

Rewriting History, Literally: Laura Riding's *The Close Chaplet*

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The Close Chaplet was published on 9 October 1926, by the Woolfs' Hogarth Press. According to Elizabeth Friedmann, 'many of the poems for *The Close Chaplet* were brought in typescript from New York, a few were added in Egypt, and the entire text was carefully edited by Robert'.¹ And further: 'A creative symbiosis was developing between Laura and Robert that allowed them to collaborate for years to come. As one wrote, the other was continually looking over the writer's shoulder with suggestions, comments, criticism.'²

The book's title is taken from a stanza of Robert Graves's poem, 'The Nape of the Neck', acting as an epigraph to the book.³

To speak of the hollow nape where the close chaplet
Of thought is bound, the loose ends lying neat
In two strands downward, where the shoulders open
Casual and strong beneath, waiting their burden,
And the long spine begins its easy journey:
The hair curtains this postern silkily,
This secret stairway by which thought will come
More personally, with a closer welcome
Than through the latticed eyes or portalled ears [...].

It is dedicated to 'My Sister Isabel and to Nancy Nicholson' and was published under her then married name 'Laura Riding Gottschalk'. Several of the poems which appear in *The Close Chaplet* were first published in *The Fugitive* magazine in 1924 and 1925, as did a number of others, and her name is listed as one of the editors.⁴

Seven decades after they appeared in her *Collected Poems* in 1938, Laura Riding's poems are still, generally speaking, a

mystery for their readers.⁵ Several critics have now written on her work, some focusing on the poems themselves to give clues and directions, but none seems quite adequate, and she herself was to say harsh words on critical works which appeared in her lifetime up to 1991, judging them wrong in the main, or wholly wrong. A number of essays have also appeared, both since her death and before, which rely in part – greater or smaller part – on a reading of her poems, and these too do not make understanding the poems easier. My fairly informed guess is that readers might approach her poems with up-to-date critical information in their hands and still be baffled by what they encounter. A large number of poems might be plucked randomly from her *Collected Poems* (1938) as examples of poems which puzzle readers, at least at a first reading and no doubt for much longer. Take this, for example (p. 48):

PRISMS

What is beheld through glass seems glass.

The quality of what I am
Encases what I am not,
Smoothes the strange world.
I perceive it slowly,
In my time,
In my material,
As my pride,
As my possession:
The vision is love.

When life crashes like a cracked pane,
Still shall I love
Even the strange dead as the living once.
Death also sees, though distantly,
And I must trust then as now
A prism – of another kind,
Through which one may not put one's hands to touch.

Such a poem raises any number of questions. It is not the kind of poem which describes things – a nature poem, a love poem, a poem of sensory experience. It is a poem which draws a reader into its thinking-course rather than providing an emotional jolt of some kind. Then, it raises some questions seemingly impossible to answer, such as: How may one love the ‘strange dead’? How does ‘another kind’ of prism differ from the title? How does love resolve any of the issues raised? And so on.

Nor do they meet our contemporary expectations of what a poem should be or might be, however various our educational backgrounds. It is not conventionally ‘pretty’, even though the lines run fluidly. It is not emotionally satisfying in an immediate way. It does not make us gasp. It leaves us, in fact, slightly floundering behind, looking for a pay-off in the concluding lines which is not quite there. Nevertheless, there is something about it which looms intelligent:⁶ the poem actually does seem to say something, although we might not grasp what it is, and so we go to another poem and, disappointingly or not, as the case might be, we find poems which have a similar if not indeed the same effect on us, and some, especially the longer ones, seem mystifying. The opening lines of ‘Disclaimer of the Person’ (p. 251) offers an outstanding example of the second kind:

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.

The poem continues for 296 lines, each no less seemingly baffling than these.

I want at this point to reassure the reader that Laura Riding's poems are *not* baffling, that this poem and others make perfect sense, indeed, beautifully lucid and lyric sense, once the underlying themes are understood, and that these themes are to be discovered either by following the poems very carefully from the first one in *Collected Poems* ('Forgotten Girlhood'), and not moving from one poem to the next until each is fully understood – a laborious feat but attainable ('laborious' because there is much to be understood) – or, by beginning at the actual beginning with *The Close Chaplet*. As Robert Nye has said:

[...] I have never found these poems wanting in their account of how it is, essentially, with a result that now I might claim not just to believe them true, but to know them truthful. Here is poetry as an articulation of the most exquisite consciousness, poetry as completely wakeful existence realised in words, with at the end of it the news that even poetry will not do. Here is work that reads the person reading it.⁷

My intention in this essay is to begin to demonstrate that *The Close Chaplet* contains all the themes that will be developed in her *Collected Poems*, and that a clear understanding of these themes will then be found to make the subsequent poems, and her later prose work, such as *The Telling* (1972), perfectly accessible. It incidentally suggests why Robert Graves admired her work so much from this time on and something of what he learned from it.

That Laura Riding knew early on that she was doing, or would be doing, something quite different in poetry from what is normally accepted as poetry or the writing of poems (however 'abnormal' poetry may seem in one poet or another, whether Rimbaud or E. E. Cummings, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Marianne Moore, or surrealists, or language poets as currently), is put forward in the very first, the opening poem of *The Close Chaplet*, 'As Well As Any Other'. Written in regular rhyming stanzaic form, the irony becomes clear as the poems that follow it unfold.

AS WELL AS ANY OTHER

As well as any other, Erato,
I can dwell separately on what men know
In common secrecy,
And celebrate the old, adorèd rose,
Retell – oh why – how similarly grows
The last leaf of the tree.

But for familiar sense what need can be
Of my most singular survey or me,
If homage may be done
(Unless it is agreed we shall not break
The patent silence just for singing's sake)
As well by anyone?

Reject me not, then, if I have begun
Unwontedly or if I seem to shun
The close and well-tilled ground:
For in untraveled soil alone can I
Unearth the gem or let the mystery lie
That never must be found.

She shuns ‘The close and well-tilled ground’ of traditional poetry in order to move in the ‘untraveled soil’ where the ‘mystery’ all poets search for, the ‘gem’, lies. This is the dream that people who work with words seek to fulfil: the desire for ultimate peace or oneness or wholeness – call it what you will. One should not underestimate the serious positioning of this particular poem at the opening of *The Close Chaplet*. In every subsequent collection of her poems, including *Collected Poems*, Riding was careful to place her poems in an unfolding sequence, each poem, or cluster of poems, a clue leading to the next one, and each one setting the context for what follows.

But to speak briefly, first, of a poem the haunting beauty of which foreshadows this one, ‘Dimensions’, which appeared in *The Fugitive* magazine (but not in *The Close Chaplet*) in 1923, where Riding puts her theme in a more forthright way.⁸ It begins:

Measure me for a burial
That my low stone may neatly say
In a precise, Euclidean way
How I am three-dimensional [...].

It concludes with the same determination of ‘As Well As Any Other’, that she will be herself and will not write poems that might be done ‘As well by anyone’ –

Measure me by myself
And not by time or love or space
Or beauty. Give me this last grace:
That I may be on my low stone
A gage unto myself alone.
I would not have these old faiths fall
To prove that I was nothing at all.

Time, love, space, beauty – these are, if not renounced, then of secondary interest to the young poet, then twenty-two years old, who looked for something more in life than life normally offers, something that is substantially of living, meaning substance. One glimpses in the penultimate stanza of ‘Dimensions’ her sweeping passion:

Measure me then by love – yet, no,
For I remember times when she
Sought her own measurements in me,
But fled, afraid I might foreshow
How broad I was myself and tall
And deep and many-measured, moving
My scale upon her and thus proving

That both of us were nothing at all.

It is difficult to understand why this poem didn't make it into either *The Close Chaplet* or the *Collected Poems*.⁹ I can only think that one or two of the grace notes, such as 'Euclidean' and 'gage', may have been too reminiscent of (i.e., 'borrowed' from) other *Fugitive* contributors, such as John Crowe Ransom, but it is a very fine poem, beautifully cadenced.

The very next poem in *The Close Chaplet* after 'As Well As Any Other' is the all-important 'The Quids', published in the February 1924 issue of *The Fugitive*. 'The Quids' has appeared in a number of anthologies¹⁰ and several critics have read it as metaphysical satire (Allen Tate, for example),¹¹ and, sometimes wildly inaccurately (Deborah Baker) as a satirical riposte to the Fugitive group of poets.¹² Barbara Adams hardly mentions it except in passing.¹³ Joyce Wexler, who devotes almost two pages of discussion to it, views it as a poem describing the 'variety of the natural world' which 'conceals the underlying sameness of all the quids'. That is, while each thing ('quid') differs from any other thing ('quid'), they fundamentally share the same identity because they derive themselves from the same material background, depicted in the poem as the 'Monoton', which represents the universal reality from which all things derive. Joyce Wexler's view is that the 'quids' share a same physical identity, and she sees the 'Monoton' as their (merely) physical background. This permits her to employ the word 'universality' when applied to the 'quids' (ultimately humans), but, to this reader, she fails to explain or elaborate much further than that.¹⁴ Only Elizabeth Friedmann, to the best of my knowledge, hits upon its central significance to Riding's work as a whole. "The Quids", she judges, 'is in rudimentary form a universal view of human existence that would find its full expression in the writings of its author's later life.'¹⁵

'The Quids' is a poem which takes an askance look at the stirrings of life, the stirrings of the universe in fact, and what, crucially, lies behind it. From what, out of what, the poem asks, does all life and all the universe emerge, and more importantly,

why, or for what reason, if any, does it emerge in the first place? It is a mistake to see ‘The Quids’ as merely social satire, although one can quickly see why critics have been misled.

The little quids, the million quids,
The everywhere, everything, always quids,
The atoms of the Monoton,
Each turned three essences where it stood,
And ground a gisty dust from its neighbors’ edges,
Until a powdery thoughtfall stormed in and out,
The cerebration of a slippery quid enterprise.
Each quid stirred.
The united quids
Waved through a sinuous decision.

The quids, that had never done anything before
But be, be, be, be, be,
The quids resolved to predicate
And dissipate in a little grammar.

There is a great sense of fun and high-jinks here, the myriad squirming little ‘quids’ (roughly, Latin for ‘the essence of a thing’ but connately the question ‘what?’ or ‘why?’) gambolling on life’s holiday, finding themselves uniquely alive, and even, the poem suggests, becoming human, ‘a powdery thoughtfall’ and ‘cerebration’, predicating and dissipating into ‘a little grammar’, more than suggesting the discovery of language and the advent of the human. It should be noted, however, that the poem opens with a description of the ‘quids’ as ‘atoms’, thus adumbrating all existence, and not just the human, and that these ‘atoms’ issue from something called ‘the Monoton’, a rather bleak-seeming name in English, but in Latin (*mon*, *mons*, etc.,) meaning something huge (e.g., a mountain) or something that instructs and advises (as in ‘demonstrates’). The next verse of the poem quickly moves in to focus on this:

Oh, the Monoton didn't care,
For whatever they did –
The Monoton's contributing quids—
The Monoton would always remain the same.

It is from this point forwards that the major themes of Laura Riding's poems, and the prose, broaden out and develop right into her very last work. All her orientations are taken from this thing, this query, the 'Monoton', fancifully sketched in here, in keeping with the tone of the poem, but wholly serious, in her first foray into her personal vision of the Creation. As we shall see, she will probe and home in on the subject of the Creation in *The Close Chaplet*, in 'The Lady of the Apple' (p. 62), and the poems in between touch on the same subject in various ways, but 'The Quids' is the first instance of the major theme elaborated throughout *Collected Poems*, and beyond that to the prose, both pre- and post-1940,¹⁶ all-present, for example, in *The Telling*, as in the following passage:¹⁷

[28] Yes, I think we remember our creation! – have the memory of it in us, to know. Through the memory of it we apprehend that there was a Before-time of being from which being passed into what would be us another and another and another, to that rounding-in and exhaustion of diversity which is human. Thus from physicality emerge persons – ourselves.

One might not grasp entirely what she is saying here, or one might reject it, out of context though it be, on 'rationalist' or Darwinistic principles, but it is clear she is speaking of the 'creation', but in terms of a 'Before-time', which is a time preceding Creation itself (and therefore before the idea of God, as indicated above in 'Disclaimer Of The Person'). The 'Monoton' can be seen as an early forerunner of such thinking, though carefully left as a blank cypher at this early stage in her career.

Not to press the post-1940 work too hard at this point, *Collected Poems* itself gives a record of her thinking on the subject of creation and pre-creation, and her adoption of it as the base-point of her poetry. Her vision, to call it that for the moment, is easily overlooked in the apparent light-heartedness (but in fact ultimate seriousness) of ‘The Quids’, and it is from there that the poems of *The Close Chaplet* move inexorably to her reformulation fifty pages later in ‘The Lady of the Apple’ of the biblical account of the Creation.

‘The Lady of the Apple’ boldly asserts that the cause or begetter of creation – that is, what happened before God, called the Monoton in ‘The Quids’ – is female.

Of old there was a spirit, it was dark
Until it felt a pity for itself,
When the tremendous darkness shrieked and broke
Of its extreme and shone, mothering the light
That had been once but pain in the heart of night,
The night original and nameless. What
Brought morning and what made the dark a mother
To light and men? Nothing but woman in
A spirit could have wrought so safe and slow
Its ruin in perpetuity and peace.

In contradistinction to the distinctly male creation stories of the Bible, Torah, Koran and other creation myths, Riding here offers an alternative vision from woman’s standpoint. The poet has been working her way towards this position, *The Close Chaplet* shows, in the poems between ‘The Quids’ and ‘The Lady of the Apple’. We are able to see, for example, the drift of her meaning in a poem such as ‘Back to the Mother Breast’, (p. 47), which, read out of the context of the book, seems somewhat curious or mysterious:

Back to the mother breast
In another place
Not for milk, not for rest,

But the embrace
Clean bone
Can give alone.

The cushioning flesh
Afraid of closer kiss
Set nakedness
Against analysis;
And the spurned infant cheek
Turned away to speak.

Now back to the mother breast,
The silent lullaby exploring
The frank bequest
And happy singing
Out of the part
Where there is no heart.

The ‘clean bone’ and the place ‘Where there is no heart’ are inexplicable unless they refer to the origin of life, the Monoton’, itself – she *wills* herself to look at everything from its perspective. She is not content in life with the solace of the ‘milk’ and ‘rest’, symbolised by the ‘breast’. The infant, turning away from the breast (‘spurned’ by the mother after just so long) learns to speak, and by implication becomes lost for a time (a ‘quid’) in the by-ways of the world, whereas the solution to life’s mystery is to return or get back to what is behind and before the breast, pictured here as ‘clean bone’. ‘[N]o heart’ means roughly ‘no sentiment’ which might distract thought, so that the poet can return to ‘analysis’ without the hindrance of all those Freudian or historical overtones. We can also now begin to see what she means in ‘Prisms’, quoted at the beginning of this essay, where she views the world from the positioning of herself in creation –

In my time,
In my material,

As my pride,
As my possession:
The vision is love

– and how she

[...] must trust then as now
A prism – of another kind,
Through which one may not put one's hands to touch.

In another poem preceding ‘The Lady of the Apple’, ‘Virgin of the Hills’ (p. 32), the poet has already placed herself in what we might describe as the long view:

My flesh is at a distance from me.
Yet approach and touch it:
It is as near as anyone can come.

Already this vestiary stuff
Is all that's left of me,
Though I have never worn it,
Though I shall never be dead.

‘Vestiary’ here is immediately precise: (*OED*), a robing room, but also ‘vest’, as in to furnish with authority, powers, property; and ‘Vesta’, goddess of the hearth or fire, as well as connately ‘vestal’, a virgin priestess consecrated to Vesta and vowed to chastity.¹⁸ She is imaginatively casting herself in the role of the creatrix. Her body, her ‘flesh’, is merely an incidental result of ‘the tremendous darkness’ of ‘The Lady of the Apple’ when it ‘shrieked and broke’ into creation, an almost-accident which she has never really ‘worn’.

And here we get to the crux of the matter. What Laura Riding was centrally doing in *The Close Chaplet*, and what she continued to develop in her subsequent poems, was identifying herself with the pre-moment, the ‘what-was-there’ before Creation. How did

the world, the universe, come to exist, why does it exist, why does it die or we die? The answer for her was in its origin, pictured rather tentatively and cautiously first as the Monoton and then as 'the lady of the apple'.

What is the logic of this? Does it make sense? Step by step in the work that follows *The Close Chaplet*, she homes in and broadens her thought. To state the case briefly, she discovered (her favoured word is 'uncovered', as in the Preface to *Collected Poems* (p. xvii)) that it is not by studying the universe and the planets, nor their inverse the atom, that human beings will find an answer to the question of 'creation' or the scientific 'big bang', but by studying the oldest, most advanced object on the planet, the human person itself. The most real thing in the universe – more *real* than anything else – she holds, is the human, which issues in a direct line by birth from the very beginning of time and therefore logically and necessarily before time began (readers might wish to compare Teilhard de Chardin's findings some thirty years later).¹⁹ And because the pathway is through birth, woman stands at the beginning and the end. The human being is also the only creature (creation) equipped to ask and answer the questions 'Why?', 'What?': language is its unique gift. Even this – language – is present, Riding argues, from the very beginning because of *sound* which must also be contained and then released into the universe. Without sound, she says, there would be no language, as similarly she will later say there would also be no soul or spirit. As she puts it in 'Come, Words, Away' (*Collected Poems*, p. 137):

But never shall truth circle so
Till words prove language is
How words come from far sound away
Through stages of immensity's small
Centering the utter telling
In truth's first soundlessness.

Whether or not we believe, comprehend or agree with this, it forms the basis of her work, and if we wish to understand her we

have to go along with her, willingly or unwillingly. She seated herself in a direct line with the pre-beginning of the universe. This immediately makes sense of, or begins to make sense of, later poems such as the witty ‘Then Follows’ in *Collected Poems* (p. 174):

It came about by chance –
I met God.
‘What,’ he said, ‘you already?’
‘What,’ I said, ‘you still?’
He apologized and I apologized.
‘I thought I was alone,’ he said.
‘Are you displeased?’ I said.
‘I suppose I should not be,’ he said.
A dove hopped out of his sleeve
And muted well in his palm.
Frowning, he wrung its neck.
‘Are there any more of you?’ he said,
Tears in his eyes, but politely.
‘As many as you care to meet,’ I said.
Tears falling, he said politely,
‘I can’t wait, but remember me to them.’

The narrator is older than God and, as it were, has been waiting in the wings along with the whole of humanity (‘As many as you care to meet’) to come on stage. She is speaking of something older than God and is not pretending she is God.²⁰ She has, she explains to her readers, existed ‘always’:

You wished to learn courage
For a certain destined major event
By flattering me to go first.
But, being not of your long ranks
Of hour-strung distances from death,
I have been here always
And so have only to report

A certain chance minor event
That fell to me by chance alone
Of walking into where I was.

She has ‘been here always’, from the beginning to the end of time.
In the words of ‘The Lady of the Apple’, to return to that poem:

[...] Only the ancient dark is sure.
Woman is there, the sombre of every woman
Remembering the black, when it was all.
It shall not be forsaken. She is content
With faith, to stay. The derivations lie
Too far away, though she deliver them,
And though they be lovely to think upon.
It is a mission for men to scare and fly
After the siren luminary day.
Someone must bide, someone must guard the night
In sorrow and tearless, understanding how
Night was a quiet always, and was first.

Again and again in the poetry, Riding returns to this question of ‘the black, when it was all’. Significantly placed, the second poem in *Collected Poems*, ‘Incarnations’ (p.9) opens with –

Do not deny,
Do not deny, thing out of thing.
Do not deny in the new vanity
The old, original dust.

To the poet, the ‘old, original dust’ is ungainsayable, and she (or we) is a ‘thing out of thing’ of direct lineage.

The lines from ‘The Lady of the Apple’ bring to attention Riding’s understanding of the difference between men and women, a prominent theme everywhere in her work. Man’s ‘mission’ is ‘to scare and fly / After the siren luminary day.’

(Those lines are included in *Collected Poems* in ‘Echoes’, p. 63.)

Men have their fealty in franchise, and
Their grief as well, for while the world is old
In all the stolid wombs, they must go far
To bear the new fruit to its season ahead.

The ‘siren luminary day’ is the world lit by the sun which men (and men specifically) are seduced by, pursuing it like quids. Their loyalty and faith (‘fealty’) in this chosen world is licensed or made free (‘franchise’) by that original ‘tremendous darkness’ which

[...] shrieked and broke
Of its extreme and shone, mothering the light
That had been once but pain in the heart of night,

which is the sun’s source (‘mothering the light’). Love, she continues, can be a saving grace, to remind both sexes of the oneness, ‘the night original and nameless’, that was once everything:

[...] Sometimes a clasp can bring
A memory of origin to stay
The fever and in the pause resume once more
The ancient emblem, the immense control
Of all that might be in what might be nothing.
But it is more than fever. Men go on,
And they are not consumed, and space leaps up
From the swift foot. Earth is made of flesh and wind,
Paced into arpents of a Marathon.

Men are not ‘consumed’ by the ‘fever’ (while by implication women may be), but continue to pace and measure (‘arpents’, meaning one hundred perches or about five-sixths of an acre (*OED*)) the sun-lit world.

A number of the poems in *The Close Chaplet* dwell on men and women and the difference she perceives between them, but while what the author thinks of men is pretty straightforward, her thought on woman is complex and allusive. Indeed, although exploring the theme constantly in her work, it is to take her some years before she can state categorically the difference of woman from man,²¹ but at this point it is more a matter of conviction – as a woman she *knows*, thus the poems emphasise, what it is to be a woman – than a matter of reasoning or saying outright. She voices the quandary, for instance, much later, in *A Trojan Ending*, thus:

‘Diomedes is in no danger of losing himself in me’, Cressida said, ‘and because I am more interested in finding out about myself than in helping to deliver him – or any man – to his fate. And is there anything new to be learned about the fate of men? But the fate of women! Is it such a mystery – what men are? Women know what men are, and, though men do not know it from themselves, they learn it from women. But women can learn nothing about themselves from men. If this had not happened to Troy, I think that one day, there, by the power of Cybele, we should have come to know the meaning of women. For what is Cybele herself, if not the sum of women? A man is himself, a solitary fragment, but surely every woman is a part of Cybele [...].²²

The tragedy for women, her argument runs, is that they simply do not know themselves, fail to understand themselves – they are, even though they are companions to and reflections of men, a blank. But, and the poems persuasively explore this, the reason they are blank is because they have thus far in history, and longer than recorded history, placed themselves in ‘fealty’ (to use that word) to men. Men are their children. They must be cared for and permitted to do whatever they wish to do until they have grown up. Women have thus far been the accomplices of men, tried to think as they do, tried to belong to man’s world, for the sake of peace, or, more stridently in this century, attain sexual equality,

although this, too, is an attempt to be ‘like’ men. Historically, if they have refused to be like men, they have, for example, been burned or rejected as witches.

‘Mortal’, the third poem in *The Close Chaplet* immediately after ‘The Quids’, directly faces into the poet’s problem of her identity as a woman and her apprehensions of death:

There is a man of me that tills.
There is a woman of me that reaps.
One is true
And one is fair.
Scarce I know where either are.

But I am seed the man should give,
And I am child the woman should bear,
And I am love
That cannot find them anywhere.

Father and Mother and God and my shadowy ancestry—
I think there’s no way of making anything more than a
mortal of me.

That deliberately awkward closing line intimates the uncertain plaintiveness of her feelings, as does the word ‘scarce’ and the ‘love’ that ‘cannot find them anywhere.’ The poem’s awkwardness centralises or clinches her dilemma. As if to answer her question, the next poem, ‘The Sad Boy’, makes the contrast between her situation and that of a boy, a contrast between male and female. ‘The Sad Boy’ is a rumbustious frolic, as the opening lines suggest:

Ay, his old mother was a glad one
And his poor old father was a mad one,
The two begot this sad one.

Alas for the single shoe

The Sad Boy pulled out of the rank green pond,
Fishing for fairies
On the prankish advice
Of two disagreeable lovers of small boys.

Pity the unfortunate Sad Boy
With but a single magic shoe
And a pair of feet
And an extra foot
With no shoe for it.

This was how the terrible hopping began [...].

The frantic boy is no better off than she is:

Wherever he went weeping and hopping
And stamping and sobbing,
Pounding a whole earth into a half-heaven,
Things split where he stood [...].

He pounds ‘a whole earth into a half-heaven’ like a quid, in his adventure, tragically unaware of what he does, but, ‘sobbing’, knows he is desperately unhappy. When he returns to the pond to fish for his other shoe he is ‘quickly (being too light for his line) / Fished in’, along with his mother and father. One might say the poem is a miniature history of men, pounding the earth looking for answers which they dimly realise are there (the ‘half-heaven’) but succeeding only in smashing things, but it is plainly a sympathetic poem and not a satire. Both ‘Mortal’ and ‘The Sad Boy’ face the same question: Is this all the meaning to life there is?

The poems which follow continue to examine the difference of women from men in a variety of ways, but because, as she says in *A Trojan Ending*, ‘women know what men are’, the struggle is to know what, as a woman, she is. We have already seen some of this in such poems as ‘The Virgin’, ‘Back to the Mother Breast’ and especially ‘The Lady of the Apple’. Another poem looks at

the myth of Amalthea, foster-mother of Zeus, goddess of nature and the cornucopia of plenty, mythologically depicted as a goat. In mythological terms, Amalthea originates from the matriarchal society of Crete, preceding Zeus and probably Cronus. So in ‘Samuel’s Elegy for Amalthea of the Legends’, Riding identifies Amalthea as beginning and end:

[...]
Amalthea is a thread
In strands so silk,
They are wind in my mad head
And swirl where the knot is.
For Amalthea is dead.
[...]

She fell of no plague or passion.
She was only swift, so swift, they say,
She ran till she stood still
As a bell swung round more than rings,
And was alive and dead in one day.
When the day went she was dead most fully.
She knew all.

[...]
I have come with Amalthea in my veins
Into a fifth season. Time drops slow.
For winter is over, yet I see no summer.
Now it is always snow.

While the poem is narrated as a man’s complaint (Samuel’s), nevertheless we can see that Riding identifies Amalthea as an emblem of the earliest woman, as she will also do with Helen of Troy in a subsequent cluster of poems, but in the end neither Amalthea nor Helen is sufficient. The poet is in the ‘fifth’ suspended season, a no-season, a time of waiting, specifically the twentieth century when history has come to an end.²³ Her next

step will be ‘The Lady of the Apple’, an alternative version of the biblical creation myth, whom she dares to identify both with the pre-beginning of creation and with woman generally and herself in particular, but before she takes this step, she writes one of her most puzzling but beautiful poems, ‘Her Ageless Brow’, which is placed just before ‘The Lady of the Apple’. To the best of my knowledge no critic has commented on ‘Her Ageless Brow’, perhaps with good reason. It is one of those Riding poems that strikes the intelligence and seems to baffle it simultaneously. The opening two stanzas immediately draw the eye:

This resolve: with trouble’s brow
To forget trouble and keep
A surface innocence and sleep
To smooth the mirror
With never, never
And now, now.

Her celebrations were one by one
Awakened hurriedly to pass
Out of remembrance, into the slow glass.
The image, not yet in recognition, had grace
To be lasting in death’s time, to postpone the face
Until the face had gone.

The first four lines seem straightforward enough if we take them as an image of a woman looking into a mirror frowning and then determining to keep the innocence of her face and mind, but we cannot be certain what ‘never, never / And now, now’ signifies. But we are immediately confronted with the switch to ‘Her’ in the second stanza and the tense-change to ‘were’, not to mention the fact that the face in the reflection now transmutes ‘into the slow glass’ and is then ‘gone’. If readers think they can make some sense of that, then they are quickly confounded:

[...]

Her regiments sprang up here and fell of peace,
Her banners dropped like birds that had never flown.

'Her' is the 'lady' of creation and her 'regiments' are women: women fall of peace. Unlike men, by inference, they have no war to wage against the world. The history of war is a history, as well as that of power-mongering, of male hatred directed at women (chronicled in millennia of rape and murder), which continues today all over the world, existing in subdued form in the 'civilised' world where sporadic and occasional outbursts of horrific violence still occur. In the poem, 'Here' is where the poet is, in her time alive, 'now, now'. Her determination is to do something that has never been done until 'now', to be fully herself:

One memory remained, slower than glass,
The most forgettable, forgotten,
Made the face stay, be sooner:
In her complete hand, clasping its open palm,
The broad forehead from finger to finger,
The stroke withheld from trouble
While trouble found its brow,
Saw first the previous double
Of itself, this resolve of calm,
Of never, never, and now, now.

The 'One memory' is the memory of origin, barely remembered and so far away it is almost, but never quite, 'forgotten', the haunted beginning of mankind framed in 'The Lady of the Apple', the alternative female creation myth to the male book of Genesis. The poet makes the 'resolve' to be calm. What has 'never' happened in history, the self-assertion of a woman to be nothing but herself, may – although the poet insists *will* – happen 'now'. In a later poem in *Collected Poems*, 'And I' (first published in 1930), she restates her position:

[...]

But now, in what am I remiss?
Wherein do I prefer
The better to the worse?

I will tell you.
There is a passing fault in her:
To be mild in my very fury.
And ‘Beloved’ she is called,
And pain I hunt alone
While she hangs back to smile,
Letting flattery crowd her round—
As if I hunted insult not true love.

But how may I be hated
Unto true love’s all of me?
I will tell you.
The fury will grow into calm
As I grow into her
And, smiling always,
She looks serenely on their death-struggle,
Having looked serenely on mine.

The ‘Beloved’ is the poet herself viewed simply as a woman, one among many, her social and sociable self, crowded by ‘flattery’. To be her true self she must be ‘hated’ by being ‘true love’s all of me’, that is, her autochthonous self. This personal ‘resolve’ to be nothing but herself, ‘now, now’, as in ‘Her Ageless Brow’, intensifies exponentially as her work everywhere advances, right to the present day and the coming publication of such posthumous new work as *The Person I Am*.²⁴ In the later poem ‘Disclaimer of the Person’ quoted at the beginning of this essay, for instance, occur the following lines:

Never was I.
Always am I.

I am whatever now is always.
I am not I.
I am not a world.
I am a woman.
I am not the sun which multiplied,
I am the moon which singled.

The ‘sun which multiplied’ belongs to the brightly lit world where ‘quids’ run amok, while the ‘I’ of ‘the moon which singled’ belongs to the ‘Monoton’ and ‘The Lady of the Apple’. In the Persea Books edition of *Collected Poems*, Laura (Riding) Jackson comments specifically on the sun and moon images, and the question of ‘woman’ here: ‘Nowhere should I be taken as speaking by what are called “symbols”. If, for instance, I say “the sun which multiplied” or “the moon which singled”, as I do in one poem, I am endeavouring to indicate actualities of physical circumstance in which our inner crucialities are set.’ And a little further on, with regard to her view of ‘woman’: ‘[...] my use of the word “woman” [...] was literal on a large scale [...]. I conceived of women under this identity as agency of the intrinsic unity-nature of being, and knew myself as of the personality of woman [...].²⁵

What Laura Riding knew, although it may seem crass to say so, was that as a woman she was different from men, but in a radical and fundamental way. There are a number of poems in *The Close Chaplet* which illustrate her sense of this difference, such as ‘John And I’:

[...] John sets a frame
That any reasonable makeshift for
A man can stoop into . . . And John looked out,
Deduced his world and wisdom from the sins
And freaks of creatures not designedly
Alive, but born just in the course of things;
Construed his house among the others, found
The worm of time carousing on his eardrum –
He was a man as far as he could see,

And where he could not, I, the chronicler,
Began [...].

Such differences as must lie between
Phantoms like us put John outside the game.
I can remember only certain rules
That make John rhetoric to prove I am
The puzzled one who sets the problem, breathes
Uneasily about the light and dark
While John denies what I have granted him,
Slips back among the shadows that are mine,
Something I should perhaps have left unlit.

His vagueness reminds us of quiddishness ('freaks of creatures', born merely to die), while she 'breathes / Uneasily about the light and dark' – as befits a Lady of the Apple – as though worrying about John, concerned for him, as a mother might, but he evades her to 'slip back' into the shadows that are hers, the history that she created, as it were, where he becomes lost. His eyes are on the world. Hers are elsewhere. Similarly in 'Druida':

Her trance of him was timeless.
Her space of him was edgeless.
But the man heard the minute strike,
Marked the spot he stood upon.
When a leaf fell, when the minute struck,
When a star stopped, when the plot was drawn,
The man called farewell to Druida.

The man is wholly absorbed by what is around him, forgetting the woman, his soul-partner, by his side. His eyes are upon the visible world. She looks elsewhere (the second stanza quoted below is not in *Collected Poems*):

Druida followed.
Not to bless him, not to curse him,

Not to bring back the bridegroom,
But to pass him like a blind bird
As if heaven were ahead.

[...]
Druida found the sky.
Earth was no more native,
Love was an alienation of the dust,
Man but a lover not love,
Woman but a form of faith,
Yet enduring in a heaven of earthly recantations.²⁶

Again the distinction between the sexes is made. As Cressida said, ‘Women know what men are, and, though men do not know it from themselves, they learn it from women. But women can learn nothing about themselves from men.’

If women can learn nothing about themselves from men, then the only alternative is to learn from themselves. They must, the poet is insisting, look into themselves, search themselves, to find their true nature and meaning: they must stay true to themselves, their nature, their origin, as woman.

As we have seen, this first meant returning to the mother breast, the creation myth, as in Genesis, and daringly rewriting it as a woman and from woman’s viewpoint (and it is hardly less credible than the male version), pushing the creation myth far further back, so to speak, to its logical origin, the ‘Monoton’. Then it meant looking at other women of the mythological past, such as Amalthea and Helen of Troy (which is why the first section of *Collected Poems* is subtitled ‘Poems of Mythical Occasion’), imaginatively recasting their experience as it accorded with her own. She had, to return for a moment to the puzzling words of ‘Disclaimer of the Person’, to ‘say’ herself:

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.

This ‘saying’ was to be *the* major theme of *Collected Poems*, second perhaps only to language itself. Any number of poems in the collected edition have this ‘myth’ as their subject (‘Incarnations’, ‘Helen’s Burning’, ‘The Tiger’, ‘Originally’, ‘World’s End’, ‘Dear Possible’, ‘Come, Words, Away’, ‘The Biography of a Myth’, ‘The Unthronged Oracle’, and others), and her poems on a wide variety of subjects take it as their inspiration.

This is not, however, to say that Laura Riding held or believed in the superiority of one gender above another, that is, that women were superior to men. She believed that women, the unknown half of humankind, will bring the human dilemma, a male-made dilemma illustrated by the Creation myths, of being alive while at the same time seeking resolution, to a close (and there begin a new beginning, as she envisages in *The Telling*). Men, she believed, were, or are, in the twentieth century, at the desperate end of their madness to find a solution to what they perceive as life’s madness. Their desperation, she points out, is to be or to become everything, to make sure that everything is themselves, themselves everything, even God. Their essential thinking-mode is that of antagonism²⁷ to the world they inhabit which, by conquering it (including woman), they include in themselves, as themselves, masters, so to speak, of all. Women, she believes, do not function in that way.

Her writing career focused, as well as on the fact of primordial creation, on the study of woman and man in relation to woman. Most remarkably, she pursued this in the poetry, but her prose books and essays also look in depth at the subject. These might be novels such as *A Trojan Ending* (1937), or *Lives Of Wives* (1939), based on the experience of wives of famous emperors of the early Christian era; or a more up-to-date study of women in *The Word*

“Woman” (published in 1993, but composed before 1936)²⁸ where the title tells all; *Four Unposted Letters to Catherine* (1930) is, generally, advice given to a young girl on how to avoid thinking like men. These were all books written or published in the 1930s. Earlier books, such as *Anarchism Is Not Enough* (1928), look specifically at male ways of thought (it opens on philosophy, for example), while the penultimate essay on sex, ‘The Damned Thing’, strongly puts the woman’s point of view and is trenchant at times.

There develops, as a counterpart to public sex [monogamy], not private sex but academic sex, sex the tradition rather than sex the practice. Sex shows itself proudly as an art. It *is* art. And as it is the male not the female who tends to express himself traditionally as *man*, art is male art. It is therefore foolish to point out that there have been very few female artists: why should one look for women artists at all in male art? Art is to man the academic idea of woman, a private play with her in public. It is therefore foolish to point out that many artists, perhaps the best, are homosexual. They are not homosexual. Art is their wench.²⁹

Other books, such as *Progress of Stories* (1935), are a *tour de force* on the subject of woman, while *The World and Ourselves* (1938) views the state of the world in the years leading up to the Second World War from woman’s ‘inside’ point of view, pointing out the monstrosities of the prewar climate of thought, and offering detailed practical remedies. Much or even most of the later work post-1940 offers her mature thought on the subject of woman (see ‘The Bondage’ (1972), for example, or ‘On The Role of Women in Contemporary Society’ (1963).³⁰

But it is in the poems that she first refines and defines the problem, as we might expect. We have seen a good deal of this in the poems discussed thus far in *The Close Chaplet*, and the story is continued and extended throughout *Collected Poems*. A brief look

at the opening lines of ‘The Tiger’ in *Collected Poems* (p. 54) suggests a good deal.³¹

The tiger in me I know late, not burning bright.
Of such women as I am, they say,
‘Woman, many women in one,’ winking.
Such women as I say, thinking,
‘A procession of one, reiteration
Of blinking eyes and disentangled brains
Measuring their length in love.
Each yard of thought is an embrace.
To these I have charms.
Shame, century creature.’
To myself, hurrying, I whisper,
‘The lechery of time greases their eyes.
Lust, earlier than time,
Unwinds their minds.
The green anatomy of desire
Plain as through glass
Quickens as I pass.’

Earlier than lust, not plain,
Behind a darkened face of memory,
My inner animal revives.
Beware, that I am tame.
Beware philosophies
Wherein I yield.

They cage me on three sides.
The fourth is glass.
Not to be image of the beast in me,
I press the tiger through.
Now we are two.
One rides.

Once again there are several narrators. ‘They’ of ‘they say’ refers to men in the generalised sense of ‘mankind’ (i.e., male-thinking). ‘Such women as I’ refers to herself in her ordinary appearance and self, simply as a woman, and sketches how women historically have viewed themselves in relation to men. ‘To myself’ is the poet as her contemporary self, recording what she sees as she passes by (lust ‘Quicken as I pass’). The final lines and the ‘darkened face of memory’ take us straight back to ‘The Lady of the Apple’, the ‘darkened face of memory.’

The immense difficulty readers and critics think they encounter in Laura (Riding) Jackson’s work – and especially critics because they have trained and vested interests – arises because she single-handedly confronted and opposed the historically established male world-construct. Intellectually she came as a poet from nowhere – nowhere, at least, that was understood – and yet her entrance into the literary world, the Fugitives aside, was via *A Survey Of Modernist Poetry* (1927), a highly respected book in its day and for long thereafter. Few readers understood then or now that that book drew heavily upon the principles of her book *Contemporaries and Snobs*, published a few months after (1928) but composed at the same time as *A Survey*. Critics (then as now) preferred to think of *A Survey* as primarily written by Robert Graves, her co-author, which had the effect of making its downright challenging views on poetry safer (how challenging *A Survey* is has seldom been understood; the book’s polemic is still barely comprehended because of this). *Contemporaries and Snobs* is far more dangerous than *A Survey*, challenging the whole (male) poetico-critical establishment of its day, especially T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound and the London set, but including tradition-favoured figures of the past such as Dryden, Pope and Wordsworth, and in particular Edgar Allan Poe. In turning attention to Robert Graves and denying Laura Riding her place as prime mover, critics could safely disregard any threat she posed. Robert Graves, however, who, as her companion, knew her closely, was well aware of what she represented, recording her effect on him in a number of places,

as in the famous epilogue to *Good-bye to All That* (1929), and in poems such as ‘On Portents’.³²

If strange things happen where she is,
So that men say that graves open
And the dead walk, or that futurity
Becomes a womb and the unborn are shed,
Such portents are not to be wondered at,
Being tourbillions in Time made
By the strong pulling of her bladed mind
Through that ever-reluctant element.

And ‘The Terraced Valley’:

But you, my love, where had you then your station?
Seeing that on this counter-earth together
We go not distant from each other;
I knew you near me in that strange region,
So searched for you, in hope to see you stand
On some near olive-terrace, in the heat,
The left-hand glove drawn on your right hand,
The empty snake’s egg perfect at your feet [...].

Graves’s unflagging respect, to the point of deference, during their fourteen or so years together has been widely recorded, and what respectful critics of Graves view as a delightful crankiness or eccentricity in his work has its foundation in hers, especially the ‘White Goddess’, who can clearly be seen as drawn directly from *The Close Chaplet*. He was neither cranky nor eccentric but rooted in her singular intellectual principles, which he simply turned to emotional advantage, as Michael Kirkham has pointed out.³³

Her fundamental (and I use the word advisedly) view is that women, while sharing the human frame, are radically different from men, both in thought and being. Her later unapologetic view is given in her essay ‘The Sex Factor In Social Progress’: ³⁴

The essence of my view of the human situation in regard to women (that is, men and women) is that the content of the human reality (by which I mean that interrelated being which human beings have in having human nature) is of cosmic dimensions, and that only when seen in its cosmic frame – the cosmic frame as against the frame we call “society” – can it be comprehended and talked about as a whole. The actual relations of men and women are seeable in the cosmic setting as survivals of a play of opposite forces as old as primordial creation in beings whom the forces of universal unity claim for their own. In this setting, human beings as women show themselves to have the part of guardianship of the human reality against the divisive dispositions that prepossess human beings as men, the instinctive antagonism to the cosmic unities – and, indeed, to the human reality itself.

The ‘cosmic force’ is that set forth in ‘The Lady of the Apple’ and in the poems generally of *The Close Chaplet*, and thereafter in *Collected Poems*. According to this passage, men, women, male, female, issue from the tearing asunder of the ‘primordial’ action of creation itself, the ‘Monoton’ (‘primordial creation’) splitting in two to create the universe, in which human beings are the most advanced kind of ‘thing’, gifted with language, both to ask the question and to answer it: ‘What is the meaning of the universe?’ She replaces, with a certain sense of justice, the early Pentateuchal story-version of men of a male God creating the universe (in which woman, originally Lilith, a name Riding adopted from time to time, is banished along with the devil), with a woman’s alternative version – how it would be if a woman wrote the history. From *The Close Chaplet* on she proceeds to develop and demonstrate the logic of the ground of her thinking: the logic that it has never before been tried.

For the purposes of this essay, whether one agrees with Laura (Riding) Jackson or not, this is the basis of her work, both poetry and prose, and if accepted as such, what appears to be obscure in

her work becomes plain. Readers and, along with them, critics, need to understand that the concentration and preoccupation in her work on language and words arises directly from her confronting the world and the universe with nothing more (one might hazard there could be nothing less) than her minded voice. As she says in *The Telling* (Passage 30):

[T]here is room in what I say for going onward – whether it be taken to mind or not. And I split Incontrovertibles barring the way, to make onward passages in them – admitting no necessity of turning aside.

That is no empty boast.

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NOTES

¹ Elizabeth Friedmann, *A Mannered Grace: The Life of Laura (Riding) Jackson* (New York: Persea, 2005), p. 85. I recommend readers to see the whole of her discussion and what she has to say of the early poems in general. I am everywhere indebted to her account.

² Laura Riding Gottschalk, *The Close Chaplet* (London: Leonard and Virginia Woolf at The Hogarth Press, 1926).

³ The revised version in Graves's *Poems (1914–26)* (1927) has 'loose-ends' in place of 'loose ends' in l. 2; 'below' in place of 'beneath' in l. 4, 'downward' in place of 'easy' in l. 5, and a comma after 'welcome' in l. 8.

⁴ *The Fugitive*, Nashville, Tennessee, 1922–1925; repr. with introduction by Donald Davidson (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1967).

⁵ *Collected Poems* (London: Cassell, 1938).

⁶ See Roy Fuller, *The Review*, 23 (September–November 1970), pp.5–6: 'Intellectual acuity: there is no doubt that she is one of the most intellectually gifted writers of the century [...]. This almost unique power to dazzle one intellectually appears again and again throughout her verse.'

⁷ Introduction, *A Selection of the Poems of Laura Riding* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1994).

⁸ *The Fugitive*, 2, August–September, 1923, p.124.

⁹ But it is republished in *First Awakenings: The Early Poems*, ed. by Elizabeth Friedmann, Alan J. Clark and Robert Nye (Manchester: Carcanet, 1992).

¹⁰ It ‘got away from me [...] like a bush-fire’, Laura Riding stated.

¹¹ ‘Metaphysical Acrobatics’, *New Republic*, 9 March 1927, p. 76, quoted by Joyce Wexler.

¹² Deborah Baker, *In Extremis* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1993), p. 73 ff.

¹³ Barbara Adams, *The Enemy Self: Poetry and Criticism of Laura Riding*, foreword by Hugh Kenner (Ann Arbor and London: U. M. I Research Press, 1990).

¹⁴ Joyce Piell Wexler, *Laura Riding’s Pursuit of Truth* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1980), pp. 23–24, 27 *passim*.

¹⁵ *A Mannered Grace*, p. 54.

¹⁶ Laura Riding deliberately ceased writing poems after 1940 and came to see poetry as irrevocably flawed as a means of expression. She returned to America, married Schuyler B. Jackson, and the two of them devoted their lives to the study of words and language, finally resulting in their book *Rational Meaning*, ed. by William Harmon, introduction by Charles Bernstein (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 1997).

¹⁷ Laura (Riding) Jackson, *The Telling* (London: Athlone Press, University of London, 1972; New York: Harper and Row, 1972). *The Telling* first appeared in 1967 in the New York magazine *Chelsea*.

¹⁸ The remarkable precision of ‘vestiary’ reminds one of Laura (Riding) Jackson’s life-long devotion to words and their meanings, becoming her main work-preoccupation after she stopped writing poems.

¹⁹ Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Phénomène Humain* (Paris, Seuil, 1955); *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York: Harper, 1959, paperback 1961, revised paperback 1965).

²⁰ Literary gossip has it that Riding had ‘God is a woman’ painted on her bedroom wall in Mallorca. She dismissed this as nonsense. One can see from this poem why, and her extended work refutes such a notion.

²¹ See especially her essay in ‘On the Role of Women in Contemporary Society’, *Civiltà delle Macchine*, July–August (1963). Reprinted as ‘The Sex Factor in Social Progress’, *Chelsea*, 16 (March 1965), pp. 114–22, and *The Laura (Riding) Jackson Reader*, ed. with an introduction by Elizabeth Friedmann (Persea, 2005), pp. 220–27. But also *The Telling*, etc.

²² *A Trojan Ending* (Deyá, Mallorca: Seizin Press, and London: Constable, 1937), p. 322.

²³ Laura Riding refers to the twentieth century as the ‘end’ of history in several places. See *inter alia* the introductory motto, for instance, in *Epilogue I*, and the Preface to *A Trojan Ending*, p. xxvii.

²⁴ *The Person I Am: The Literary Memoirs of Laura (Riding) Jackson*, ed. by John Nolan and Carroll Ann Friedmann, 2 vols, Trent Editions (Nottingham: Nottingham Trent University, 2011).

²⁵ See *The Poems of Laura Riding: Newly Revised Edition of the 1938/1980 Collection* (New York: Persea, 2001), pp. 496–97.

²⁶ The following midrash featuring Lilith is attributed to Ben Sira, and dates from approximately 1000 CE: ‘He created a woman, also from the earth, and called her Lilith. They quarrelled immediately. She said: “I will not lie below you.” He said, “I will not lie below you, but above you. For you are fit to be below me.” She responded: “We are both equal because we both come from the earth.” Neither listened to the other. When Lilith realized what was happening, she pronounced the Ineffable name of God and flew off into the air.’ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Genesis.

²⁷ See *Civiltà delle Macchine*.

²⁸ Laura (Riding) Jackson, *The Word “Woman” and Other Related Writings*, ed. by Elizabeth Friedmann and Alan Clark (New York: Persea, 1993); see the editors’ introduction.

²⁹ *Anarchism Is Not Enough* (1928), ed. by Lisa Samuels (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), p. 205.

³⁰ *Chelsea* 30/31 (June 1972), pp. 24–33; *Civiltà delle Macchine*, July–August (1963), reprinted as ‘The Sex Factor in Social Progress’, *Chelsea* 16 (March 1965), pp. 114–22.

³¹ Interestingly, there are two poems, ‘Following The Tiger’, in *The Fugitive* (April 1922), p. 17, and ‘The Tiger-Woman’, in *The Fugitive* (June 1922), p. 49, by Roger Gallivant (a pseudonym for Donald Davidson) which have elements in common with this poem. Laura Riding’s ‘The Tiger’ could be read as a direct rejection of, or at least a contrast to, these very male poems.

³² Robert Graves’s poetry, as he himself said, will not be understood until she is. See Douglas Day, *Swifter Than Reason: The Poetry and Criticism of Robert Graves* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963), *inter alia*.

³³ Michael Kirkham, ‘Laura (Riding) Jackson’, *Chelsea*, 33 (September 1974).

³⁴ *The Word “Woman”*, pp. 173–82. First published in *Civiltà delle Macchine*, July–August (1962).