundamental and general a kind that no other name besides poetry is adequate except truth” (*Poems* 484). This poem=truth equation was a central element of her initial reasoning. She understood truth as “the result when reality as a whole [wa]s uncovered by those faculties which apprehend in terms of entirety, rather than in terms merely of parts” (*Poems* 484), and she was positive that the poem could be such an uncovering. In other words, she did not view the fact that the poem was a *kind of medium* as problematic. Rather, she was convinced that its *artifice* was *not artificial*, which meant that it constituted *the only possible linguistic arrangement* through which the uncovering could happen. What has to be stressed is the poet’s deep belief in the transcendental nature of language as a carrier of *truth* and her own nearly mystical experience of it. That is why for (Riding) Jackson poetry was first and foremost a certain moral imperative. Upon her discovery that she had misjudged the potential of the poetic medium, which she began to view as a well-crafted lie designed to manipulate the reader and keep her/him away from the truth, (Riding) Jackson put forward the concept of the “I-thing” that was to correspond to *what happened* to the subject within the space of poetry. Importantly, the poet never ceased to believe in language as a prospective medium that could produce true meanings.¹ The difficulty that my

1 After her renunciation of poetry, (Riding) Jackson started working on two language-centered philosophical prose projects: *The Telling* and *Rational Meaning: Toward a New Foundation of Words*, a peculiar dictionary of “intrinsic” meanings she had been putting together for several years with her husband, Schuyler B. Jackson until his death in 1968. She later carried on compiling it on her own. Although never officially finished, the work was published in 1997.

work points to is that once (Riding) Jackson started to feel uneasy about her belief in poetry as an art that corresponds to the purity of language rather than to the utility of discourse, she remained torn between the "I" and the "I-thing": the Self and its approximation, its mirror image reflected in the poem.

In the first part of this article I am going to analyze what at first was the attraction of poetry for (Riding) Jackson and what possibilities it presented. Poetry provided, according to (Riding) Jackson, a chance to present reality and the subject immersed in it the way they really were. Then, I am going to show how the poet came to the conclusion that the only thing poetry actually offered was its failure to grasp reality and the Self and, as a result, the only thing that could emerge from the text was the approximation of both the real and the Self. In other words, the text presented their discursive enactments—the results of their textual transformations.

For (Riding) Jackson, language, in the process of writing, becomes both the very *subject* and the *object* of poetry. Hence her poetry could be described as both *metapoetic* and *metalinguistic*. Jerome McGann notices that "her writing is a continuation of modernism's constructivist line (Pound, William Carlos Williams, Gertrude Stein, Louis Zukofsky), which emphasized word-as-such" (466). For (Riding) Jackson, "words-as-such" are crucial, since they are to reflect thoughts. In her early theoretical work, (Riding) Jackson argues that words are the only material out of which *the truth of poetry in its integrity* is made; she refuses to isolate words as independent *matter* of poetry that itself generates autonomous meanings. She dismisses such an employment of language as burdened with additional semantic suggestions, which she finds distracting from the truth poetry is supposed to render. As early as in her sketch from the 1928 *Anarchism Is Not Enough* she notices:

Language is a form of laziness; the word is a compromise between what is possible to express and what is not possible to express. That is, expression itself is a form of laziness. The cause of expression is incomplete powers of understanding and communication: unevenly distributed intelligence. Language does not attempt to affect this distribution; it accepts the inequality and makes possible a mathematical intercourse between the degrees of intelligence occurring in an average range. The degrees of intelligence at each extreme are thus naturally neglected: and yet they are obviously the most important. (13)

This passage indicates that (Riding) Jackson's interests as thinker and poet revolved around the nature of language from the very beginning of her literary career. Moreover, the poet had already at that time been aware that there indeed existed things "not possible to express." It can be inferred that they were conceptualized

by the poet in her mind and located in thought. The task of language was to translate the abstraction of thought into the actuality of words so that the truth could be articulated *into* the real world. In the late 1920s, (Riding) Jackson still believed, although not without reservations, that poetry as a thought-processing activity had some potential for this:

Poetry is an attempt to make language do more than express; to make it work; to redistribute intelligence by the means of the word. If it succeeds in this the problem of communication disappears. It does not treat this problem as a matter of mathematical distribution of intelligence between an abstract known and unknown represented in a concrete knower and not-knower. The distribution must take place, if at all, within the intelligence itself. Prose evades this problem by making slovenly equations which always seem successful because, being inexact, they conceal inexactness. Poetry always faces, and generally meets with, failure. But even if it fails, it is at least at the heart of the difficulty, which it treats not as a difficulty of minds but of mind. (*Anarchism* 14)

In this passage (Riding) Jackson acknowledges the very struggle that takes place in the process of writing poetry. She points to what she once believed to be the feature that distinguished poetry from other arts: its potential as an asocial force capable of transgressing the socially utilitarian, which brought poetry as close as possible to “the literal truth,” as McGann puts it (461). That truth, (Riding) Jackson once believed, could be enacted within language. In his prefatory note to *Rational Meaning: Toward a New Foundation of Words*, the work (Riding) Jackson co-authored with her husband, Schuyler B. Jackson, Charles Bernstein argues that

the Jacksons reject any external or transcendental vantage point from which language would acquire its truths. They return us, again and again, to language as an enactment, a telling. Truth, in this light, is never exterior to language (there is no extra-linguistic, ‘independent’ reality), just as different languages are not exterior, but rather, interior, to each other. (114)

Truth lies *within* language; language is where truth is to be sought. The real is supposed to be found in language. Language, especially in the form of poetry, gives us direct access to the way the real is. The art of poetry is the art of the real. To further demonstrate how much (Riding) Jackson initially believed poetry to be invested in the real, I would like to pay special attention to one of the poet’s sketches from *Anarchism* entitled “Poetry and Music” in which she sets forth her views on what poetry is in relation to music. She explains why poetry should

not be thought of as an art closest to music as far as its artistic expression is concerned. Her argument in this essay best exemplifies the difference between art as a social force intended to please and art as an asocial force invested in the truth, and I find this distinction central to her original poetics.

(Riding) Jackson argues that it is common practice to describe music employing the language of poetry and to describe poetry by borrowing phrases from the jargon of music. She objects to such "musification" (32) of poetry, as she calls it, stating that the nature of poetry is that of an asocial phenomenon, whereas the nature of music is that of "chicanery" performed in front of an audience, which implies that music is an "art" (33), and thus a social phenomenon. Having pointed out several other differences between poetry and music, (Riding) Jackson makes a distinction at another, deeper level—that of what art is and what poetry is. "Art" is juxtaposed by (Riding) Jackson with "pure' poetry" which, according to her, is "made out of nothing by a nobody" (33, 32, 34). If poetry is written to flatter an audience or critics, then, as an "art," it equals music. For (Riding) Jackson, "pure poetry" is "metaphysically musical," that is it involves the reader intellectually, instead of manipulatively playing on his/her emotions. Thus, the poet points to an "art" as a phenomenon that has a "social source" (32, 33); in other words, all that is "art" is socially utilitarian. She confronts these general assumptions with her self-conscious analysis of several differences between poetry and music.

First, the poet calls musicians "physically misshapen" (33). The metaphor implies that music is incapable of existing asocially, because an audience has certain expectations of the performer which he or she has to meet to be accepted. Therefore, the aim of a musical work is success and flattery. Then (Riding) Jackson claims that the language of "pure poetry" is "unsystematizable" (34) and idiosyncratic, which her aforementioned statement, calling for a repetition here, proves: "a poem is made out of nothing by a nobody." The composer uses a set of patterns and formulas that have nothing to do with the real and that pre-define him as an artist to compose his work. Music plays on emotions, its aim is to "give pleasure to the mind." Poetry does not affect its readers in that way: its end does not create any pleasant effect—it is nothing but an "immediate insistence on itself," the very opposite of what music is. Poetry is the "absolutism of dissatisfaction"; the reader is always brought to a point "beyond which the consciousness itself cannot go," while music, considered by (Riding) Jackson an "experience," one lives through, even if conceived of as sad and tragic, evokes all kinds of moods that—paradoxically—make the listener still derive pleasure from it. Such aesthetic satisfaction is called by the poet "the vulgarity of satisfaction" (35–36). Poetry is defined against music as an isolating force, which is what

makes it recommendable. By an isolating force (Riding) Jackson means a quality that defies social adaptation and distortion, something that by nature cannot be utilized by society and its mechanisms.

As an asocial force, poetry was supposed to be an enactment of the Self. However, as time passed and her poetics evolved, (Riding) Jackson seemed to change her mind, and claimed that she had misjudged the asocial potential of poetry. Poetry, just like human communication, turned out to contain concealed, non-verbal messages. In a poem entitled “Hospitality to Words,” (Riding) Jackson elaborates on the question of the discursive nature of communication. Speaking to someone, uttering words is like pulling the concepts out of one’s thoughts and forcing them into an utterance, which is a form of social communication burdened with hidden meanings. Writing poetry is an analogous process:

How mad for friendliness
 Creep words from where they shiver and starve,
 Small and far away in thought,
 Untalkative and outcast. (*Poems* 70)

The poet comes to realize that the true meanings of words are “far away in thought / Untalkative and outcast” from discourse. Another example comes from “Poet: A Lying Word:”

Does it seem I ring, I sing, I rhyme, I poet-wit? Shame on me then! Grin me your foulest humor then of poet-piety, your eyes rolled up in white hypocrisy—should I be one sprite more of your versed fame—or turned from me into your historied brain, where the lines are more actual. Shame on me then!
 (*Poems* 237)

This passage aptly illustrates what Charles Bernstein calls (Riding) Jackson’s “longing for rootedness in language’s intrinsic meanings.” It was this longing that led her to a radical denunciation of poetry as an art most likely to lie because of its frequent employment of metaphor and other stylistic figures that detach words either from their designates or their “true” meaning. In this way, poets are counterfeiters who produce a counterfeit version of a universal linguistic reality. What (Riding) Jackson also stresses is her concern with the history of the (mis)use of words, which belongs to the social sphere of language usage. Together with it, the poet indirectly questions conventional order and social hierarchy—the two main factors responsible for the shaping of the linguistic code. This is the moment when (Riding) Jackson finally dismisses poetry as merely another manifestation

of social discourse. However, it has to be emphasized again that she still believes that there is a possibility for a "pure" language to exist *outside poetry*, the kind of language that can *tell* the Self.

Having demonstrated the potential of poetry, the reasons for its eventual failure, and the concept of "pure language," I will move on to discuss how the anxiety accompanying these discoveries is expressed in the very poems. The moment (Riding) Jackson started to become aware of poetry's insufficiencies, her verse turned out to be a *wonderful* display for those "inadequacies." That the language of poetry falsifies the universal truth is the most obvious of poetry's deficiencies, according to (Riding) Jackson. However, it cannot escape notice that due to the close engagement of poetry with the concept of subjectivity, and the subject itself, there emerges the problem of the speaking persona and its relation to the Self. I believe the nature of this interconnection, as it has been explored by (Riding) Jackson, to be the main factor that led to her final abandonment of poetry.

Before I concentrate specifically on this interconnection, I would like to make a few remarks on the process of comprehending the external reality by the human subject in (Riding) Jackson's poems. What kind of reality is it that is accessible to the human subject? In the poem "The World and I" (Riding) Jackson shows the ways in which the Self clashes with the "approximation" of reality evident in a linguistic enactment of the poem. The poet recognizes that the subject's comprehension of reality is defined by language, and thus reality in itself becomes its linguistic mirror image. Yet the Self does not get translated into this reality, it cannot place itself within it:

This is not exactly what I mean
 Any more than the sun is the sun.
 But how to mean more closely
 If the sun shines but approximately?
 What a world of awkwardness!
 What hostile implements of sense!
 Perhaps this is as close a meaning
 As perhaps becomes such knowing.
 Else I think the world and I
 Must live together as strangers and die—
 A sour love, each doubtful whether
 Was ever a thing to love the other.
 No, better for both to be nearly sure
 Each of each—exactly where
 Exactly I and exactly the world
 Fail to meet by a moment, and a word. (*Poems* 198)

Before I move on to discuss the passage, the poet's definition of the truth requires repetition: "[t]ruth is the result when reality as a whole is uncovered by those faculties which apprehend in terms of entirety, rather than in terms merely of parts" (*Poems* 484). Truth emerges as a result of the subject's collision with the external reality, and thus manifests itself in the subject's comprehension, or making sense of, this reality. First, reality is uncovered by the Self, and subsequently this uncovering can be possibly channeled into language in a manner that would most literally describe the experience. The very uncovering with the participation of the Self, however, has the nature of an extralinguistic epiphany. In this way, the subject is always "a word behind" the Self. This implies that the poet acknowledges the linguistic mediation of reality from the position of the Self that is not entirely immersed in language. She claims that there is, indeed, "a moment" in which the subject stays outside the linguistic reality, in the pre-linguistic world of the Self. That moment happens right before the Self's collision with *the word*, "a compromise between what is possible to express and what is not possible to express" (*Anarchism* 13), in which the subject's failure to meet the world is manifested.

The poet recognizes that there, indeed, exists an experience of the Self that precedes its linguistic enactment. The poem entitled "Beyond" explores the nature of the phenomenon whose transfer from the empirical and/or sensory realm into the linguistic realm is in itself problematic and undermines the literalness of the truth that can possibly emerge from the poem:

Pain is impossible to describe
 Pain is the impossibility of describing
 Describing what is impossible to describe
 Which must be a thing beyond description
 Beyond description not to be known
 Beyond knowing but not mystery
 Not mystery but pain not plain but pain
 But pain beyond but here beyond (*Poems* 131)

Pain, be it psychological or physical, is one of the most subjective feelings and, because of that, is accessible only to the Self in the form similar to that of the aforementioned epiphany. The difficulty (Riding) Jackson points to is whether pain, whose referent is actually a feeling contained within the subject, functions as an indicator of the existence of a possible extralinguistic subjectivity. The "beyond" is a place to which language apparently has no access, the place identifiable only with the Self. Any attempt at translating the "beyond" into lan-

guage, if possible at all, is limited to capturing "what follows" the sensory or emotional experience; in other words, the very *way* this experience is channeled into the linguistic sphere. To put it differently, the poem "grasps," or materializes within language, the moment of the sensory experience being processed by the mind. Extralinguistic "pain," the actual feeling of pain belongs to the Self and is "[b]eyond description not to be known / Beyond knowing but not a mystery." Pain can be made sense of by the mind, and it is this rationalization of pain, or its location within consciousness, that makes the feeling of pain utterable by the subject that experiences it. Once uttered, it peculiarly "leaves" the Self and gets attached to the textual "I," which suggests that pain is a borderline phenomenon.

Now, I will focus on (Riding) Jackson's enquiry into what happens to the Self exclusively in the space of *language organized into poetry*. Does it ever get translated into its own linguistic enactment within that space? (Riding) Jackson's reflections on *what poetry does to language* led her to conclude that the Self, instead of getting established within poetry as a linguistic enactment of the Self, gets destabilized, and there emerges an artificial construct previously unknown to the poet: the "I-thing." The "I-thing" is a discursive construct imposed on the Self, which (Riding) Jackson explores in the poem "Disclaimer of the Person." Written in the 1930s and included in the final part of *Collected Poems*, "Poems of the Final Occasion," "Disclaimer of the Person" is a two-part meditation on the Self's confinement within the discursive space of poetry and its inability to *get rewritten* into its direct linguistic equivalent.

In "Disclaimer of the Person," (Riding) Jackson, in an artistically brilliant way, delegitimizes the nineteenth-century identification of the poetic "I" with its creator. As Jerome McGann argues, "(Riding) Jackson made a definitive swerve from romantic 'I-centered' poetry, along with all the ideological assumptions that came with that tradition (the most important of these being the idea of the poet as genius or creator)" (466). "Disclaimer of the Person" is a recognition that the "I" the poet assumes in the poem may be nothing but an entity that annuls the Self, excluding the possibility of its linguistic enactment within the space of the poem. The first part of "Disclaimer of the Person" differs considerably from the second; in part one, the reader finds (Riding) Jackson exploring (exploiting) a somewhat limited number of phrases and word combinations. It seems as if she were trapped within a space circumscribed by language and did not wish to leave it. The poet wanders through verbal configurations, exploring what happens in between the binary opposites of the affirmative and negative statements. In fact, she frames her exploration with those polar opposites, examining the dubiousness that occurs in between. The poem opens with the following statement:

I say myself.
 The beginning was that no saying was.
 There was no beginning.
 There is an end and there was no beginning.
 There is a saying and there was no saying.
 In the beginning God did not create.
 There was no creation.
 There was no God.
 There was that I did not say.
 I did not say because I could not say.
 I could not say because I was not.
 I was not because I am.
 I am because I say.
 I say myself. (*Poems* 251)

When one reads the opening line, it is hard to resist the impression that the line is a peculiar rewriting of the famous Whitmanian formulation “I celebrate myself, and sing myself” (26). (Riding) Jackson *deconstructs* the formula, abandoning the nineteenth-century perspective—the poet is no longer an ultimate creator of the reality-within-the-poem. By saying “I celebrate myself” Whitman emphasized his creative powers: he, in fact, made his entire poem evolve, or revolve, around the poetic “I” whom he endowed with the creative power of the Self. In other words, within the poem the empirical Self of the poet-man and the textual “I” are united. (Riding) Jackson’s opening statement signals that the reader is immediately taken into the enclosed space of language where the poem and its projection of the “I” actually take place. There emerges a tension between the textual “I” and my-Self: already in the opening sentence the “I” becomes the subject in a discourse, the agent in an utterance, whereas “myself” turns into an object—*something* that gets articulated by the “I.” Being is for the poet conditioned by saying: “I am because I say.” Without “saying” there is no “being” in poetry. “Being” in the poem is not direct; it is always mediated by “saying.” And “saying” belongs to the sphere of discourse. Poetry is not a territory for the Self to project itself fully through language in order to transform itself into its linguistic counterpart. Poetry is a space in which the Self gets disguised as “I” and goes down the slide of discourse. (Riding) Jackson becomes aware of that and this is the point when her gradual departure from poetry starts for good.

More attention is paid to the status of the discursive “I” in the following passage from the second part of “Disclaimer of the Person”:

This is the I, I: the I-thing.
 It is a self-postponed exactitude,
 An after-happening to happen come:
 As closing calm is actual
 By all the sooner winds, and these
 Its wild own are, in heirship silent. (*Poems* 258)

The “I-thing” is a “self-postponed . . . after-happening”; the Self’s replacement in the discursive space of the poem that operates in *a-moment-after* mode. The poet diagnoses the relationship between the two as highly problematic later in the poem, because the relation seems to open new possibilities previously unknown to her: This is that latest all-risk:

An I which mine is for the courage
 No other to be, if not danger’s self.
 Nor did I other become, others,
 In braving all-risk with hushed step,
 Mind rattling veteran armories.
 I thus creep upon myself
 A player of two parts, as woman turns
 Between the lover and beloved,
 So be it well—she is herself and not,
 Herself and anxious love. (*Poems* 258–9)

The poet sees herself as “[a] player of two parts”: an *objectified subject*—a compromise between the subject and the object. The poem forces contradiction upon the subject: it makes the subject contradict its own subjectivity by questioning its own status as subject. Thus, the poetic discourse attempts at annulling the validity of the Self and excludes it from the space of the poem by blocking the possibility of translating it in its actuality into language.

If I my words am,
 If the footed head which frowns them
 And the handed heart which smiles them
 Are the very writing, table, chair,
 The paper, pen, self, taut community
 Wherein enigma’s orb is word-constrained. (*Poems* 259–60)

What if I have become writing? What if I am playing in the “word-constrained” territory?— the poet seems to be asking. Writing and being get confused on the page:

Does myself upon the page meet,
 Does the thronging firm a name
 To nod my own—witnessing
 I write or am this, it is written?
 What thinks the world?
 Has here the time eclipsed occasion
 Grown language-present?
 Or does the world demand,
 And what think I?
 The world in me which fleet to disavow
 Ordains perpetual reiteration?
 And these the words ensuing. (*Poems* 260)

“Disclaimer of the Person” is (Riding) Jackson’s most courageous venture; the venture that makes her question and reevaluate all the assumptions she had so far made, taking her thinking on the subject far beyond what modernist philosophy offers. In fact, this poem establishes poetry as perhaps the only space which, in McGann’s words, “is that form of discourse whose only object is to allow language to display itself, to show how it lives. What was once named ‘God’—that being whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere—has died and been reborn as language.” As the critic further argues, “poetry is literally a divine action, for poetry is language practicing itself. In poetry, language lives and moves and has its being” (472).

Similarly, in the poem “I Am,” there emerges an objectifying, and objectified, “I” that remains distinct from the Self. The “I” is like any other commodity, a prop set alongside other props, “names” only:

I am an indicated other:
 Witness this common presence
 Intelligible to the common mind,
 The daylight census.

I am such-and-such appearance
 Listed among the furnitures
 Of the proprietary epoch
 That on the tattered throne of time
 Effects inheritance still,
 Though of shadow that estate now,
 Death-dim, memory illumined.

You, spent kingdom of the senses,
 Have laid hands on the unseeable,
 Shadow's seeming fellow:
 And all together we
 A population of names only
 Inhabiting the hypothetic streets,
 Where no one can be found
 Ever at home. (*Poems* 209)

Finally, (Riding) Jackson, speaking through the medium of poetry, declares that the Self turns out to be untranslatable into language, and the place reserved for it in the poem gets occupied for good by the discursive "I" that posits the poet as an "indicated other" within the poem. (Riding) Jackson, who used to believe that "pure" language was the space the Self could *get to* inhabit once channeled by the poet into the linguistic space of poetry, arrives at a conclusion that anticipates postmodern philosophy: language becomes a game to play, a game that generates *truths* of its own, which the poet does not want to accept. In this light, language could be almost synonymous with discourse, a strict division between the two being no longer justified. In this way, the Self is eternally replaced by the "I-(play)thing," and the poem is a vehicle for putting language into play.

(Riding) Jackson discovers that the discursive "I" is what would have had to suffice had she continued to carry on writing poetry. The poet, for whom the truth was the ultimate value, must have been disturbed by that discovery: she realized how far away from her original assumptions about the nature of poetry and truth the *practice* of poetry had actually taken her. She decided that she would rather question poetry than compromise the truth. By refusing to engage in a game to be played and, eventually, abandoning poetry, she chose to withdraw into the self-containment of the Self. However, during the period of claiming *within* poetry that poetry, indeed, falsifies "true" meanings of words and disguises the Self, (Riding) Jackson, paradoxically, made language work and communicate its *inherent* truths. Her explorations, courageous as they were, eventually led her to poetic silence, because she did not manage to reconcile herself to the conclusions she herself had drawn, the most important of them being that art, by its nature, creates discourses in which *ambiguity* equals *possibility*. Was her refusal to play the game of poetry ill-considered? I do not know, but I wish she had made use of the possibilities she discovered. That would have certainly enriched American literature and given us readers many stimulating impulses.

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