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Texas Studies in Literature and Language, Volume 52, Number 1,
Spring 2010, pp. 1-30 (Article)

Published by University of Texas Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/tsl.0.0046>



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“Your Majesty’s Self Is But a Ceremony”: Laura (Riding) Jackson, Emerson, and the Conduct of Life

Luke Carson

For Laura (Riding) Jackson, the act of self-disclosure was, from her earliest work of the nineteen-twenties to her work of the seventies and eighties, as fundamental as it was to Ralph Waldo Emerson. In her 1928 collection of essays, *Anarchism Is Not Enough*, (Riding) Jackson works through some characteristic contradictions of modernism to the point of affirming a radical dualism of self and society such that the social in any form spells the destruction of the truth that appears suddenly in the form of the authenticity of the original self. This truth has no consequences for social or political life whatsoever; measured entirely by the experience of the poet in the act of making a poem, it is purely aesthetic in being an end in itself. This radical commitment to a self-disclosure unconcerned with the disclosure of the world makes her an exception among modernist poets, many of whom lamented the passing of organic “traditional” cultures to justify an aesthetic practice that implicitly or explicitly acknowledges values of aristocratic origin, such as nobility, majesty, and dignity—the values of beauty and sublimity that inform the humanist tradition. In their treatises on social and political life, modernists such as Percy Wyndham Lewis, T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats, and Ezra Pound sought to identify the conditions under which such values can be realized both socially and on an individual level, so that the good life would be as beautiful as the work of art was felt to be good. For each of these poets, values disclosed in aesthetic experience remain unfulfilled until they are expressed also in social interaction. In the early work of (Riding) Jackson, on the other hand, aesthetic experience is defined by pure self-disclosure, the import of which is absolutely private.

Nonetheless, that the aesthetic experience of self-disclosure bears an ethical value as well is recognized by (Riding) Jackson in an early essay on the vocation of the poet: in a phrase that may or may not have been

borrowed from Emerson, she declares her concern to be above all “the conduct of life itself” (*First* 275).¹ This ethical demand she shares with other modernists is immanent to the values disclosed by aesthetic experience, which, as Kant says of the sublime, command respect (114). (Riding) Jackson follows Emerson in identifying the object of that respect, which comes bearing the values of nobility and dignity, as the self. While for Emerson too the conduct of life must always be compatible with the possibility of self-disclosure as truth, the truth of selfhood cannot evade the aesthetic criteria of beauty and nobility by which it is recognized. The Emersonian intrasubjective drama, however sublime, draws its figures from the range of attitudes and values marked in the scales of social distinction, and the social derivation of the aesthetic value of selfhood implies also that the imagined world of the sociable self finds itself imbricated in strategies of social distinction.

Both (Riding) Jackson and Emerson acknowledge that the aesthetic value that establishes the idea of selfhood also implies a phenomenology of sociability and therefore an imagining of the social conditions in which the original self could manifest itself. While Emerson’s commitment to the sublime values of nobility and majesty displaces the intersubjective drama of social distinction almost entirely into the private realm of the self, the Emersonian negation of the social, as I will argue in my reading of “Manners” (in *Essays: Second Series*) and “Behavior” (in *The Conduct of Life*), cannot forgo the forms of sociability in which social subjects encounter each other, and may in fact require that such forms be released from their social determinations in order to achieve purely aesthetic status.² While Emerson in the end can only envision friendship rather than society or the salon as nearly adequate to the sublimity of the self, his reflections on manners are instructive for their rehearsals of the failure of self-disclosure and acknowledgment. I hope to show that they are particularly instructive for reading certain essays and poems of (Riding) Jackson’s in which the self is envisioned as offering its hospitality to others in pursuit of mutual recognition and acknowledgment. While in her later work (Riding) Jackson recognizes that intersubjective acknowledgment is necessary to self-disclosure, this theoretical revision cannot resolve what amounts to a contradiction: rather than being based on sublimity or nobility, the respect for the individual required for mutual recognition is predicated upon a general human value that ultimately deprives the individual’s purported singularity or uniqueness of the acknowledgment it seeks.³ As I will argue in a reading of several poems, theoretical texts, and finally her preface to a collection of stories called *Progress of Stories*, what remains after the failure of sociability is merely the ceremonial aesthetics of selfhood, emptied of the motivation that was to have justified one’s hospitality to others.

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In their turn to “tradition,” modernist writers invoked models of the self in its relation to others—models of nobility and majesty—adequate to the autonomous aesthetic value they pursued in their work, and proceeded to imagine the material conditions that would enable such models to be realized. From this perspective, the manners of Emerson’s nineteenth-century America, as Henry James repeatedly made clear, were too laughable even to repudiate. Though the idea of a “poetical” life, one’s self-fashioning in the social world, was as important to Emerson as it was to Sir Philip Sidney, John Donne, or George Herbert, the self-reliant American soul would encounter one of its tests in a more humble venue than would an Elizabethan or Renaissance poet: “The theatre in which this science of manners has a formal importance is not with us a court, but dress-circles, wherein, after the close of the day’s business, men and women meet at leisure, for mutual entertainment, in ornamented drawing-rooms” (*Essays* 1045).

In his 1887 review of James Elliot Cabot’s *A Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Henry James finds fault in Cabot’s neglect of “the social conditions in which Emerson moved, the company he lived in, the moral air he breathed. . . . We know a man imperfectly until we know his society, and we but half know a society until we know its manners. This is especially true of a man of letters, for manners lie very close to literature” (210). Yet James takes this opportunity to reiterate the point he had earlier made about Hawthorne, whose accomplishment as a writer was limited by the thin texture of New England social life: “We have the impression, somehow, that life had never bribed him [Emerson] to look at anything but the soul; and indeed in the world in which he grew up and lived the bribes and lures, the beguilements and prizes, were few.” This put Emerson, James wryly notes, “in an admirable position for showing, what he constantly endeavored to show, that the prize was within” (214). James would have agreed with Trilling’s assessment that American writing, particularly of the Emersonian variety, has suffered from the “particular idea of reality” (210) to which it is committed: a reality for which manners are mere social appearance.⁴ Were Emerson a novelist, we can imagine James asking, what intricacies of plot would come from the life of the “charming yet ever slightly droll” figure of the Emersonian scholar (221)? And yet “It is of the scholar that he expects all the heroic and uncomfortable things, the concentrations and relinquishments, that make up the noble life” (221).

Emerson is sophisticated enough socially to recognize and anticipate the condescension by which James claims to honor him for pursuing “the prize within.” In the concluding paragraph of “Manners,” he wryly and proudly withdraws any claim to fit in with such company as James would seek, and implicitly permits James to place him at a safe distance from the

inner circle of the socially adept: "But I shall hear without pain, that I play the courtier very ill, and talk [in this talk of manners] of that which I do not well understand" (*Essays* 532). Nonetheless, there is something defensive in this acceptance of his role as what he might call "the pale scholar" (515) who is subject to the intimidation of people such as James. Though self-reliance need not have any relationship to comportment, Emerson expected his scholar to be sociable, and not always to be identified with his vocation. He knew the risk that the scholar's commitment to solitude and self-reliance ran, and acknowledged that the social world was among the tests of self-reliance: "The basis of good manners is self-reliance" (1046). The scholar must have the manners that testify to self-reliance, and must not be intimidated. If a scholar is an "enthusiast," but not "a well-bred man," upon his introduction "to polished scholars in society, [he] is chilled and silenced by finding himself not in their element. They all have somewhat which he has not, and, it seems, ought to have" (1044). The forms of courtesy and politeness permit the isolate self to emerge and prove itself in public: "Manners impress as they indicate real power" (1047); therefore, "The compliments and ceremonies of our breeding should signify, however remotely, the recollection of the grandeur of our destiny" (523).

Having been instructed in independence by "the incommunicable objects of nature and the metaphysical isolation of man" (522), the scholar ought to be able to sustain this freedom in the midst of others. Self-reliance, then, implies an art of living: it is "the basis of behavior, as it is the guaranty that the powers are not squandered in too much demonstration" (1048). America, Emerson claims, is inclined to squander such power: "we have a superficial culture, and a profusion of reading and writing and expression. We parade our nobilities in poems and orations, instead of working them up into happiness" (1048). An improvement in manners would require a certain reticence: "There is a whisper out of the ages to him who can understand it,—'whatever is known to thyself alone, has always very great value'" (1048). Were Americans less publishing of themselves and their thoughts, Emerson suggests, their reserve could give rise to a culture of manners of more value than a culture of print: "There is some reason to believe, that, when a man does not write his poetry, it escapes by other vents through him, instead of the one vent of writing; clings to his form and manners, whilst poets have often nothing poetical about them except their verses" (1048).

The gap between literary style and personal or social style is a source of some grief to Emerson. However, in spite of his requirement that the scholar be sociable, in his reflections upon and prescriptions for social life in "Manners" and "Behavior" Emerson recognizes that the sublime values of nobility and majesty can never accommodate themselves to the diminished world of what is at best the beautiful: "All association must be a compromise. . . . What a perpetual disappointment is actual society,

even of the virtuous and gifted!" (345). Rather than the sublime society of those who have seen the truth, the Emersonian self finds itself among those who live in the select society of the *beau monde*, or what in "Manners" he calls the world of Fashion. However, his evaluation of social life would be merely conciliatory if sociability did not have a higher truth immanent to the challenges it poses to the self. The telos of sociability, for Emerson, is sublime friendship, which requires that the scholar gradually reduce to a very few the number of those who gather sociably.⁵ Were friendship among the self-reliant not possible, the only purpose of sociability for the Emersonian self would be social harmony. As he writes of manners in "Behavior": "Their first service is very low,—when they are the minor morals: but 'tis the beginning of civility,—to make us, I mean, endurable to each other" (1038). The higher truth of manners, for Emerson, is love.

To arrive at his vision of love as the principle of manners, Emerson identifies the benevolence that is at the heart even of fashionable manners. Generosity or benevolence is not only ethically admirable, but manifests itself in behavior that is judged to be beautiful. Fashion, for Emerson, is an aesthetic rendition of the exemplary generosity of the self-reliant, who need not themselves be members of the inner circle: "living blood and a passion of kindness does at last distinguish God's gentleman from Fashion's" (527). According to Emerson's genealogy, fashion is "an attempt to organize beauty of behavior" on the basis provided by the actions and gestures of the "natural aristocracy," who "are not found in the actual aristocracy, or, only on its edge" (527). "The theory of society supposes the existence and sovereignty of these," since only their existence can explain why manners provide so much evidence of the ethical ideal of respect and benevolence that Emerson argues is immanent to them. While for Emerson, the ethical substance of manners is love, this substance is refracted and diminished in society by the aesthetic appearance that imitates it. Nonetheless, "the forms of politeness universally express benevolence in superlative degrees" (526), and in so doing the aesthetic of the *beau monde* retains enough of ethical substance in reserve that its appearances deserve to be saved.

Emerson acknowledges that in the eyes of Fashion his earnest theory of manners may cause him some embarrassment: he allows that "[w]e may easily seem ridiculous in our eulogy of courtesy, whenever we insist on benevolence as its foundation. The painted phantasm Fashion rises to cast a species of derision on what we say" (525). Fashion would find much to laugh at in his theory of society: "I know that a comic disparity would be felt, if we should enter the acknowledged 'first circles,' and apply these terrific standards of justice, beauty, and benefit, to the individuals actually found there" (526). Were Emerson to enter the "first circles" and discourse on the truth that is immanent to fashionable manners, his earnestness would make him unfit company, for, as he recognizes, the truth that is

known by the intellect ought not to chill the warm climate of the drawing room: while “the direct splendor of intellectual power is ever welcome in fine society as the costliest addition to its rule and its credit,” “[t]he dry light” it sheds “must be tempered and shaded, or that will also offend” (524). Intellectual power and therefore truth are subordinate to “good-nature, expressing all degrees of generosity, from the lowest willingness and faculty to oblige, up to the heights of magnanimity and love” (524). This compromise with truth, for Emerson, “makes the good and bad of manners”: the purpose of fashionable manners is to encourage what is best and strongest in a merely relative sense, and to seek “good fellowship” above all. “Society will pardon much to genius and special gifts, but, being in its nature a convention, it loves what is conventional, or what belongs to coming together” (524).

Emerson can praise fine manners only so far, for it is clear that politeness and good will are not adequate to constitute “the gladdest and highest tone of human feeling,” which is reserved either for solitude or, more importantly, for friendship (514). Emerson’s exploration of the idea of courtesy in “Manners” pays respect to fashion and manners only insofar as their foundation is in the powers of the natural aristocracy of the self-reliant. But his account of fashionable society cannot avoid the disappointment that comes with compromise. In the end, the only serious reason to enter society is to find a friend, not simply to find entertaining company; ultimately, there is no other reason to hint to the ambitious youth that he continue to seek entrance into the world of fashion, and there is no other reason for Emerson himself to dally in the drawing room. “For what is it that we seek, in so many visits and hospitalities? Is it your draperies, pictures and decorations? Or, do we not insatiably ask, Was a man in the house?” (521). What we seek is a friend, a “gentleman” who “assures the other party, first of all, that he has been met” (521).

Emersonian friendship, the topic of the essay “Friendship,” is the missing center of both “Manners” and “Behavior,” which can only allude to it as the measure by which “actual society” is experienced as a compromise and a disappointment.⁶ Emerson identifies “two elements that go to the composition of friendship, each so sovereign that [he] can detect no superiority”: truth (347) and tenderness, or love (348). Friendship is the social form that transcends the limits of sociability encountered in “Manners”: in comparison with friendship, fashionable society can offer little more than “subordinate social benefit.” In friendship love is not weakened into benevolence; the kindness of affection that makes possible “the lowest degree of good-will” is intensified into “the highest degree of passionate love” (341). Furthermore, truth is not dimmed by decorum: as our affection increases, so do our “intellectual and active powers” (341), and we will not compromise. Truth is so commanding in friendship that

"the forms of politeness" can be left behind: "I am arrived at last in the presence of a man so real and equal, that I may drop even those undermost garments of dissimulation, courtesy, and second thought, which men never put off . . . Sincerity is the luxury allowed, like diadems and authority, only to the highest rank, *that* being permitted to speak truth, as having none above it to court or conform unto" (347).

However, though friendship can never be achieved by means of "the forms of politeness," the fact that "Manners" and "Behavior" intersect so often with "Friendship" amounts to an acknowledgment that friendship nonetheless must begin in the trivial social forms because of their foundation in the benevolence that provides the minimal conditions necessary for the "mutual respect" (352) and self-recognition of friends. Though social performance can never take the full measure of the self, which withdraws from its appearances and remains "inviolable" (522), it does enable the mutual recognition of the self-reliant. While in his dealing with the question of friendship "with roughest courage" Emerson may claim that it can cast courtesy aside, he also recognizes that courteousness is not courtesy (528), and that "the first point of courtesy must always be truth, as really all the forms of good-breeding point that way" (522). With friendship, mere politeness and sociability disclose the sublime courtesy that acknowledges the presence of the powers of the self, and enables the self-reliant to say of the friend, "I rely on him as on myself" (1049).

The ideas and vocabulary of "Friendship" emerge in the gaps in "Manners" because the concept of friendship attempts to reconcile or bridge the contradictory tendencies of truth and love, solitude and sociability, and private and public. These contradictions emerge when Emerson reflects on sociability because sociability must be redeemed in order to accommodate the greatness and nobility of the self. While self-reliance is made possible by the intrasubjective drama Emerson so often describes, he acknowledges that it can only achieve realization through the intersubjective drama of friendship that lies on the other side of the world of sociability. However, the social world that the self-reliant self is to enter must have within it the possibility of greatness, and for Emerson this means that it must have an aristocratic principle of selection immanent to it; this is why he must acknowledge the authority of fashionable manners. While he does not credit the principle of distinction according to which it operates empirically, he does credit its beautiful appearances with having a foundation in the good and the true. Though he takes a critical distance from the world of fashionable manners, Emerson will "neither be driven from some allowance to Fashion as a symbolic institution, nor from the belief that love is the basis of courtesy" (525). Emerson acknowledges that it would be tempting, once having felt excluded from fashionable society, to give up and find majesty elsewhere: "The constitution of our society," he writes, makes fashionable

society “a giant’s castle to the ambitious youth . . . whom it has excluded from its coveted honors and privileges.” Exclusion and social distinction generate social affects such as humiliation, resentment, and envy, among the many affects that debilitate self-reliance. Among such youth are “those who are predisposed to suffer from the tyrannies of this caprice” of fashion (531). In entering the world of Fashion, the ambitious youth is subject to a “system of society” that has prepared for him “mortifications . . . which seem to impose the alternative to resist or to avoid it” (229). As if to recommend avoidance, Emerson suggests “remov[ing] residence a couple of miles, or at most four,” since fashion is usually local, and confined to a few streets. However, since Emerson himself is determined neither to avoid nor resist the call of Fashion, the more serious remedy to one’s humiliation by the world of fashionable manners is to find solace in his argument that the world of fashion derives its manners from the self-reliant souls who are occasionally perceptible from within the precinct of fashionable society. If one considers oneself to be among the self-reliant, this strategy has the merit of allowing one to see oneself as the unacknowledged standard, and even perhaps legislator, of aristocratic demeanor.

Emerson is sensitive to the anxieties and desires attendant upon the entrance into the social world of “the ambitious youth” (531, 1038, 1040) whom he encourages to trust himself. At his most edifying, however, Emerson speaks to his audience as if it consists of the self-reliant, ready to enter the world: having completed the intrasubjective drama of self-creation, one is ready for the intersubjective drama of friendship. As Emerson writes, “[t]he reason why an ingenious soul shuns society, is to the end of finding society” (105). The implication is that one is capable of sincere self-disclosure, which requires the higher affect of tenderness and the rigor of truth. The debilitating affects of self-doubt are behind one: “We may congratulate ourselves that the period of nonage, of follies, of blunders, and of shame, is passed in solitude, and when we are finished men, we shall grasp heroic hands in heroic hands” (352). Yet the follies, blunders, and shame are the risks of self-presentation in public, particularly in the world of Fashion. For Emerson, however, it is best to ignore the debilitating social affects attendant upon the intersubjective drama of sociability: the “uneasy pleasures and fine pains” of sociability and friendship, the fears, doubts, and anxieties, “are not to be indulged” (345); these “subtle antagonisms” that reflect our ego’s armor “translate all poetry into stale prose” (345). A novelist’s prosaic interest in the subtle affects experienced by the ambitious youth can yield only self-knowledge of the morbid kind. Poetry, on the other hand, identifies and “indulges” the feelings that edify the youth and give him the courage and self-reliance that make for good manners. But there is a danger also in the poetry of friendship: “[t]he higher the style we demand of friendship, of course the less easy to establish it with flesh and

blood. . . . Friends, such as we desire, are dreams and fables" (352). Though it is essential to the Emersonian ethic that "[t]he scholar . . . feel . . . that the richest romance,—the noblest fiction that was ever woven,—the heart and soul of beauty,—lies enclosed in human life" (106), he must always, in spite of "sublime hope" (352), face the disappointment that the "true romance" (Emerson 469) of friendship remains to be realized.

Where does this leave the ambitious youth seeking an entry to the world of Fashion, knowing that Emerson's assurance might actually conceal a fear that the youth has "an ambition out of all proportion to [his] practical force" (274)? Committed to the romance of self-disclosure, he cannot know whether to retire to his solitude in order to read and write, or to enter society in order to seek recognition of his powers. While solitude and society each appear to have criteria by which the truth of the self can be tested, the one set of criteria intrasubjective and the other intersubjective, neither venue seems to have the authority necessary to guarantee that one is not squandering one's powers on "the seeming that unmakes our being" (106). In his earlier work, more confident that "the modern majesty consists in work" (107), Emerson could reconcile the private and radically original self to the social through the Protestant notion of office or vocation, particularly the office of the scholar, which allowed him to refigure the idea of work according to the imperatives of intellectual power.⁷ Yet the work of the scholar—or of the poet, for that matter—has an implicitly social dimension in the audience it projects as conferring recognition. This dimension of the intrasubjective drama is concealed in Emerson's account of the private life of the scholar, but becomes apparent, as I have argued, in Emerson's begrudging incursions into the "theory of society" (527) or association. While the scholar imagines that he might enter society as a "finished m[a]n," he takes a significant risk of stumbling, and therefore of failing to achieve recognition as one of those whose naturally aristocratic behavior signifies the power that authorizes and can evaluate fashionable manners.

A novelist could make the case that Emerson's glimpses at the ambitious youth tell the story of his own uncertainties and anxieties before the aristocratic social world. Speaking of English aristocratic culture in "The Young American," Emerson finds it "intolerable . . . that no man of letters, be his eminence what it may, is received into the best society, except as a lion and a show." While he identifies this as a problem "for Englishmen to consider, not for us," his identification with his kind and the "mortifications" they have suffered is strong enough to make the resentment more than sympathetic (229). But whether or not this story has biographical truth, it is not the story Emerson wants to tell. His task is edification, which requires focusing on certain affective complexes and diminishing the force of the more debilitating ones. And yet, the world of fashionable and aristocratic manners—credited by Emerson with enough authority to

constitute a test for the ambitious youth—is capable of inducing the most debilitating social affects. The very reason for crediting the institution of Fashion with symbolic import may, in fact, be a consequence of such a debilitating affect as resentment. Why would the scholar want acknowledgment from and inclusion within such circles? The most general answer is in Emerson’s implicit concession, in his discussions of sociability and friendship, that the foundations of the original self lie in intersubjective relations of recognition and acknowledgment. The self may discover itself in solitude, but even in the intrasubjective sphere he requires a select society of great persons to play out the drama of self-disclosure. The consequence is that the private work of self-cultivation of the scholar appears to be wanting, and the scholar needs not only to seek a friend, but to seek the society in which a friend is likely to be found. The values of nobility and majesty sought by the scholar are, according to Emerson, refracted adequately by fashionable or aristocratic society that the scholar ought to seek a nod of recognition from those who serve in the “herald’s office for the sifting of character” (520). The scholar or youth inclined to back out might, of course, justify his withdrawal by citing Emerson’s adage that self-disclosure is serious business, unlike the idle play of sociability. Speaking of the feudal institution of hereditary nobility, Emerson cites a story that, in spite of Emerson’s intention, we can take as instructive for the young Americans and ambitious youths he addresses: “Philip II. of Spain rated his ambassador for neglecting serious affairs in Italy, whilst he debated some point of honor with the French ambassador; ‘You have left a business of importance for a ceremony.’ The ambassador replied, ‘Your majesty’s self is but a ceremony’” (229).

2

The consequences of such Emersonianism are visible in the work of Laura (Riding) Jackson, who is notable among modernists for the vituperation her early work displays towards the social, a vituperation that remains consistent in each of her major prose works from *Anarchism Is Not Enough* (1928) to *The Left Heresy in Literature and Life* (written with Harry Kemp, 1939). (Riding) Jackson’s critique of the social, however, has little that is constructive for readers concerned to make political choices or to conduct their lives and shape their selves so as to further some model of the good life. If indeed “anarchism is not enough,” (Riding) Jackson has little to say about what is necessary to social and political life. The “anarchism” of her title is, in the end, applicable only to the state of literary criticism and aesthetic practice in the 1920s, and (Riding) Jackson is implicitly calling for an end to cultural activity not informed by the experience—which is ultimately aesthetic—of authenticity. While aesthetic and cultural disorientation signals for (Riding)

Jackson a disorientation in all fields of value, and her jeremiad implicitly appeals to her readers to transform themselves and the world by way of a fundamental reorientation, she can only advocate that the self affirm its "unreality" in face of the "real" that is constituted socially as a world of others hostile to authentic selfhood. As a result, "the unreal self . . . is a sort of social disappearance" (75). Her dualism commits her also to a strict division between the private and the public aspects of the self, in which the former is identified entirely with freedom and ultimate reality and the latter with duplicity of various kinds, including the self-conscious duplicity of the true and original self when it appears among its "fellows." She claims that "the unsocial, ascetic concentration of self on self, the analytic intensification of personality to a state of unreality, makes personality a . . . completely private activity" (118). Once we are able "to separate the fact of individuality from the fact of sociality," it is possible to "reveal how they maintain themselves in one person through a contradiction, not through 'reason.'" Though reconciliation is not her concern, this model of social life, (Riding) Jackson misleadingly insists, would be "the only possible clue to the reconciliation of freedom and formality" (119).

(Riding) Jackson's target is modernists such as Wyndham Lewis who felt the need to overcome the division between the authentic life of the self and the social and political world that threatened it. Like Gertrude Stein's autonomous "human mind," which has no relation to the social, political, and economic institutions that shape themselves according to the identity of "human nature," (Riding) Jackson's vision of the radically private self sanctions no social or political vision that can be aligned with the aesthetic disclosure of self-evident value.⁸ Nonetheless, just as Stein falls back on laissez-faire liberalism as most conducive to the creation of aesthetic masterpieces, (Riding) Jackson proposes the outline of a social vision that is fundamentally modern or modernist in a broad sense. In this social vision, the relation of "the unreal self" to its "fellows" is a profoundly detached and ironic one: where the unreality of the self has been affirmed, "all synthetic, public, real life would be impersonal and formal." Appearing in public, the "unreal person . . . would sharpen and try his asceticism in it." Society would be "an artificial pattern based on accident instead of a 'real' pattern based on necessity."

Though she opposes the social to the aesthetic, (Riding) Jackson's social vision relies on the vocabulary of the aesthetic artifact: the "pattern" of the new social order would be "artificial," and, unlike the aesthetic politics of other modernist writers, would do nothing to turn the "accident[al]" objects, events, and arrangements of quotidian life into a utopian necessity. This aesthetic of social life competes with the disciplines and practices of contemporary social life, in which even the "art of friendship," she claims, is "the making of people," such that "one finds oneself surrounded with numbers

of artificial selves." Under this arrangement, the self, "forced to become a competitive self, ceases to be the original self, is, like all the others, a creation. The person, too, becomes a friend of himself. *He* no longer exists" (12). But the aesthetic self-fashioning proposed by (Riding) Jackson has no bearing on the aesthetic value that is disclosed privately as the unreal, authentic self, which requires the aesthetic practice that creates an artifact.

(Riding) Jackson's dominant aesthetic concern is the question of self-disclosure. In the essays collected in *Anarchism Is Not Enough* and *Contemporaries and Snobs*, self-disclosure takes place without an audience, and is entirely private. The only evidence of self-disclosure is the aesthetic trace in which the self materializes. For (Riding) Jackson, the ontology of the work of art rests upon the "unreality" of the self:

An author must first of all have a sure apprehension of what is self in him, what is new, fresh, not history, synthesis, reality. In every person there is the possibility of a small, pure, new, unreal portion which is, without reference to personality in the popular, social sense, self. . . . When this self has been *isolated* from all that is impression and impurity of contact in an individual, then a "thing," a work, occurs, it is discharged from the individual, it is self; not *his* self, but self. (95–96)

While in an earlier essay (Riding) Jackson understands the work of art in roughly Kantian and Schillerian terms as "a temporary or an eternal form that is a symbol of peace and reconciliation between the inner nature of a man and the external world without him" (*First* 280), the asceticism of (Riding) Jackson's private self makes it hostile to all reification and objecthood. The aesthetic object or artifact in (Riding) Jackson's aesthetic theory of the late twenties and early thirties vanishes almost to nothing. Nonetheless, in *Contemporaries and Snobs* it becomes apparent that the difference between poet and product is a crucial and yet infinitesimally small one, and that the self is inextricable from the materiality of the poem:

[t]he only difference between a poem and a person is that in a poem *being* is the final state, in a person the preliminary state. These two kinds of realities, that of the person and that of the poem, stand at one end and the other of the poet's mind, which is but progressive experience made into a recurrent sequence circulating between one kind of reality and the other without destroying one reality in the other. (*Contemporaries* 62–63)

The volatile contradiction at the heart of her dualistic conception of self and world will be realigned according to the distinction of making and doing, which allows her to complicate the dialectical opposition of person

and poem: "The word *poem* itself," she argues, "is an ever new meaning of an ever new combination of *doing* and *making* as one act, with a third inference of *being* perpetuating these in dynamic form" (62).

While the opposition between doing and making further aggravates the tension between the material instance of the work and the ideality of the radically autonomous self or mind, it also alleviates it and aligns the terms in a relation of mutual implication rather than futile contradiction. (Riding) Jackson's distinction between doing and making has consequences that can be derived from the Aristotelian distinction of *praxis* (to act) and *poiesis* (to make). While *poiesis*, being a private activity, has no bearing on the ethical life, *praxis* supplies the term missing from (Riding) Jackson's dualistic conception of the self: the presence of others.⁹ By introducing this further distinction into her thought (Riding) Jackson will reinterpret mind and matter in nondualist terms, and imagine a self that relies upon the presence of others.

The Aristotelian distinction of *praxis* and *poiesis* reappears in (Riding) Jackson's distinction between beauty and truth, in which "beauty," defined according to categories derived from the social world, is preliminary to the manifestation of one self to another. In an essay from the mid-1930s on the art of painting, (Riding) Jackson argues that "Beauty is the peace existing between varied material forms—a selfless, multifariously mutual letting-be, in virtue of what is same in each."¹⁰ Truth, on the other hand, is only possible as a relation between selves: it "is an active reconciliation between varied selves—a co-operative making-to-be of one another, in virtue of what is compatibly different in each." Beauty harmonizes the materiality of the body with the materiality of the world in a stage of being preliminary to the practice of self-disclosure: "Whoever does not believe in earth-life as the most materially articulate manifestation of existence is not only incapable of 'appreciating pictures': he has not given himself entirely to earth-existence, and to the degree that he thus reserves his self may be said not to live."¹¹ Where (Riding) Jackson had earlier only been able to envision social interaction as arbitrary and formal, she now considers beauty a means for people "to yield voluntarily to the compulsion of reliance on 'surroundings,' in order that the yielding (the continual breakdown from self that happens in every self-specific person) shall not be to false environmental spells"—that is, social codes, "things hated but relied on in the non-self moments because believed 'there,'" and "all the ancestral, animal bad habits, or the second-natures that people have made for themselves in spurious social self-sufficiency."

Her recognition that the self appears only among others, and cannot be isolated and independent, allows (Riding) Jackson to ease the opposition of matter and mind. This accommodation to matter, however, relies upon the social values by which beauty, in her analysis, assumes meaning. While matter is essentially generous to the possibility of self, its generosity is

disclosed in human comportment. While she asserts that “beauty is material good-will, [a] kind of selflessness . . . , a habit of existing materially which is also a generous, non-resistant making-way for other things,” it is more important to recognize that beauty is meaningful ultimately in its socialized, human form: beauty is above all “that perfect carelessness of individual being, dignified nevertheless, which matter makes possible.”

In (Riding) Jackson’s essay on painting, the material artifact is no longer the site at which the unreal self appears, but shapes the “material conditions” in which the mutual self-disclosure of persons is possible.¹² As a result, the act of making—*poiesis*—becomes subordinate to the action and speech, or *praxis*, of the self in the presence of others. The stress on *praxis* requires that she distinguish this self from the poet as maker, or in the words of her 1925 “A Prophecy or a Plea,” the poet as “producer.” *Poiesis* is inadequate to self-disclosure because it is fundamentally a very private activity, as (Riding) Jackson acknowledges with the radically asocial and private understanding of the self she proposes in her 1928 essays, which had originally sanctioned the use of the worker metaphor. In *Contemporaries and Snobs*, (Riding) Jackson traces the “forced dissociation of poetry from social uses” (*Contemporaries* 24) as an interpreter of the tribal mind or social reality (cf. 57). Since society no longer has a demand for it as a “community handmaiden,” poetry is consequently out of work and “writes on unemployment.”

The worker metaphor suggests that the poet is a producer of value that goes unrecompensed in modern industrial society, that the poet has no concrete social position or identity, and that the poet’s value can be measured by the degree to which he or she is alienated from a commercial and industrial society. But (Riding) Jackson extends these conventional meanings with her figure of “unemployment,” which, in spite of its negative, envisions the alienation of the poet in positive terms as the idleness or leisure that is an alternative to employment as goal-oriented work. The figure of unemployment has a history going back at least to Baudelaire’s *flâneur*, who is a dandy and a gentleman of leisure. In (Riding) Jackson’s case, the figure of unemployment signals a revaluation of *poiesis*: rather than seeing the artifact as the site of self-disclosure, (Riding) Jackson begins to envision self-disclosure much as Emerson does in his commentary on manners. As she turns away from metaphors of work and production—*poiesis*—to describe the act of self-disclosure, (Riding) Jackson turns more toward intersubjective models of communication, and particularly toward a model of conversation based on face-to-face encounters. This transformation in her thought is perceptible in her work from the mid-thirties, such as the essay on painting discussed above, in which the bearing of the self in the material world is a precondition of the encounter with other persons. Like Emerson, (Riding) Jackson would have the poet or the scholar enter the social world to test his or her power of self-reliance. For both,

the purpose of entering society is ultimately to discover friendship, and friends, as Emerson knew, "ought to be entertained with large leisures" (*Essays* 1046).

The poem "Cycle of Industry" (*Poems* 296) addresses this question of the relation of work or "industry" to leisure with much ambivalence. At the end of a day of work, the speaker has retired to be among friends or companions in a café: "We parry the prospective boredom / With elbows deaf upon the café-table." Such leisure is only fully achieved in sleep, a leisure which is "less strategic idleness" because it suspends all purposiveness, rendering one "loath to attain" any goal at all. The tone of the poem is described well by the speaker, who "haughtily" defends idleness to the "novice in time" who would naively object to this particular waste of it. But it is difficult to know what she thinks of the idleness of leisure; she appears also to value industry over leisure, and is scornful of the idleness in which the industrious day necessarily comes to an end. The ambiguity of the speaker's tone and attitude derives from her own uncertainty at the meaning of this leisure time; she is not simply lamenting that idleness and fatigue are a necessary part of the cycle of industry. Instead, she seems to acknowledge that idleness itself, like sleep, offers a perspective that questions "The laborious infatuation / Of the past with the future," the earnest pursuit of "consecutive intent" and the "zeal of continuity." Though it doesn't propose an answer, the poem reveals that there is something in a waste of time that is not merely an absence of effort or labor. This leisure is a "strategic idleness" rather than an imposed one; its very purposelessness would seem to serve a purpose. Despite her resistance, she actively consents to idleness: when she and her household "wake to breakfast," they choose to ignore the waiting day's impatience to renew the cycle of industry. It becomes apparent that idleness offers a competing temporality, a time that originally opened on "the first morning after the first evening / On which we learnt to divide ourselves / Laggardly from all tyrant liege-selves away." Rather than continuing to regard leisure time as part of the cycle of industry, the poem begins to see it as taking precedence in value to the productive time of work. It is to be found not only at the end of the cycle, but at the beginning of the day: the leisure of that Edenic "first morning" is experienced daily in the ritual repetition of "the habit of coffee." Moreover, the social world envisioned by the poem undergoes a significant shift toward the end of the poem. Rather than being hard workers who have earned their leisure in the cycle of industry, the poem's characters become aristocrats in a noble household. Assuming the role of hostess, the speaker concludes:

To a casual nicety we shall now perform
Certain acts of neighborly compunction
Which regard for our fellow-dawdlers dictates—

It were ungallant not to seem to stir
 In such invisible progress-making.
 Then, by eternity's grace, we shall sit down
 To fill our cups with the eternal yawn
 Whose to-night's taste is to-morrow enough.

Though this particular morning-after languor, with its allusion to Adam and Eve, suggests that the poem contrasts the time of erotic play with the earnest application to industry, the poem's tone relies upon waking up to company in the house. The household is not the "sentimental privacy" of either domestic or erotic intimacy, but the household of a hostess who has taken responsibility for the leisure time of her guests.¹³

Having discovered the aristocratic "yawn" in her exploration of leisure time, the speaker no longer seems concerned with the self of the cycle of industry, the maker of poems or the painter of paintings. There is no room in this household for work: the temporality of "infinite leisure" and "eternity's grace" precludes a return to the "effort" of industry. The poem emphasizes from the beginning that the work of the day no longer occasions the self-recognition it did while the work was underway: when the work is done, "to-day's effort changes / Into tomorrow's tedious stranger." While "effort" refers to the industrious activity of making, it also refers to the artifact itself: a work completed, such as a poem written. In the opening scene, then, the artifact appears alien to its maker and no longer objectifies the self. While in (Riding) Jackson's aesthetic theory the work is a dynamic medium of the self-recognition of the unreal self, it here returns to one as an unrecognized stranger to whom one must play host.

The aristocratic social relations that become the focus of the poem recover archaic relations of "liege" that transcend the liegdom and tyranny of the everyday social life of "the cycle of industry." The value of this leisure turns upon the prestige derived from these obligations having been undertaken freely, and not imposed by necessity. While in the morning after the first evening "Certain acts of neighborly compunction" are undertaken, these acts are "dictate[d]" by "regard for our fellow-dawdlers." "Regard" is a noble motive for these acts of generosity. Only a certain kind of person achieves the state of idleness that achieves the "infinite leisure" of Edenic time: the noble or elect person who has divided him- or herself "from all [the] tyrant liege-selves" that assemble in the social world. But this form of graciousness and hospitality does not require real effort; it is only necessary "to seem to stir." The noble social grace of such hospitality reflects "eternity's grace," the grace that elects certain persons over others. As (Riding) Jackson envisioned in *Anarchism Is Not Enough*, social relations have become purely formal. Whereas the earlier "unreal self" was incapable of associating with other selves, the noble self of leisure refuses to

be so “ungallant,” and is willing “to seem to stir” for the sake of sustaining the appearance of generosity.

Given her radically antisocial notion of the self, it may be surprising to see (Riding) Jackson concern herself with questions of generosity and hospitality. But rather than simply being radically opposed to the social and the selves that it can produce, (Riding) Jackson bifurcates the social into the noble and the base. The “unreal” self now appears publicly as the hostess of the noble household, and is no longer reliant on the materiality of the aesthetic artifact and “the cycle of industry.” As we will see, it is this hostess who returns at various points as the guiding voice of *Progress of Stories*, who makes it very clear that she will be economical with her generosity: her assumption is that we are all “novice[s] in time,” and that our use of it must be monitored constantly. The speaker who is in possession of this voice is also in possession of the truth: as we will see, she “understands everything” (*Progress* 98), and will leave us alone as soon as we begin to waste her time.

3

Like Emerson, (Riding) Jackson approaches the social world of manners and leisure only with great circumspection and hesitation. (Riding) Jackson is certainly not known for her good manners: the satirical power of her early essays and poems gives way in her later essays to a hectoring manner familiar from the tradition of the jeremiad. Nonetheless, (Riding) Jackson is aware that hectoring her audience does little to advance conditions of truth. She acknowledges as much in *The Telling*: speaking of her own tone in this essay that attempts to enact the conversation that is a precondition of mutual self-disclosure, she writes: “I do not like that I caution and counsel so much, here, rather than only tell my story of us. This is to speak louder than story-speaking, in which we are as in the same room with one another.” However, the stylistic difficulty she faces is that “Much of what we have to say—though all is matter on which to put heads together—must be spoken with weighted reverberance, to be heard; and one may sound, saying it, as if one thought oneself the others’ voice of conscience, come from the keeping of ‘God’ . . .” (*Telling* 43).

The demands that (Riding) Jackson places on those who would converse with her make it difficult to find the right tone in which she can address potential friends. While she recognizes that a friend “ought to be entertained with large leisures” (*Essays* 1046), as Emerson writes, (Riding) Jackson cannot help but draw attention to the generosity that is required of her in order simply to have a conversation with us. As we will see shortly, her book, *Progress of Stories*, which is pivotal to the transformation of her thought in the thirties, turns repeatedly to the question of generosity.

As (Riding) Jackson sees it, in a claim that anticipates her arguments against poetry, the main purpose served by stories in the modern world is recreation, though a recreation that flatters our vanity by being seen as “intellectually and morally useful” (*Progress* xxxii). To flatter our vanity, according to (Riding) Jackson, writers of short stories make unimportant things, namely our private lives, important. This takes great effort: writers of stories work hard, and “it would sadden them to feel that their work on the material did not make it more important” (xi). Because of this labor, (Riding) Jackson suggests, “People who write stories are . . . generous” (xi).

However, (Riding) Jackson’s acknowledgment of the writer’s generosity is thoroughly ironic, for she argues simultaneously that the more challenging task is to do as she has claimed to do in certain of her stories: “It is very difficult to let the unimportant remain unimportant” (xi). While other writers labor to make the unimportant important, (Riding) Jackson says that she has “done a certain amount of work on [the material of her first group of stories], but no more than was enough to establish it decently in its unimportance” (xii). This apparent modesty, of course, conceals only slightly, and only with irony, (Riding) Jackson’s claim that she has faced the most challenging task of a writer, which is the task of “truth-telling” (xii and *passim*). This claim is the foundation of the severity of her manner with her readers in this book. Like other writers of stories, (Riding) Jackson is generous. But she is careful to warn us that her generosity has a limit: “I too am generous, but I am economical—I do not believe in wasting generosity. One can get all the sensations of generosity, where it is improvident to be generous, in being fair.” As we will see shortly, in *Progress of Stories*, (Riding) Jackson offers herself as our hostess in offering us “large leisures,” but she also makes it very clear that she expects great things of us, and that if we don’t satisfy those expectations, her generosity will run out.

In response to a criticism of the obscurity of her 1931 poem, “Laura and Francisca,” (Riding) Jackson writes: “I am not offering myself but my hospitality. Nor do I hawk my hospitality abroad. I give out indications of my willingness to dispense hospitality on a basis that protects my integrity as a host” (cited in Baker 221). In a manner that is consistent with (Riding) Jackson’s commitment to the unreality of the self, the offer of hospitality does not compromise the reserve or withdrawal of the self from its appearances. By offering herself as hostess—in this case, by means of her presence in the artifact of the poem—she acknowledges that there is some chance that a person will be a conversationalist capable of self-disclosure, that “there is something to be gained, by you, in breaking my peace, and by me in having it broken.” It is only for this reason that she consents to have people over for tea:

I do not mind giving you a cup of tea, if that is all you want. But I do not like being forced into a conversation about the really important things

when all you want is a cup of tea. This is insincerity, if you will, since I am only interested in the really important things: it is insincere of me to give you a cup of tea at all. But that is my way of understanding everything, even a cup of tea. My understanding everything is my way of being alone and yet not locking myself up in my room all day. (*Progress* 98)

But (Riding) Jackson makes it clear that as a hostess capable of “large leasures” she keeps herself entirely in a reserve that protects her perfection:

My real perfection is, I hope, not so obvious to you as the perfection of my manners. Wherein *that* lies is *my* secret. I may tell you that it lies in my power to treat you as if you were really interested in the really important things, when it is quite clear to me that you are not, and to keep the really important things to myself all the time—but just that, and no more. I cannot tell you, in fact, what I am really like. (98)

In the story “Reality as Port Huntclady,” so strong is the pressure to enter into a conversation about that which is most important—truth—that (Riding) Jackson can barely acknowledge the “limited courtesies” by which “we create between us the charm of the story” that we put “between us as a substitute for any more profound experience of each other” (97–98). The charm of the story is “its hospitality (how it makes one sit down and forget the pressure of the severities)” (97). (Riding) Jackson is aware of the danger at such a gathering of “reminding ourselves too brutally at any point of the nature of this transaction, which is after all, a cold exchange between your desire, on the one hand, to pay your respects to the really important things without getting actually involved, so to speak, in their family life, and, on the other hand, my desire . . . to make somewhat light of the really important things before visitors, or at any rate, not to urge anyone to stay longer than he wishes” (97). However, these stories must turn in the direction of truth; once she has indulged us with the early stories of her collection, (Riding) Jackson demands that we be more serious, and “leave the hearsay behind, without pomp, in all its triviality, obscurity and shabbiness, and as tenderly as we [can]” (xvii). Coming closer to truth telling, however, “we should be gradually feeling that our company was thinning.”

According to (Riding) Jackson, there are “three stages in the history of stories” (xvi), each of which is represented in her *Progress of Stories*: “Stories of Lives,” “Stories of Ideas,” and “Nearly True Stories.” Each kind of story is characterized by its relative distance from “the world of hearsay” (xvi) and proximity to truth. The first group consists of stories concerning what is unimportant. Telling and listening to these stories, (Riding) Jackson writes, “we were not even a mixed company, we were not a company at all; there was no ‘we’” (xvi). With the second group, “Stories of Ideas,” (Riding)

Jackson identifies enough of a “mixed company” to subsume the figure of generosity into the metaphor of a hostess at a gathering:

Suppose yourself a guest in a house where your hostess is an energetic woman of wide interests. In such a house, in such a universe, there are really no degrees of importance. At table no topic is supposed to be discussed which is not in some way important. Yet, undeniably, everything is discussed; and only a small part of what is said is true—that is, absolutely important. Your hostess is affectionate as well as energetic. She appreciates your good intentions—she has made friends of you because of your good intentions—and does not require that every word you say at her table shall be gospel truth. Indeed, to show her confidence in you, she absents herself a good deal from table, and leaves you most of the time to yourselves, to talk as you please, feeling that you will not go very far wrong in what you say, not wrong enough to make her ask herself why you should be friends of hers at all. (xiii)

In spite of her confidence, however, the hostess feels that her guests are disappointing: while “[w]hat you say has a general air of importance . . . , [y]our wisdom is on the whole pretty diluted” (xiv). Nonetheless, the hostess remains polite: “Your hostess herself, when she talks with you, tries not to be a purist. She too says many things which are merely stories of ideas. And for the moment this kind of conversation will do” (xiv).

Though she addresses her audience in the second person, and speaks of the hostess in the third person, we begin to suspect that (Riding) Jackson is speaking down to us, is merely being polite, as she is when she suggests that she herself is not the hostess: “You will notice that I speak of ‘our’ minds, not saying which one of these is mine. For at this stage we are merely a mixed company; I have no right to affirm that my mind is necessarily purer than yours, or that I am necessarily the hostess” (xiv). However, she has at this point only “absent[ed] herself . . . from table” to let us talk as we would. In addressing the third kind of story, however, (Riding) Jackson returns as the hostess herself, and reveals that it had been her all along: though “[t]here were altogether too many of you . . . , yet I said, ‘There must be perfect intimacy between us all, we must tell the exact truth to one another.’” Her guests disappointed her, however:

nothing happened, except that there were more and more of you. And I kept waiting for someone to begin. I did not want to begin myself because I wanted everyone to have his say before I began: I was polite as well as optimistic. But as no one began, and nothing happened,

except that there were more and more of you, I grew very pessimistic. But as, also, I could not sacrifice the situation to my fanatical scruples of courtesy, I eventually began the conversation myself. (xv)

(Riding) Jackson's hostess cannot refrain from reminding us that she is merely being polite, that she is too generous with us, and that she is becoming impatient. At the end of the story "A Crown for Hans Andersen," she reminds us that her story is about coming to the end of stories, "where the book begins to be not a story-book" (281), and we will no longer find our vanity flattered. At this point, the guests will have thinned out so that only "the right people" remain: "For, of course, there are right people? I mean, does one not owe it to the general situation to behave as if, undoubtedly, yes? Concealing one's uncertainty about what must in a little while be clear, finally, behind a screenwork of ambiguous courtesies . . . ?" (281). While our mutual storytelling has allowed each party to preserve a certain imagined "gracefulness" by placing a story as "an emotion-screen" between us, (Riding) Jackson's hostess will leave us now, very politely, so that "you keep your gracefulness and I keep mine: we do not distort our faces with the futile passions of futile adventure" (98). But the gracefulness of the hostess differs from the gracefulness of those who prove themselves incapable of truth telling. The grace that the guest is permitted to retain is merely social, while the gracefulness of the host signifies the grace of election, or what in "Cycle of Industry" is called "eternity's grace": (Riding) Jackson's hostess is perfect, and "understands everything."

While the moral urgency of the truth, in this case of (Riding) Jackson's "understanding everything," has traditionally been a license to prophetic indecorousness, (Riding) Jackson's insistence not only on moral superiority but also on the superiority of manners exempts her from the tradition of prophetic rudeness.¹⁵ In spite of her "ambiguous courtesies," and even as she asserts her "power to treat" her guests according to their capacities for truth, (Riding) Jackson's hostess is anxious to find the right tone of "hospitable serenity" (xxxiii), and not merely "to behave as if" there is a fit audience for the truth. Her final story proposes Hans Christian Andersen as a model for the tone to adopt when one has come into the possession of truth. Andersen's work stands as a "sincere device" upon what would otherwise remain a "screenwork of ambiguous courtesies" (281). In spite of her imitation of the modesty of Andersen's tone, the voice of wise experience that assumes the innocence of the childlike audience it projects, (Riding) Jackson acknowledges that she cannot bring herself past the point of mere, and therefore condescending, politeness. Her strategy of drawing attention to the perfection of her manners, rather than simply becoming openly rude, even as it allows her to continue "to behave as if" she is being polite,

nonetheless negates the benevolent effect of her “fanatical scruples of courtesy.” By virtue of this contradiction, she toggles back and forth between the social awkwardness of the earnest pursuit of truth, which makes us feel “the pressure of the severities” (97), and the gracefulness with which she welcomes us to her gathering. When (Riding) Jackson says that her “real perfection” should not be “so obvious to you as the perfection of my manners,” she wants her social graces to be both a sign of her inner perfection and a “screenwork” to protect it from public display: “Wherein *that* lies is *my* secret.” However, though she claims that she “cannot tell you, in fact, what [she is] really like,” she teases us with a clue to her secret: “I may tell you that it lies in my power to treat you as if you were really interested in the really important things, when it is quite clear to me that you are not, and to keep the really important things to myself all the time—but just that, and no more” (98). Her power to treat us in such a manner, to behave “as if,” however, *is* the power of manners; it is no accident that her emphatic “*that*” refers ambiguously both to her “real perfection” and “the perfection of [her] manners.” Emptied of meaning, her manners no longer express respect, and her mere politeness is intended to make clear to us that we did not earn the respect she provisionally conferred upon us—and her manners serve no purpose that cannot be served equally well by rudeness.

Why does (Riding) Jackson’s “real perfection” express itself in “ambiguous courtesies,” which appears to be no more than a power of distinction? What is the power of “behaving as if” one’s guest is an equal who is worthy of respect? Why does she need to insist on the superiority of her manners, and to cast it as a sign of election? The strategy of emptying manners of the moral substance (Riding) Jackson implicitly claims for them—their power, for example, to disarm “shame of the person” and thereby provide conditions adequate to the acknowledgment of singularity—may seem to be an illiberal claim to aristocratic distinction.¹⁶ However, by retaining the form of politeness she signals that respect, though withheld, still operates as the principle of the sociability that is required for self-disclosure. (Riding) Jackson’s courtesy is ambiguous because it confers respect not upon the empirical self of the guest, but upon the utterly singular and unique self, which in these later writings (Riding) Jackson attempts to envision as a self capable of social manifestation. While the singular or “unreal” self of her earlier work was “a sort of social disappearance” (*Anarchism* 75), her reflections on manners and self-disclosure aim to retrieve the universal or collective dimension of personhood from the “private activity” to which her dualism had confined it. While her hospitality opened itself to the utter singularity of the other self, her mere politeness acknowledges merely the general value of personhood, of which every guest is in principle an instance. All that is left to her is the pure form of respect, which is courtesy.¹⁷

4

There is more, however, than this paradox of liberal culture at work in (Riding) Jackson's—and Emerson's—insistence that the self-reliant soul manifests itself in beautiful conduct. It suggests that the feudal origins of the aesthetic criteria by which the truth of the self-reliant or perfect self calls for acknowledgment may be irremediably shaped by the power of distinction that is the other legacy of nobility of manner. In both (Riding) Jackson and Emerson, the truth of the self has been identified with the values of nobility and majesty, which in modernity (at least after Nietzsche) are aesthetic criteria before they are criteria of truth.¹⁸ For Emerson, self-disclosure is identical with a truth that is in principle to be acknowledged by others, and friendships capable of providing acknowledgment in terms of criteria of truth and goodness. "Manners," however, reveals that what is acknowledged is not simply truth, but its manifestation as nobility and majesty, just as in (Riding) Jackson truth and perfection of the self are manifested as gracefulness of bearing and conduct. In Emerson, the manners of the self-reliant are the unacknowledged foundation of the manners of fashionable society, which imitates their beautiful appearance. In (Riding) Jackson, the manners of the self-reliant soul become purely formal, or mere appearance: the perfect self, who is in possession of truth, retains the manners of the noble but exercises them only to exclude those who do not belong. Rather than withdraw from the social circle, the perfect self needs to display its nobility as a power of hierarchy and privilege. Its manners are the pure display of the privilege conferred by "eternity's grace," and the display is intended to make one feel embarrassed or ashamed—to suffer, as Emerson says, "mortification."

The perfect self of (Riding) Jackson's hostess is disclosed not in the content of its stories, but in the manner of its being. One can imagine that, as with Philip II in Emerson's illustration, the majesty of self is but a ceremony—that manners make for the noble appearance of a self that requires its audience's belief. What would it mean to disengage the idea of the self entirely from images of nobility, and even of majesty? It may be too flattering to ourselves to imagine that these dreams of the self have been or can be fully eradicated. While the "human form divine," as Allen Grossman argues, may be "a pure contingency" of "a defunctive aristocratic civilization," the view to which most theoretical reflection is currently committed, it is also possible that it is only its "hostage or dependency." If the latter, then the value of nobility—and even perhaps of majesty—can be redeemed from its genealogical origin. So redeemed, however, the value of nobility as a principle of personhood may do little to overcome the paradoxes of liberalism; it may become apparent that, in Grossman's words,

"[n]onhierarchical differentiation is inimical to the nature of personhood itself" (301).

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NOTES

1. I have come across no evidence that (Riding) Jackson read Emerson, though given the comprehensiveness of her reading of her predecessors and contemporaries, particularly in her early years—the twenties and thirties—as a poet and a polemical essayist (as one can see from the range of writers discussed in a book like *Anarchism Is Not Enough*), it is likely that she did. The essay from which I just cited, "A Prophecy or a Plea" (which I discuss in further detail below), suggests that she prepared for her poetic statement by studying previous defences of poetry thoroughly. This essay emerges in particular from her reading of Shelley, but she also refers to Whitman, among others, and seems to echo Emerson's "Experience" when complaining of modern poets' naïve appeals to "life" and "experience" for their authority: they "are still worshipping that old God, Experience: it is all somewhere in life, the truth," they claim. "But who has ever learned anything from experience?" (*First* 278–79).

2. In Georg Simmel's words, when the forms of sociability are emptied of the "life-conditioned motivations of sociation" (44), social interaction becomes "a symbolic play whose aesthetic charms embody the finest and subtlest dynamics of broad, rich social existence" (56).

3. While my use of the language of acknowledgment in an essay on Emerson calls for a discussion of Stanley Cavell's reading of Emerson, space does not allow me to engage with it here. I will say, however, that Cavell's Emerson is very much the Emerson of "Friendship" rather than "Manners" (see for example *Conditions* 56), and the scenes of acknowledgment and selfhood Cavell explores in his essays on Emerson are more concerned with selfhood in relation to citizenship in a liberal state than they are with the chagrin brought about by the world of sociability. Yet the Emerson I am concerned with can also become visible through Cavell's thinking. Just as reflections on manners must be preliminary to reflections on friendship (without being subsumed by them), so there are issues that must be thought through before one can broach the question of Cavellian perfectionism. For example, Cavell's version of Emerson's "Manners," with its sense of the chagrin attendant upon social encounters and attempts to overcome the conditions that cause it, might be seen in his discussion in *The Claim of Reason* of the failures of the "best case" scenario for knowing of the existence of others (see for example 438–40). Trying to counter imagined disappointment, he asks if the best case might not be just "this haphazard, unsponsored state of the world, just this radiation of relationships, of my cares and commitments [that] provides the milieu in which my knowledge of others can best be expressed? Just *this*—say expecting someone to tea; or returning a favor; waving goodbye. . . . Is there more for it to come to; more that it *must* come to?" (439–40). The importance of Thoreau's scenes of hospi-

tality in *Walden* also come to mind, though they tend always to the disappointment of discovering that, as he says at the end of "Economy," "Our manners have been corrupted by communication with the saints" (70), and that there are experiences of neighboring that make "the fancied advantages of human neighborhood insignificant" (119). For Cavell's reading of these passages, see *Senses* 105–09.

4. For Trilling, Henry James was alone among American writers "in knowing that to scale the moral and aesthetic heights in the novel one had to use the ladder of social observation" (206); in its "perpetual quest for reality," the novel always takes as its material "manners as the indication of the direction of a man's soul" (205). Emerson would not have disagreed: "Society is the stage on which manners are shown; novels are their literature. Novels are the journal or record of manners; and the new importance of these books derives from the fact, that the novelist begins to penetrate the surface, and treat this part of life more worthily" (1048–49).

5. See 349. My discussion of sociability can only touch upon the nexus of issues raised by the various forms of sociality that both sustain and threaten the Emersonian self. For a thorough analysis of the consequences for Emerson of what Unger calls "the paradox of sociability," see Newfield, who, focusing on Emerson's "pleasure in overcoming autonomy" (118), explores the many facets of "the individual's radical dependence on the group" (98). See in particular his discussion of how the individual's antipathy to "society" finds an antidote in his reliance upon the heterosexual couple of friendship, which can in turn be expanded into the fraternal bonds of "association" (119). In his discussion of the emergence of "character" as a central concept for Emerson, Robinson argues that in *Essays: Second Series* Emerson "changes the terms of the discourse" of character, "reorienting the reader's sense of the social manifestation of character, when he transforms the bristling individualism that had defined character into a humanly accessible, even congenial, quality." Though he does not consider the essay "Manners," he points out that Emerson imagines a test for character in "a social call, a moment whose potential artificiality . . . is a challenge to the qualities of character that Emerson has been describing" (79; see Emerson 500). Though Robinson's argument turns on the claim that that "the direction of [Emerson's] work was toward a salvaging of meaningful interpersonal relations" (6), he takes the essays on "Character" and "Friendship" to be adequate statements on the question of sociability. For an important discussion of Emerson's *Conduct of Life* in terms of sociability, manners, and the genre of conduct books, see Ellison.

6. According to Cayton, the genesis of Emerson's reflections on society begin with his disappointment in the consequences of the Divinity School Address and his subsequent move from Boston to rural Concord, where "he would seek in the private sphere a substitute community to the public world that had failed him" (190). "Friendship" is the fruit of these reflections, which found their greatest provocation in Margaret Fuller's commitment to passionate friendship. Emerson met Fuller in 1835, when he had been disappointed by his attempts to find a context for the self in the domestic sphere and in communities of the like-minded such as the Transcendental Club. Though Cayton does not discuss "Manners" (her book considers Emerson's work up to and not including the publication of *Essays: Second Series*), she does briefly and very perceptively discuss "the essays [from this period] clearly focused on human relationships" (197). Fuller also seems to have played a central role

in Emerson's coming to think about the question of manners. In his eulogy to Fuller, Emerson mentions admiring Fuller's "sympathy with the artist in the protest which his work pronounced on the deformity of our daily manners" (cited in Cayton 207). The apparent dispersal of topics in "Manners" and the later "Behavior" may reflect that Emerson is thinking about his own manners and his capacity for the more intimate, differently strenuous, and culturally more "feminine," forms of socializing at which Fuller was expert. In particular, the role of fashion in Emerson's discussion of manners, a topic that in the end has no bearing whatsoever on the question of friendship, is a sign of Emerson's contending with the unstable relationships between courtesy, courtship, and seduction, and their involvement with what James, in the passage cited above, calls "the bribes and lures, the beguilements and prizes" of society. The nexus of concerns explored by these essays is visible in Fuller's recognition of Emerson's baffled response to the intimacy she demands of friendship: she wishes that he will be able to "correct [his] vocabulary and . . . not always answer the burst of frank affection by the use of such a word as 'flattery'" (cited in Cayton 216). Rather than being merely an obligatory concession to the empirical fact that the *beau monde* is also fashionable, it is a recognition of the compelling power that fashion holds in the solicitation of attention, interest, and desire.

The essay "Friendship" has received the bulk of commentary when it comes to Emerson's ideas of social relationships, while "Manners" and "Behavior" have been relatively neglected, often mentioned only in passing on the way to "Friendship." They are seen as minor essays, treating of topics—such as fashion—that are either obligatory or are ultimately to be subsumed by synthetic concepts such as friendship. However, the problems raised by these essays are never put aside or resolved, and remain essential to the imagination of the noble life because they retain ineffaceable traces of the empirical life the ennoblement of which is Emerson's aim. The centrality given to "Friendship" denies a fuller picture of Emerson's intellectual and emotional investments in the social world. While Cayton's lucid analysis of this period of Emerson's life (see 201–17 in particular) provides a complete sketch for such a picture, Emerson's concern with manners is diminished to an aspect of the "pragmatic question" Emerson poses in "Fate": "How shall I live?" Both *The Conduct of Life* and *Society and Solitude* (1870), she writes, treat of "limited or partial subjects . . . having to do with manners or aspects of the daily life of those likely to be listening" (237). In his account of the friendship of Emerson and Fuller (271–79), Gonnard points out that "[t]he letters Fuller and Emerson exchanged from August to October of 1840 . . . constitute a sort of dramatic supplement to the essay on friendship" (275). They also supplement "Manners," which in turn allows us to glimpse more of the dramatic complexity of social interaction than does "Friendship." (For Gonnard's brief discussion of "Manners," see 374–75.) In her concise analysis of "Behavior," which she rightly insists should be seen as "neither resigned nor homely" (5), Hughes argues that it has its own structural integrity and, occupying the center of *The Conduct of Life*, also plays a central role in its architecture (2–5).

7. For an excellent discussion of the scholar's vocation in Emerson, see Cayton's comments on "The American Scholar" (145–49). After the hostile response to the Divinity School Address in 1938, according to Cayton, "Emerson abruptly came to doubt the whole concept of vocation that he had been developing over the previous four years" (37) and turned toward the private sphere in what she calls the

"Concord experiments" with the sociability of the private and domestic spheres (see note 6 above).

8. See Stein, *The Geographical History of America*, passim.

9. My formulation of the Aristotelian distinction borrows from Arendt (192–99 and passim.). While Arendt gives a broad historical narrative of the loss of the specificity of the concept of action, the problem (Riding) Jackson confronts here parallels, though in the ambiguous terminology of aesthetics, the elision of action that Arendt identifies in modernity. It is perhaps best seen as having been bequeathed to modernist aesthetics by early German Romanticism and the idealist philosophy that coincided with it. On the complex relationships among the ideas of the artist, the work, and sociability in German Romanticism, see Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy's concise comments on the "both auto-centered and pluri-centered society-artist" (70). The importance of modes of sociability and sociality for the Athenaeum group, as with Emerson, derives from their potential "efficacy of the subject's access to itself" (70). For a relevant deployment of Arendt's analysis, see Agamben (68–93).

10. "Painting," unpublished typescript (24 pages) held at the The Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature at the New York Public Library (Box 118: Graves, Robert, and Riding, Laura [Rota 88, John Aldridge Papers]). I am grateful to Elizabeth Friedmann who, on behalf of the Board of Literary Management of the late Laura (Riding) Jackson, granted permission to cite this essay. Though their content differs significantly, "Painting" may have some connection to (Riding) Jackson's essay "Pictures," written for a 1933 London exhibition of the work of her friend John Aldridge (see Friedmann 192).

11. On the question of the reserve of the self, compare (Riding) Jackson's response to a review of her poem "Laura and Francisca": "Of course I am obscure. I am not offering myself but my hospitality. Nor do I hawk my hospitality abroad. I give out indications of my willingness to dispense hospitality on a basis that protects my integrity as a host" (originally published in *Times Literary Supplement* [March 3, 1932]; cited in Baker 221).

12. Emerson comments on the effect of architecture and ornamentation upon manners in "Culture" (in *The Conduct of Life*): "When our higher faculties are in activity, we are domesticated, and awkwardness and discomfort give place to natural and agreeable movements. . . . Even a high dome, and the expansive interior of a cathedral, have a sensible effect on manners. I have heard that stiff people lose something of their awkwardness under high ceilings, and in spacious halls. I think, sculpture and painting have an effect to teach us manners, and abolish hurry" (1030).

13. During the thirties, (Riding) Jackson turns to the household—both as metaphor and in actual practice—as a means of articulating the relationship between mind and matter in a non-contradictory manner. In her essay, "The Word 'Woman'" (1934–35), (Riding) Jackson makes the claim that it is a woman's work to make the whole universe "an indoor place." While patriarchal social relations, based on the exclusion of difference, have made of "the notion 'home' . . . a sentimental privacy," woman is to realize the inclusive whole as a domestic interior that can accommodate the relations that stand in truth. (See "Woman" 62–63.) Compare (Riding) Jackson's hostess to Emerson's: "For, though the bias of her nature was not to thought, but to sympathy, yet was she so perfect in her own nature, as to meet intellectual persons by the fullness of her heart, warming them by her

sentiments; believing, as she did, that by dealing nobly with all, all would show themselves noble" (530).

14. (Riding) Jackson's public exchanges with her readers and critics, when she suspected sincerity of motivation, were notably stern, and often aggressive. The most well known of these is her ferocious response to Christopher Norris's commentary on her 1972 work *The Telling*. In the exchange that followed the publication of his article, decorousness, civility, and pleasantness become central concerns, with each writer making gestures of conciliatory politeness to the other.

15. (Riding) Jackson's hybrid of manners and moral urgency could be seen in terms of what John Murray Cuddihy calls the "ordeal of civility" undergone by diasporic Jews in Western Europe and North America. Among the consequences of the struggle with assimilation to "the Protestant Esthetic and Etiquette" (4), Cuddihy argues, is that Diaspora intellectuals such as Freud and Marx are obsessed with the theme of "morals versus manners, the hypocrisy of civility, [and] the triviality of etiquette," or "the complex code of interaction ritual which governs . . . the members of Western bourgeois society" (157). (Riding) Jackson's strategy to align manners and morals, that is, to correct appearances by identifying the substance that justifies them, parallels Lévi-Strauss's attempt, in Cuddihy's analysis, to teach the West "the nature of true deference and demeanor" (156): "True morality, the morality 'immanent in the myths' of 'savage peoples,' is based on 'deference toward the universe'" (156). For Lévi-Strauss's savages and their deference to the universe, we can replace (Riding) Jackson's "human beings" and their deference to "human truth."

16. Commenting on the fact that "artists are . . . often aristocratically inclined," Georg Simmel argues that "the attitude of the artist is based upon the assumption that the inner significance of things adequately reveals itself in their appearance, if only this appearance is seen correctly and completely. The separation of the world from its value, of appearance from its significance, is *the* anti-artistic disposition. . . . Thus, the psychological and historical connection between the aristocratic and the artistic conceptions of life may, at least in part, be based on the fact that only an aristocratic order equips the inner value relations among men with a visible form, with their aesthetic symbol, so to speak" (296). Simmel's own respect for social appearances parallels Emerson's effort to save Fashion from the resentment of his "ambitious youth." As Cuddihy argues, Simmel's sociology is made possible by his departure from "the mainstream of the Diaspora intelligentsia" and "becom[ing] the 'father' of . . . those Diaspora intellectuals who, sick to death of unmasking the *goyim*, decide to abstain, for a time, from the *ivresse des grandes profondeurs* in order to take on faith the system of appearances *goyim* take at face [sic] and that are constitutive of their everyday lives" (76).

17. Roberto Unger has formulated this problem succinctly as "the paradox of sociability":

To be an individual one must win the recognition of others. But the greater the conformity to their expectations, the less is one a distinctive individual. The paradox of sociability is the problem posed by the relation between self and others. The self is an individual and it is social. But the requirements of individuality are in conflict with the demands of sociability in a way that does not seem immediately capable of solution. . . . What would it mean for the self

to reconcile its individual and its social nature and to escape from the paradox of sociability? The person would have to be able to satisfy his needs for assent and recognition without surrendering his distinctiveness. He would have to find a way in which union with the others would foster rather than diminish the sense of his own individual being. (217)

Though the political consequences of this contradiction will have to remain in the background of my paper, it is important to recognize that it is the paradox most specific to liberalism, the modernist inheritance of which is, as Michael North has argued, among the most crucial factors in the politics of the modernist writers (see 1–20). For a discussion of Emerson's understanding of individualism as conditioned by such abstract universalism, see Patell, who in his second chapter argues that abstraction raised to a high enough level makes "individual differences disappear into an abstract vision of the individual that can serve as a common denominator for all human beings, a universal formulation that promotes philosophical idealism" (51).

18. Though the relationship between German *Kultur* and French *civilisation* makes this a complicated issue, Nietzsche's idea of nobility, like Emerson's, owes much to the French tradition. Jean Starobinski demonstrates how the moral category of truth separates itself from the morality of sociability (in the French tradition of *honnêteté*) by way of the aestheticization of judgments of merit (see esp. 36–43).

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