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THE ARBITRARY POWER OF LANGUAGE:
LOCKE, ROMANTIC WRITERS, AND THE STANDARDIZERS OF ENGLISH

by

Sunghyun Jang

An Abstract

Of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Doctor of
Philosophy degree in English
in the Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

May 2013

Thesis Supervisor: Professor Judith Pascoe

ABSTRACT

Writers from the Romantic period embraced Locke’s principle of linguistic arbitrariness as they reacted to the threat to their literary authority posed by the standardizers of English such as Samuel Johnson. Their texts articulate a desire to maximize the potential for authorial freedom that Locke’s theory of language offers. By exploiting arbitrary properties of language, writers hoped to transcend the linguistic limits imposed by the standardizers and thus to confirm their status as creative practitioners of the English language. Priestley, one of such writers, capitalizes on the arbitrariness of signs as described by Locke when he envisions a perfect language that shall be universally used in the future millennial kingdom. Predicated upon the arbitrary connection between words and “things of considerable consequence,” Priestley’s universal language scheme allows the writer to ponder meanings outside the semantic range of standard lexicography. In Pigott’s *Political Dictionary* (1795), Locke’s semantic theory becomes the means to radicalize Locke’s political ideas, especially the idea of the right of revolution. The arbitrariness (or voluntariness) of signification encourages Pigott to revise Johnson’s standard definitions in a way that articulates French Revolutionary principles. Wordsworth sides with Francis Grose—the author of *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (1785)—in placing a high value on vulgar English. But unlike Grose, he contends that rural language is “more permanent,” i.e. durable, than a refined language. Wordsworth’s description of how rustics’ language achieves durability reveals that he is deeply conscious of all linguistic signs being arbitrary. Furthermore, the naturalism that Wordsworth attributes to his poetic diction results from his appropriation of the arbitrariness that rules the language of rustics. Coleridge emphatically denies the role of linguistic arbitrariness in his theorization of the symbol. The signifying process that produces the symbol, however, operates by seizing on the possibilities for semantic expansion that the arbitrary quality of the sign opens up. As a result, the privileged status of the symbol, and hence of the “natural” in Coleridge’s system, is thrown into question. My reading of Coleridge deconstructs the opposition of natural / arbitrary in his thinking about language. By exerting arbitrary power over the ways in which words stand for ideas, Romantic authors sought to restore the vitality of their literary language and to lead the continued progress of their mother tongue.

Abstract Approved: ____________________________________
Thesis Supervisor

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Date

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
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Graduate College
The University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

PH.D. THESIS

This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

Sunghyun Jang

has been approved by the Examining Committee
for the thesis requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy
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INTRODUCTION

In a letter of September 1800, Coleridge prompts William Godwin to inquire into "the power of words," and also into how words acquire "affinities" with "human feelings" (*CL* I, 625). The poet goes on to write:

> Is *thinking* impossible without arbitrary signs? & — how far is the word 'arbitrary' a misnomer? Are not words &c parts & germinations of the Plant? And what is the law of their Growth? — In something of this order I would endeavor to destroy the old antithesis of *Words & Things*, elevating, as it were, words into Things, & living Things too. (626, emphasis in the original)

In this line of thought, the arbitrariness of linguistic signs prevents them from forming natural affinities with human emotions. In other words, arbitrary signs have no "power" to build essential links with thoughts and feelings. The exercise of this mystical power, Coleridge asserts, elevate words to "living things" that, like plants, germinate and grow. For him, this elevation of words to things ultimately leads to "the old antithesis of Words & Things" being destroyed. What he has in mind by this "antithesis" is John Locke's principle of linguistic arbitrariness: the arbitrary signifying relation between a word and the idea it denotes. In Locke's view, words are only arbitrary signs of ideas in the mind of the speaker, and thus bear no direct relation to things in the world. Coleridge denounces Locke for having severed the bond between words and things. The poet's concept of words-as-things involves a deep yearning to overcome the arbitrariness of the sign as Locke described it.

Was Coleridge, then, successful in dissolving the antithesis of words and things as he wished? To put it another way, did he successfully redeem language from the law of arbitrariness laid down by Locke? Strangely enough, these questions have not yet been addressed in Romanticism scholarship. Taking Coleridge's hostility to Locke as a self-evident fact, critics have not brought into question whether he *really* fulfilled his initial aim of rejecting Locke's doctrine of arbitrary signs. In answer to this question, my reading of Coleridge will show that despite his apparent repudiation of Lockean linguistics, he actually developed his theory of poetic language on the basis of Locke's conception of "arbitrary." The power of words that Coleridge aspires to, it turns out, rests with the arbitrary relation of those words to the thoughts they represent.

While examining Locke's influence on Coleridge's thinking about language, I became interested in how Wordsworth and other writers from the Romantic era reacted to Locke's linguistic ideas. My interest in the Romantic reception of Locke derived from the fact that, as many scholars have pointed out, Locke's philosophy of language was the most dominant influence at work in eighteenth-century linguistic thought. Linguistic scholars acknowledge him as the first important thinker to recognize the key role of language in human understanding.[1] Locke advocated a view that language and mind are inseparable; and this view prompted eighteenth-century theorists to believe that language exercises a constitutive function in the formation of thoughts. In fact, Locke's account of the nature of language was at the center of linguistic debate throughout the century.[2] His notion that language arises from the arbitrary act of the individual speaker's mind, in particular, raised vexing questions for later philosophers. Although seventeenth-century linguists also applied the term “arbitrary” to the link between sign and referent, it was Locke’s theorization that gave rise to the most intense speculation over the arbitrariness of language. Interestingly, this association between Locke and the idea of the arbitrary was made even stronger by his own political writings, in which arbitrary government is bitterly denounced. Locke therefore remained a pervasive presence in both linguistic and political discussions about the arbitrary.

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[1] For a discussion of Locke's place in the history of linguistic thought, see Michael Losonsky, "Language, Meaning, and Mind in Locke's *Essay*," *The Cambridge Companion to Locke's "Essay Concerning Human Understanding*," ed. Lex Newman (New York: Cambridge UP, 2007) 300; Michael Losonsky, *Linguistic Turns in Modern Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2006) 25; Stephen K. Land, *The Philosophy of Language in Britain: Major Theories from Hobbes to Thomas Reid* (New York: AMS Press, 1986) 239; William Keach, "Romanticism and Language," *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, ed. Stuart Curran (New York: Cambridge UP, 1993) 97-98.

[2] Many of the eighteenth-century theorists of language engaged with Locke's theory: for example, George Berkeley, Lord Monboddo (James Burnet), Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, and Horne Tooke. For a helpful survey of these philosophers, see Keach's "Romanticism and Language."

My reading of Romantic writings on language draws on this close association of Locke with the eighteenth-century discourse on the arbitrary. I found that those texts articulate a desire for the arbitrary power of language—a desire to capitalize on arbitrary properties of language as expounded by Locke. Then what created this desire? What circumstances made writers return to Locke’s idea of arbitrariness? I want to stress that the late eighteenth century in which these writers lived saw the emergence of fully standardized English. Throughout this dissertation, I will be arguing that Romantic writers became intrigued by Locke’s account of the arbitrary sign in response to the effects of language standardization.

Before articulating more fully my argument, I would like to give a broad historical overview of the standardization of English, or linguistic prescriptivism in the mid- to late eighteenth century.[3] This background knowledge is necessary for understanding how my argument is framed. One of the excellent references on this subject is Andrew Elfenbein's *Romanticism and the Rise of English* (2009). According to him, the process of standardization had reached completion by the late eighteenth century as lexicographers and grammarians formulated prescriptive rules about right usage of English. Established as a communal bond among all Britons, standardized English (particularly in print form accessible to everyone) emerged in the Romantic period as the most effective means to achieve national unity, that is, Britishness.

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[3] Strictly speaking, standardization is one of the main aims of prescriptivism or prescription. I use the two terms almost interchangeably in this dissertation. According to David Crystal, the author of *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics* (6th ed., 2009), a prescriptivist “lay[s] down rules of correctness” regarding language, and tries to preserve “imagined standards by insisting on norms of usage and criticizing departures from these norms” (384). Prescriptivism has often been contrasted with descriptivism in the history of language studies. A descriptivist, in Crystal’s words, attempts to “describe the facts of linguistic usage as they are” (139). Crystal points out the overwhelming dominance of descriptive aims over prescriptive ones in modern linguistics.

I begin my overview of linguistic standardization by examining Jonathan Swift's 1712 pamphlet *A Proposal For Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue*. Swift was one of the earliest writers to promote the importance of standardizing English in order that it would serve as a suitable vehicle of communication for all Britons. His *Proposal* is well worth discussing, since it gave later prescriptivists clear objectives to work towards. Though relatively unknown, Swift's tract holds a significant place in the history of linguistic thought in that it accords special status to language in constructing a sense of national identity—to quote the author's own words, in "preserving our Civil or Religious Constitution" (6). For this reason, reforming the tongue merits as urgent attention as other serious issues of the nation, e.g. "a Foreign War" and "a Domestick Faction" (41). Swift recognizes the close link between language and nation in the following passage:

> From the Civil War to this present Time, I am apt to doubt whether the Corruptions in our Language have not at least equalled the Refinements of it; and these Corruptions very few of the best Authors in our Age have wholly escaped. During the Usurpation, such an Infusion of Enthusiastick Jargon prevailed in every Writing, as was not shook off in many Years after. To this succeeded that Licentiousness which entered with the *Restoration*, and from infecting our Religion and Morals, fell to corrupt our Language . . . . (18)

Swift here regards the state of language as an index of the health of the nation's political and social conditions. The signs of deterioration that he notices in English are symptomatic of declining moral standards of the post-Restoration period. In his view, this linguistic corruption is due to "an Infusion of Enthusiastick Jargon" introduced by "illiterate Court-Fops, halfwitted-Poets, and University-Boys" (28). The prevention of this corruption, the author insists, requires two tasks: "to settle our Language, and put it into a state of Continuance" (39). The national standard language—which he conceives of as unchanging material that never falls into disuse and decay—opposes all types of linguistic change. As such, standard English helps to keep the cultural and social identity of the nation intact through the ages, thereby maintaining the health of the society.

With this end in view, Swift proposes founding a language academy that will supervise the work on linguistic standardization. In his argument, the academy offers two big advantages. Under the regulations that the academy enacts, first, the English language will be considered "fit to record the History of so great and good a Princess" (38). That is to say, the academy's efforts to suppress linguistic variation will bring considerable benefits to Queen Anne and her ministers, since a fixed language ensures the faithful recording of their achievements for all succeeding generations:

> [S]uch a Work as this, brought to Perfection, would very much contribute to the Glory of Her MAJESTY's Reign; which ought to be recorded in *Words more durable than Brass*, and such as our Posterity may read a thousand Years hence, with Pleasures as well as Admiration. (37, emphasis added)

Swift warns the Earl of Oxford (to whom the proposal is submitted), too, that given the current state of language, he cannot guarantee that the earl's "Memory shall be preserved above an Hundred Years" (40). The degeneration of language over time might make the records of one's brilliant feats almost inaccessible for future readers. In the same line of reasoning, Swift proceeds to argue that without efforts to reverse the decay of English, even a "Man who hath a Genius for History" would worry that "he will be read with Pleasure but a very few Years, and in an Age or two shall hardly be understood without an Interpreter" (43). In order to secure the permanent availability of historical records, therefore, language should be ascertained and fixed—a task that Swift assigns the academy to carry out. The language reform by the academy—in his own words, making "Words more durable than Brass"—has another great advantage in earning writers lasting fame because later generations will have no trouble understanding the value of their work. He confidently declares: "[O]ur best Writings might probably be preserved with Care, and grow into Esteem, and the Authors have a Chance for Immortality" (15). This view that took durability, or permanence, as a key characteristic of the standard form of the written language asserted a dominant influence on eighteenth-century codification and prescription of English.

In actual fact, Swift was not the first to suggest creating an academy that monitors the variability of linguistic usage. Daniel Defoe put forward the same proposal in *Essays upon Several Projects* (1702).[4] According to him, English had already proven superior in "the Comprehensiveness of Expression" to other European languages; he proudly says, "the *English* Tongue not only Equals but Excels its Neighbours" (229-30). This superiority that the English language evinces, Defoe argues, shall be universally acknowledged among learned men as a result of the work of the academy, which shall "polish and refine the *English* Tongue, and advance the so much neglected Faculty of

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[4] Besides Swift and Defoe, John Dryden, Joseph Addison, and Alexander Pope suggested the foundation of a language academy.

Correct Language, to establish *Purity* and Propriety of Stile, and to *purge* it from all the Irregular Additions that Ignorance and Affectation have introduced" (233, emphasis added). Defoe expects the academy to illuminate "the true Glory of our *English* Stile" and so to confirm English's status as "the Noblest and most Comprehensive of all the Vulgar Languages in the World" (234). This sense of national superiority in language proved highly instrumental in accelerating attempts to codify the standard language over the course of the eighteenth century. In other words, a deeply held belief in the "genius" of English prompted language reformers to impose a set of prescriptive norms upon the language throughout the century.[5] They worked hard to create *pure* English—note the words that I set in italics in Defoe's statement—that would manifest that genius most obviously.

Swift's and Defoe's advocacy of the academy for English failed to win broad support. This was mainly because the objectives they set for the academy—that is, correcting and fixing the native tongue, and thereby demonstrating its inherent superiority—were achieved by private writers on language as the eighteenth century progressed. This group of "English experts" as Elfenbein collectively calls them—i.e. grammarians, lexicographers, rhetoricians and orthographers—acted, unofficially, as a substitute for the academy by compiling a corpus of rules and regulations regarding language in their books of usage: grammars, dictionaries, rhetorics and spelling books.[6]

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[5] According to John Barrell, "the 'genius' of the tongue" is a phase that demands our attention for its numerous appearances in eighteenth-century writings on language (123). Samuel Johnson uses the phrase "the genius of our tongue" twice in the Preface to his *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755).

[6] To make a list of some of the books: John Keysey, *A New English Dictionary* (1702); Nathan Bailey, *An Universal Etymological English Dictionary* (1721); Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755); Robert Lowth, *Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762); George Campbell, *Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776); Thomas Sheridan, *A General Dictionary of the English Language* (1780); Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783); Robert Nares, *Elements of*

Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade has also observed that "[t]he need for an academy was gradually felt less strongly as a result of the increasing number of grammars and dictionaries which appeared" (877). An an illustration of this, she reports that the number of grammar books produced during the second half of the century was nearly four times that of all preceding periods (877).

Rules of linguistic correctness set out in these grammars and dictionaries primarily aimed at establishing formal, written English. One obvious reason for this was that written forms of language, or print-language, made a much easier target for prescriptivists than the colloquial language. Elfenbein indicates that over the course of the century, printed English had become the only source of "common ground" for all people in the British Isles (21). "[O]f all modes of creating national unity," he goes on to write, "print English seemed the most achievable" since almost anyone could access print (23). Benedict Anderson, too, addresses the role of print-language in the formation of national consciousness in his *Imagined Communities* (rev. ed., 2006). According to him, the interaction between capitalism and print technology encouraged the development of the book industry, which widely disseminated print-language through mechanical reproduction. This "print-capitalism," Anderson argues, gave birth to "monoglot mass reading publics," and consequently opened up "the possibility of a new form of imagined community" (43, 46). With the aid of print technology, language obtained "a new fixity," "a permanent form"; and the fixing of print-language led to the creation of "unified fields of exchange and communication below Latin and above the spoken vernaculars" (44). In conclusion, the achievement of authoritarian prescriptivists was most clearly recognizable

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Orthoepy (1784); Francis Grose, *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (1785); John Walker, *Critical Pronouncing Dictionary* (1791); Lindley Murray, *English Grammar* (1795); Caleb Stower, *The Printer's Grammar* (1808).

in written English. As far as the written styles of language are concerned, Swift's dream of language being more durable than brass, it seemed, had almost come true by the latter half of the eighteenth century.

This formation of a standard literary language by prescriptivists had both positive and negative repercussions for a literary field. On the one hand, as Swift had already noted, writers in the Romantic period could hope that their works, written in a reliably fixed language, would "be preserved with Care, and grow into Esteem," thereby affording them "a Chance for Immortality." However, on the other hand, a fully standardized language represented significant challenges for Romantic writers. According to Elfenbein, the purification of English signified "a distinct loss of power for authors," since it turned out that "English needed no new authors" (38, 40). Grammarians and lexicographers had already accumulated plenty more examples of both proper and incorrect English usage from the texts of dead writers like Addison, Swift, and Pope. In other words, new books were all but useless in their task of fixing a model of English writing. While rendering value judgments on the exemplars drawn from older books, the English experts formulated rules of correct language in their usage guides; and these guides, many of which were commercial successes, inculcated upon the general public their conceptions of standard English. By the Romantic period, in consequence, the standardizers firmly established themselves as the proper authorities who, in Elfenbein's words, "would determine the course of English" (38). Living authors seemed to have no significant role to play in shaping the future of their mother tongue.

I am especially interested in how Romantic authors dealt with this anxiety caused by the rise of standardized English. They found themselves confronting a challenge that

English literature had never taken on before. What I am identifying as a distinctive characteristic of the Romantic response to prescriptivism is close attention to the *arbitrary*—a key concept in both the political and linguistic discourses by Locke. Writers of the Romantic era, including Wordsworth and Coleridge, often denounced some aspects of prescriptive approaches to language as “arbitrary.” In their view, many of the linguistic norms imposed by professional grammarians and rhetoricians tended to convey an arbitrary notion of correctness that was not exactly in accordance with, or even contradictory to, actual usage. To provide an example, Linda Mitchell points out that eighteenth-century grammarians had a habit of “using Latin models to standardize the English language” (36). They utilized Latin grammar as a point of reference in resolving grammatical problems in English and thus fixing the language as Swift proposed. Not surprisingly, this caused distortion of English grammar. For Romantic writers, this sort of elitist, authoritarian attempt at regulating language, often to the neglect of normal usage, was arbitrary. As we shall see, the use of “arbitrary” as a derogatory term came in large part from Locke’s political treatises, in which he condemned the absolute arbitrary power of the monarchy. Johnson’s definition of “arbitrary” directly reflects the negative connotations attached to “arbitrary” in Locke’s political philosophy: “despotick; absolute . . . following the will without restraint . . . capricious.” But it is not in these political meanings of “arbitrary” that I grasp the real essence of the writers’ reaction to the linguistic authority of prescriptivists. From my own point of view, what proved crucial to the writers’ resistance to the increasing pressure from linguistic standardization was—I shall argue throughout this dissertation—Locke’s speculation on the arbitrariness of language.

Let me elaborate my argument more fully. Locke's description of the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign boils down to the doctrine that words are only arbitrary signs of ideas. In the third book of his 1690 *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, he asserts that "[Words] signify only Men's peculiar Ideas . . . by a perfectly arbitrary Imposition" (408). This "arbitrary imposition" by which a particular word is associated with a particular idea is the *voluntary* act of the individual speaker's will. Locke here conceives of language as the private act of conveying one's thoughts through words. I maintain that late-eighteenth-century writers drew creative inspiration for their linguistic experiments from Locke's explanation of the voluntary, privative nature of the sign. They sought to take full advantage of the subjective aspect of language highlighted in Locke's theory, recognizing that such emphasis on the role of subjectivity in producing linguistic meaning allows them authorial freedom to go beyond the bounds of the literary standards set by prescriptivists. Locke's doctrine of arbitrariness fostered in these writers an aspiration for the arbitrary control of language. My study traces the origins of such a desire to exploit the potential of the arbitrary connection between words and ideas, and examines how that desire drove writers to create a new form of literariness. I stress that this longing arose in response to a particular historical situation in which the writers found themselves, i.e. the rise of English prescriptivism. In this situation, the writers were attracted to the older idea of the arbitrary and transformed it into an effective means of withstanding the pressures of prescriptivism.

Locke's insistence upon the arbitrary nature of the relation between the two components of the sign brings to mind one of the central theses of Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistics: the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary. Indeed, Saussure’s argument about the arbitrariness of the sign had so profound an influence on modern linguists (and thus literary theorists as well) that it would seem unreasonable to exclude him from any discussion on linguistic arbitrariness. In addition, I find it worthwhile to compare Locke’s theory of the arbitrary sign with Saussure’s because this comparison will help us see more clearly what aspects of the former intrigued Romantic authors. In the *Course in General Linguistics* (1916), Saussure claims that the word “arbitrary” should not be misunderstood as implying that “the choice of the signifier is left entirely to the speaker.” This choice is, he goes on to say, “*unmotivated*, i.e. arbitrary in that it actually has no *natural* connection with the signified” (69, emphasis added). To put it differently, there is no inevitable or necessary link between any given signifier and that which is signified, and hence language is an elaborate network of differences and relationships sanctioned by the linguistic community and not by the individual. This point is further clarified when Saussure writes: “Whether we take the signified or the signifier, language has neither ideas nor sounds that existed before the linguistic system, but only conceptual and phonic differences that have issued from the system” (120). Though making no mention of Locke, Saussure here challenges the whole basis on which the Lockean philosophy of language is built. Whereas Locke’s principle that words signify ideas in the mind seems to postulate the preexistence of ideas, Saussure outright rejects such reasoning by arguing that “language has neither ideas nor sounds that existed before the linguistic system”—a system in which both signifier and signified are matters of structural differences. For Locke, as Stephen K. Land has observed, language was not so much a *system* as “an *aggregate* of signs” (2, emphasis in the original). This explains why Locke drew attention to the importance of clear and exact definitions, and hence of an authoritative dictionary. He was interested in how words refer to ideas or things rather than in how words relate to other words.

In addition, and most importantly, Locke and Saussure hold contrary opinions about the arbitrariness of the sign. As noted earlier, Saussure's principle of arbitrariness dismisses the notion that "the choice of the signifier is left entirely to the speaker." I would like to emphasize that this very notion, the reverse of Saussure's thesis, was what Locke intended by his linguistic uses of "arbitrary." It is noteworthy that, as I shall show in the first chapter, Locke used "arbitrary" and "voluntary" almost synonymously in his linguistic discourse. Considering that the word "voluntary" has far different senses from "unmotivated" in ordinary usage, we might say that Locke's concept of arbitrariness has little to do with unmotivatedness, which for Saussure characterizes the essential feature of the arbitrary sign. My main contention is that Locke's understanding of arbitrariness as making a *motivated* choice about the word-idea connection—a serious misunderstanding of the term from Saussure's point of view—carried profound implications for the Romantics' linguistic projects. One might say that Saussure has already successfully disproven the Lockean theory of language, and that, therefore, Locke's notion of arbitrariness—which Saussure particularly railed against—should not be accepted as still valid in our thinking about the arbitrary nature of language. Although it is true that many of Locke's linguistic ideas are outdated from the standpoint of modern linguists, however, his account of arbitrariness still deserves careful scholarly attention in that, I would argue, it provides a viable alternative to Saussure's account. To my way of thinking, this insistence on a re-evaluation of Locke's argument about the arbitrariness of the sign can be justified in terms of Jacques Derrida's deconstructive reading of Saussure.

In *Of Grammatology* (1967), Derrida demonstrates that Saussure's principle of arbitrariness inverts his own hierarchical opposition of speech / writing. While valorizing the relation between sound-image and concept as the "natural" and "only true bond," Saussure disparages writing as a derivative representation of spoken language (25).[7] In his system, the written word—though seemingly "permanent and stable"—forms only a "superficial bond" with its meaning due to the absence of the speaker, and consequently "obscures language" (25, 30). Writing, Saussure adds, "is not a guise for language but a disguise" (30). In Derrida's view, this logocentric argument—which privileges self-present speech and "chases writing to the outer darkness of language"—contradicts the thesis of the arbitrariness of the sign (45). "This thesis," Derrida contends, "successfully accounts for a conventional relationship between the phoneme and the grapheme . . . , but by the same token it forbids that the latter be an 'image' [or in Sassure's terms 'representation'] of the former" (45). The point that Derrida makes here is clarified by one of his earlier statements: "This natural bond of the signified (concept or sense) to the phonic signifier would condition the natural relationship subordinating writing (visible image) to speech" (35). That is to say, the natural relation that Saussure supposes to exist between voice and thought must confirm the natural superiority of speech over writing, the latter being a visible image of the former. To quote Derrida's phrase, Saussure assumes "a *natural order* of relationships between linguistic and graphic signs" (35, emphasis in the original). Written language shows a tendency to subvert this natural order, the linguist warns, by “usurp[ing] the main role” and “forc[ing] itself upon [aural impressions] at the expense of sound” (24-25).

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[7] The phrase rendered into "the only true bond" in the standard translation of Wade Baskin (1959) translates as "the natural and only authentic connexion" in Roy Harrison's edition (1986). In Derrida's reading of Saussure, "natural" is a crucial adjective describing the bond between the spoken signifier and the signified. See Derek Attridge 60.

However, if signifiers (phonic or graphic) are merely arbitrarily connected to their signifieds as Saussure insists, what could be the natural relationship between speech and writing, and between phonic signifier and concept as well? Derrida argues:

> Now from the moment that one considers the totality of determined signs, spoken, and a fortiori written, as unmotivated institutions, one must exclude any relationship of natural subordination, any natural hierarchy among signifiers or orders of signifiers. (44)

Our bond with sound would not be more natural than that with writing if the operating principle of language is unmotivatedness (i.e. arbitrariness) and both signifier and signified are thus “purely differential” as Saussure puts it (120). The natural hierarchy of speech / writing that he reinforces is thrown into question from within his own text, since under the rule of arbitrariness, there can be no grounds for regarding one kind of sign as a representative “image” of another. So Derrida points out that “[t]he thesis of the arbitrariness of the sign (so grossly misnamed, and not only for the reasons Saussure himself recognizes) must forbid a radical distinction between the linguistic and the graphic sign” (44). In other words, the crucial distinction that Saussure draws between speech and writing in the logocentric tradition of Western philosophy is being erased by his own claims about the arbitrary.

I find particularly inspiring Derrida’s assertion that the thesis of arbitrariness has been “grossly misnamed . . . not only for the reasons Saussure himself recognizes.” What are these reasons that Derrida is mentioning? Let us turn back to the chapter of the *Course* in which Saussure examines the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign. Towards the end of the chapter, he addresses the possible objection that onomatopoeia and interjections—which both appear to demonstrate the natural link between sign and meaning—are likely to undermine his thesis of arbitrariness. According to Saussure, those seemingly spontaneous expressions are far from refuting his thesis, because they are “never organic elements of a linguistic system,” and moreover, their number is too small to be worth considering (69). Yet Derrida maintains that the thesis of arbitrariness is accused of misnaming *not only* on the grounds of onomatopoeic words and interjections. The implication is clear: there are also *other* grounds for the charge of misnaming. In context, Derrida’s point is that the thesis is in direct contradiction to the underlying premise of Saussure’s linguistics, or “the entire uncritical tradition which he inherits,” i.e. a line of logocentric thought (46). I take Derrida’s accusation of misnaming a bold step further, with an insistence that the accusation opens up the possibility that the theme of the arbitrary could be considered outside the conceptual framework established by Saussure. Put another way, Derrida suggests the possibility of adopting a non-(or pre-) Saussurean approach to the problem of arbitrariness; and I am proposing Locke’s doctrine as an alternative perspective on how a particular sign can be arbitrary. I am not saying that Locke’s position should replace Saussure’s, but that our comprehension of arbitrariness can benefit significantly from a Lockean perspective.

As we have seen, Derrida shows that Saussure’s account of language suffers from a contradiction between the natural link between sound and sense on the one hand, and the arbitrary link between the signifier and the signified on the other. Derrida’s thinking not only served, as shown above, as a basis for my approach to linguistic arbitrariness from Locke’s standpoint. It also heavily influenced the development of my basic argument in chapters on Wordsworth and Coleridge. What particularly intrigued me was

Derrida’s deconstructive analysis of the tension between “natural” and “arbitrary” in Saussure’s text. In the final two chapters devoted to Wordsworth and Coleridge, I will likewise question the boundary between “natural” and “arbitrary” which dominates some of their texts. My aim is to dismantle the hierarchy implicit in the natural / arbitrary opposition: the privileging of the natural with the correlative denigration of the arbitrary. In other words, I will demonstrate that a text deeply cautious of arbitrary qualities of language—e.g. Wordsworth’s Preface or Coleridge’s notebook entries—has already harbored a desire to exploit them to the fullest. The naturalness of language to which the poets aspire turns out to be a product of their appropriation of the arbitrary signifying relation as described by Locke.[8]

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[8] Another study that bears on my thesis here is Deborah Cameron’s deconstructive account of prescriptivism versus descriptivism in her book *Verbal Hygiene* (1995). For the prescriptive / descriptive opposition in linguistics, see my first footnote. I find especially interesting Cameron’s attack on the idea of the “natural,” which, according to her, has reinforced the binarism of prescriptive / descriptive. She stresses the need for great caution in handling the term “natural.” While castigating prescriptive practices as “unnatural interference,” linguists have conventionally applied the label “natural” to a descriptive approach that supposedly gives an objective analysis of linguistic behaviors as they are observed (5). They drew a parallel between prescriptive / descriptive and unnatural (or arbitrary) / natural. In Cameron’s argument, this parallelism is highly problematic:

> If ‘natural’ here means something like ‘observed to occur in all speech communities to a greater or lesser extent’, then the kind of norm-making and tinkering linguists label ‘prescriptive’ is ‘natural’ too: not all languages and varieties undergo the institutional processes of standardization, but all are subject to some normative regulation. (5)

Descriptivists take linguistic change “in all speech communities” as natural, something not to be interfered but to be carefully observed. Yet prescriptive regulation, Cameron argues, appears perfectly natural, too, because an inclination to regulate language and improve it is observable “in all speech communities.” Simply put, norm-making (prescriptive) is as inherently natural as norm-observing (descriptive). The two seemingly antithetical discourses involve alike pronouncing value judgments about usage. Hence, they are actually two “aspects of a single (and normative) activity,” and of what Cameron calls “verbal hygiene,” i.e. common practice of controlling language use (8). By showing that descriptive statements are motivated by a deep desire for control over language, Cameron breaks the traditional associations of “prescriptive” with “unnatural” (or “arbitrary”) and of “descriptive” with “natural.” This bears a strong resemblance to my questioning of the binary distinction of natural / arbitrary as it is found to exist in Romantic writing. Cameron’s speculation over the term “natural”—how the natural has already been coupled with the unnatural—corresponds to my speculation over the term in chapters on Wordsworth and Coleridge.

Now, let me set out the specific aims of each chapter. My dissertation consists of five chapters. The first chapter, “The Arbitrariness of Language: Locke, Johnson, and Romantic Writers,” lays the groundwork for the arguments to be deployed in the following four chapters. Its primary goal is to explain in detail Locke’s idea of the arbitrariness of signs. I will investigate how seventeenth-century conceptions of language formed the basis of Locke’s premise as regards the arbitrary relation of signs to their referents. I will be also showing that the Romantics’ thinking on the term “arbitrary” indicates that Locke’s linguistic and political ideas of the arbitrary had become entwined in the later part of the eighteenth century. In addition, I will compare Johnson, the greatest prescriptivist, to Romantic writers in terms of how they reacted to Locke’s propositions about the arbitrary sign. Whereas Johnson focused his efforts on making language as minimally arbitrary as possible, the writers chose to make use of Locke’s tenets to their benefit.

Chapter 2, “Connecting Words with ‘Things of Considerable Consequence’: The Arbitrary Nature of Priestley’s Universal Language,” explores the impact of Locke’s semantic theory on Priestley’s prophetic vision of the perfectly universal language that shall be used in the future millennial kingdom. For Priestley, this millennium is a republic in which arbitrary government as Locke conceived it has been toppled. The perfect language to be used in this free society is, according to Priestley, constructed by connecting words with “things of considerable consequence.” I will see how this language scheme depended on Locke’s theory of signification. I contend that Priestley recognized intriguing possibilities in Locke’s principle of linguistic arbitrariness. The voluntariness (or arbitrariness) of the sign enabled Priestley to envision a universal language transcending the confines of standard semantics established by prescriptivists.

Chapter 3, "'The Overturning of an Arbitrary Government': Pigott's Revolutionary Challenge to Standard Lexicography," examines Charles Pigott's *A Political Dictionary: Explaining the True Meaning of Words* (1795), a radical pamphlet that has received little attention in the studies of the Revolutionary controversy of the 1790s. I am primarily concerned with how Pigott capitalized on the arbitrary nature of the relation between word and idea that Locke elucidated when challenging the linguistic authority of Johnson. In particular, Pigott directly takes issue with Johnson's notion of revolution and proposes an alternative, radical definition of the term that reflects the influence of Locke's political thought: "the sudden overturning of an arbitrary government by the people." Apart from this entry for "revolution," many of Pigott's other entries articulate French Revolutionary principles. I argue that his radicalization of Locke's political agenda drew on Locke's account of the arbitrary quality of the sign. And I also explore what Pigott intended to achieve by presenting himself as a professional lexicographer, one with the authority to determine a word's meaning. Additionally, I examine the role of Priestley in Pigott's engagement with Locke's linguistic and political theories.

Chapter 4, "The Language of Rustics: Its Durability, Naturalness, and Arbitrariness in Wordsworth's Linguistic Theories," investigates the relationship between Wordsworth's theory of rustic language and Locke's linguistic discourse of the arbitrary. I start this chapter by discussing Francis Grose's *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (1785), which invites interesting comparison not only with Johnson's lexicography but also with Wordsworth’s Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* in terms of the way that they treat the vulgar language. A key point of comparison between Grose and Wordsworth is this: Whereas Grose admits that the vulgar terms he collected are mutable, Wordsworth claims that the *real* language of rustics to be adopted in his poetry is even more durable than a standardized language. I will demonstrate that Wordsworth’s ascription of durability to rural language points to his implicit acceptance of Locke’s doctrine that words are arbitrary signs. Furthermore, I will also examine how the naturalness that Wordsworth attributes to his poetic diction derives from his appropriation of Locke’s idea of private language. In this line of argument, Wordsworth’s seemingly un-Lockean position in the Note to “The Thorn,” too, is shown to be Lockean.

Chapter 5, “‘A Voluntary Appropriation’ of Arbitrary Signs: Questioning Coleridge’s Distinction of Natural / Arbitrary,” undertakes a careful examination of Coleridge’s engagement with Lockean linguistics. The purpose of this study is to show that Coleridge’s poetics is deeply indebted to Locke’s philosophy that emphasized the purely subjective (or private) nature of language. Coleridge has been understood to be critical of Locke’s philosophy of language. But his notion that the best language for poetry rises from “a voluntary appropriation” of linguistic signs for mental processes—it will be argued—has its basis in Locke’s principle of arbitrariness. I will explore how Coleridge’s idea of linguistic naturalness draws upon the “voluntary imposition” of words on ideas as Locke had it, and then go on to question his prioritizing of the natural over the arbitrary. With this aim in view, I will discuss at length Paul de Man’s famous essay “The Rhetoric of Temporality.” De Man’s undoing of the concept of symbol in this essay serves as a springboard for me to cast doubt on the privileged status of the natural.

My reading of Coleridge resembles in some respects the way that de Man deconstructs Coleridge’s distinction between symbol and allegory. The superiority of the symbol over allegory, which de Man attacks, bears an interesting parallel to that of the natural over the arbitrary. De Man’s deconstructive criticism provides me with the means to erase the dichotomy of natural / arbitrary in Coleridge’s texts.

I set out to show how a group of Romantic writers who actively engaged in shaping the linguistic thought of the period expressed, explicitly or not, a desire for the arbitrary power of language as a way to deal with growing anxiety over their precarious literary status, the anxiety caused by the standardization of English that was nearing completion in their time. This unprecedented challenge from prescriptivism led the writers to revisit Locke’s concept of the arbitrary sign. They paid special attention to the implications that the arbitrary—and voluntary, too—imposition of Locke’s sign would have for their task of reclaiming literary credentials which the standardizers seemed to have deprived them of. The strategy that the authors drew up for this task was to seize on the name giver’s voluntariness posited in the Lockean process of signification. This strategy provided them with a unique role as producers of literature who could tap the full potential of the English language beyond the boundaries of its standardized form. My dissertation identifies arbitrariness as a key characteristic of linguistic projects designed by the Romantic authors; and also identifies English’s standardization as the driving force behind these writers’ attempts to exploit the arbitrary properties of language. By connecting historical research on the formation of standard English to Locke scholarship focusing on his linguistic theories, this dissertation aims to present a fresh perspective on the Romantics’ involvement in the linguistic debates of their day.

CHAPTER ONE:

THE ARBITRARINESS OF LANGUAGE: LOCKE, JOHNSON, AND ROMANTIC WRITERS

As early as 1761, the English language had already made substantial progress towards standardization. In his *Observations on Style* published that year, Joseph Priestley testifies to this progress as follows:

> We need make no doubt, therefore, but that the conjectures and apprehensions we find in the writings of *Addison, Pope, Swift*, and others, their contemporaries, that the language of their time would, at length become obsolete in this nation, are absolutely groundless. And it may be taken for granted, that the schemes of some still more modern writers, to add something considerable to the perfection of the English language, in order to contribute to the permanency of it, cannot, according to the course of nature, produce any effect. (60)

Given the fact that Addison, Pope, and Swift all suggested the founding of the English Academy, what Priestley is pointing out here is the absurdity of having a national institution refine and fix the language. Those authors' worries about the irreversible change of language turned out to be "absolutely groundless," since the "English experts" (Elfenbein's term for grammarians and lexicographers) informally took on the job originally envisaged for the academy. They codified and prescribed English, their decisions being based not only upon their personal preferences regarding linguistic style but also upon enough models of good language usage left by such great writers as Addison and Pope. Because of their concerted effort, it seemed to Priestley that English had reached full maturity, with the result that modern writers found themselves unable to make a meaningful contribution to the "perfection" and the "permanency" of the language. He goes on to assert forcefully: “If the English language hath not already attained to its maturity, we may safely pronounce that it never will” (60).

Besides, Priestley correctly perceives that it is the imposition of rules of formal English writing which “fixes, and gives stability to a language” (60) as I highlighted in the introduction citing Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*. With the emergence of “monoglot mass reading publics” (Anderson’s phrase) facilitated by the thriving publishing industry, there appeared to be only a very remote possibility that English—at least where written forms were concerned—would change markedly in the future. Priestley addresses this point in the following: “[W]hen a language is so much read, written, and diffused in books through the bulk of the nation that speaks it as the English, in its present state, it would be absolutely miraculous were it to receive any considerable alteration” (60-61). With this fixed print language, as Elfenbein indicates in his reading of the above passage, modern authors could rest assured that their works would be completely understandable to later readers (39).

On the other hand, however, it appeared as a consequence that living authors had suddenly lost their *raison d’être*. Unlike such early writers as Swift and Defoe, they were no longer in a position to spearhead the campaign for language reform. It was the English experts who had risen to that position of authority, by standardizing English in the written channel to the point of leaving little room for further improvement. As Elfenbein has astutely observed, “[t]here hardly seemed any pressing need for new literature at all” as a result (40). Not only had modern writers lost the real meaning of producing literature, but they had also come to find themselves in an embarrassing situation where their literary reputation depended on the standardizers’ judgments. To cite a striking instance given by

Elfenbein (36), the most well-known poem by Wordsworth in his lifetime was “The Pet-Lamb,” for the simple reason that Lindley Murray, the renowned grammarian, anthologized it in his *Introduction to the English Reader*, a major commercial success which continued to release its revised editions (36 in total) until 1836.

Under these circumstances Romantic writers sought ways to restore the lost vitality of authorship and to reclaim literature from the hands of the standardizers. These efforts led them to embrace, deliberately or not, the doctrine of linguistic arbitrariness as it was expounded by Locke—an argument that will be advanced in different versions in subsequent chapters, which are extensive discussions of individual writers. As for this chapter, it primarily offers an account of Locke’s linguistic discourse, i.e. the third book of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690).[1] First, I will investigate Romantic conceptions of the arbitrary and relate them to Locke’s political thought. My analysis of Locke’s linguistic idea of the arbitrary, then, will not only show that it traces its origins back to the artificial language planning in the seventeenth century, but also reveal that it considerably influenced eighteenth-century linguistic prescriptivism, particularly Samuel Johnson’s lexicographic work. After examining Johnson’s response to Lockean linguistics, I will highlight how the Romantics differed from Johnson in accommodating Locke’s theory of arbitrary signification within their linguistic schemes.

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[1] All quotations from Locke’s *Essay* refer to Peter H. Nidditch’s edition (1979), a standard version of the text.

The Romantic Uses of "Arbitrary" and

Locke's Political Discourse on Arbitrary Power

Writers in the Romantic period habitually attached the label *arbitrary* to all manner of writing that they considered unnatural and therefore un-English. Their criticism particularly centered on a style of writing with pedantic and tiresomely elaborate constructions. For example, William Hazlitt in his essay "On Familiar Style" (1821) criticizes the writing style of Johnson for showing a preference for "tall, opaque words"—i.e. polysyllabic Latinate words—over "a genuine familiar or truly English style" (156, 155). Hazlitt says mockingly, "If a fine style depended on this sort of *arbitrary pretension*, it would be fair to judge of an author's elegance by the measurement of his words, and the substitution of foreign circumlocutions (with no precise associations) for the mother-tongue" (156, emphasis added). And in his lecture "On the Periodical Essayists" (1819), Hazlitt also argues: "The fault of Dr. Johnson's style is, that it reduces all things to the same *artificial* and unmeaning level. It destroys all shades of difference, the association between words and things" (23, emphasis added). As is suggested by these two critical remarks, Hazlitt considers "artificiality"—almost synonymous with "arbitrariness" in his vocabulary—the most salient characteristic of Johnson's highly literate style.

Wordsworth and Coleridge, too, had a similarly negative sense of the arbitrary.[2] Wordsworth in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1802) contrasts the *real* language of rustics with poetic diction practiced by those, like Thomas Gray, who "separate themselves from the sympathies of men, and indulge in arbitrary and capricious habits of expression" (61). The highly elaborate diction of these writers, Wordsworth attacks, is full of "false refinement or arbitrary innovation" (62). He even worries that his poetic language may have already been affected by "those arbitrary connections of feelings and ideas with particular words," from which, he excuses himself, "no man can altogether protect himself" (84). Coleridge in the *Biographia Literaria* (1817), too, affixes "arbitrary" as a descriptive term to all linguistic practices that promote "cold technical artifices of ornament or connection" and, in so doing, neglect the "pure and genuine mother English" (361, 168). The word "arbitrary" in the following phrases from the *Biographia* carries derogatory connotations: "arbitrary dictation and petulant sneers" (190); "worse defect of arbitrary and illogical phrases" (201); "the transitions abrupt and arbitrary" (255); and "arbitrary and sometimes petulant verdicts" (382). Elsewhere in the book, furthermore, Coleridge distinguishes "the arbitrary marks of thought," which count as the "smooth market-coin of intercourse," from words used to "enliven and particularize" external objects and also to "body forth the inward state of the person speaking" (389).

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[2] All quotations from Wordsworth's 1802 Preface and Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* refer to *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. Michael Mason (New York: Longman, 1992), and *The Major Works including* Biographia Literaria, ed. H. J. Jackson (New York: Oxford UP, 2000).

I would like to emphasize that these writers used "arbitrary" mostly in its pejorative senses developed in Locke's political treatises on the arbitrary power of monarchy, which was condemned by him as despotic and capricious. In particular, Locke's *Second Treatise of Government* (1689), his seminal work advancing a theory of civil society, contains clear examples of the ways that he used "arbitrary" in political discourse.[3] Frequently appearing together with such adjectives as "absolute" and "despotical" in the *Treatise*, "arbitrary" characterizes absolutist monarchical rule that governs by “extemporary dictates and undetermined resolutions” and not by “declared and received laws” (78). The absolute arbitrary power a monarch has over the life and property of his people, it seems to Locke, constitutes a flagrant violation of “the law of nature,” by which they have “a liberty to defend their right against the injuries of others . . . upon equal terms of force” (77). To put it another way, relinquishing a natural right to protect one’s life and property to the arbitrary will of another—to use Locke’s words, subjecting oneself to “the ill usage of arbitrary power” (115)—is drifting into a far worse state than “the state of nature,” wherein each individual is given total freedom to do whatever he likes within the boundaries of the law of nature. Why, then, did men give up this freedom and decide to build political society in the first place? Locke answers:

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[3] All quotations from Locke's *Treatise* refer to *The Selected Political Writings of John Locke*, ed. Paul E. Sigmund (New York: Norton, 2005).

> [T]hough in the state of nature he hath such a right, yet the enjoyment of it is very uncertain, and constantly exposed to the invasion of others: . . . This makes him willing to quit a condition, which, however free, is full of fears and continual dangers: and it is not without reason, that he seeks out, and is willing to join in society with others, who are already united, or have a mind to unite, for the mutual preservation of their lives, liberties and estates, which I call by the general name, property. (72)

Though not as terrible as Hobbes imagined it to be, the state of nature described by Locke does not ensure the protection of private property—by which he collectively refers to life, liberty, and estate.[4]

Men thus create, “by a tacit and voluntary consent,” civil society for the effective protection of their property (38). They agree to submit themselves, voluntarily, to the political power of government in the belief that society will better preserve the peace and stability of their lives. In this state of society, they are “to be under no other legislative power, but that established, by consent, in the commonwealth" (26). For Locke, a legitimate government is one that secures the consent of the people; and he deems a monarchical form of government legitimate insofar as it serves the interests of citizens. But when monarchical power rests not with the consent of the people but with the ruler's own caprices, it becomes arbitrary and despotic. Locke writes:

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[4] As Hobbes famously phrased, the state of nature he depicted is an awful state of “war of every man against every man”; but Locke’s state of nature is relatively peaceful, although it is vulnerable to “fears and continual dangers.”

> Absolute arbitrary power, or governing without settled standing laws, can neither of them consist with the ends of society and government, which men would not quit the freedom of the state of the nature for, and tie themselves up under, were it not to preserve their lives, liberties, and fortunes, and by stated rules of right and property to secure their peace and quiet. (77)

This arbitrary exercise of power depending on the ruler's personal whims defeats the purpose of establishing the monarchy in the first place, since people's living conditions have worsened considerably when compared to those in the anarchic state of nature. Their lives have been put at greater risk, though their original purpose in forming a government was to have a "comfortable, safe, and peaceable living one amongst another, in a secure enjoyment of their properties" (58). If the king has no intention of serving this purpose and persists in "set[ting] up his own arbitrary will as the law of the society," such a tyranny, Locke boldly claims, must be overthrown (114).

My point is that Romantic writers applied this concept of tyrannical arbitrariness developed in Locke's political discussion to their critique of contemporary literary language. They denounced as "arbitrary" the neo-classical stylistic principle—laid down by such authority figures as Addison and Johnson—that "poetry should be written in a specialised variety of English, deviating from contemporary spoken language in features of lexis, grammar, and idiom" as Sylvia Adamson identifies it in her extensive discussion of the history of literary language (598). Wordsworth and Coleridge, and Hazlitt as well, largely accepted English's standardization; but they perceived that it had brought about some harmful effects on the naturalness of their mother tongue. Although standardized English proved highly instrumental in attaining the nationalist ideal, there was a sense among writers that language had somehow deteriorated. They were especially concerned about a mode of standardization that tended to put increasing distance between poetic diction and conversational language. Adhering rigidly to the rules of propriety and grammatical correctness, literary English was perceived, to use Adamson's phrase, as "Standard English in evening dress" (599). In other words, literary language was thought of as a highly polished and refined form of standard language, perfectly purified from regional dialects and colloquialisms. Seen from the viewpoint of Romantic authors, many of the stylistic guidelines about a refined literary language were despotic and capricious, along the lines of arbitrary political power. To elaborate further, those arbitrary regulations not only excluded from the literary realm writers who could not (or willfully did not) bring their works up to the standards of respectable style. The regulations also gave little consideration to the actual, common practice of language, hence making the English language less responsive to genuine human feeling. As was indicated in my introduction, it is true that prescriptivists worked towards the goal of achieving national unification through codified English. On the other hand, however, their intense prescriptions in literary, polite usage widened the gap between a formal language and colloquial speech, and by implication, marginalized less formally educated people. The standardizers' endeavors to refine the model of literariness exhibited a tendency to reinforce class divisions.

Though disturbed by these class implications of standardized English, most of the Romantic writers were reluctant to go to lengths to adopt markedly non-standard vocabulary. The late eighteenth-century exploration of archaic English did not much interest them—of course, except that Coleridge purposefully used archaic spelling in "The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere," which he contributed to the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads*. Such eighteenth-century poets as Thomas Chatterton, Thomas Percy, and James Macpherson experimented with pseudo-archaic English in an attempt to revive in their works the primitive beauty and vitality of older languages—languages that were supposed to be "more spontaneous and 'natural' than modern tongues" as Nicholas Hudson puts it in his overview of eighteenth-century theories of language (345). Unlike these experimental writers who located natural forms of English in the age before linguistic codification, Romantic ones tried to achieve the naturalness of English in their use of contemporary language, largely within the boundaries of the standard language variety.[5] They, notably Wordsworth and Coleridge, aimed to acquire a literary status that set them apart from the standardizers in their pursuit of "natural" poetic language as opposed to "arbitrary" language.

Yet it should be noted that the Romantics' use of "arbitrary" as a derogatory term in their linguistic discussions was somewhat misguided. To reiterate my point: In applying the label "arbitrary" to neoclassical idioms and rules of refined usage against which they revolted, they exploited the political meanings of "arbitrary" as clarified in the *Treatise,* and thereby drew analogies between the literary model of neoclassicists and the arbitrary power of the monarchy. Just as a despotic ruler falsely claims to represent his people, the prescriptive grammarians imposed the norms of polite language represented by neoclassical writers to be followed by all prospective ones. Moreover, this political-oriented view of the arbitrary informed their reading of Locke's linguistic theory formulated in the *Essay*. As indicated by William Keach in a book titled *Arbitrary Power: Romanticism, Language, Politics* (2004)[6], however, Locke tried to assign "a neutral philosophical meaning" to the term "arbitrary" in his linguistic discourse; in other words, he framed it as a technical term describing the relation of signification between "articulate sounds" and "ideas"—a term free from value judgments (5). Nevertheless, this linguistic conception of "arbitrary" became "confusingly vulnerable" to the pejorative connotations attached to the arbitrary in his political discourse (5). Keach does not trace the origin of this technical sense of "arbitrary." Through my research into seventeenth-century linguistic thought, however, I have reached the conclusion that Locke inherited the word with its neutral meaning from seventeenth-century projectors of artificial languages: to give the names of major figures, Francis Bacon, Thomas Hobbes, Bishop John Wilkins.

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[5] In an article about English's standardization which he contributed to *The Cambridge Companion to British Romantic Poetry* (2008), Elfenbein remarks: "On the whole, a distinguishing mark of Romantic English is its counter-rebellion against an earlier, late eighteenth-century search for pseudo-archaic alternatives to standardized English" (85). I have reservations regarding the word "counter-rebellion." Though far less interested in inventing an archaic style of English than their predecessors, Romantic writers shared with them an abiding passion for "natural" poetry in response to language standardization.

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[6] This work bears special relevance to my present study in that it delineates the varied responses of the early nineteenth-century writers to the doctrine of arbitrariness that had largely dominated language debates since Locke. The great value of Keach's study lies in its remarkably extensive research into the far-reaching implications that the whole controversy over the arbitrary had for both linguistic and political theories, as well as into the ways in which that controversy contributed to the shaping of each major writer's poetic theory and style of language, especially those of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley.

The Artificial Language Movement in the Seventeenth Century

What these language planners stressed by "arbitrary" was the name-giver's own will. Rhodri Lewis illustrates this point in his recent work *Language, Mind and Nature: Artificial Languages in England from Bacon to Locke* (2007). In compliance with Bacon's natural philosophy, according to Lewis, the language planners proposed the creation of artificial (or universal) languages on the basis of their revisionist exegesis of Adam's act of naming narrated in Genesis 2:19: "[W]hatsoever Adam called every living creature, that *was* the name thereof" (King James Version). The Renaissance humanists believed that Adam called each creature by a name encapsulating its real essence by virtue of his God-given understanding of the external world. They also hoped that this natural, prelapsarian language—whose words bore divinely ordained relationships to the things they designated—could be somehow re-created in their time, albeit in part, thus helping them "recapture the condition of epistemological purity" that existed before the confusion of languages at Babel (Lewis 111). "It is clear," affirms Lewis, "that reverence for the Adamic condition was a staple of English (and Protestant) philosophical and theological thought throughout the early modern period" (117). This "linguistic essentialism" as Lewis terms it, however, provoked an attack from Bacon and his disciples, including Locke, who subscribed to the mechanistic logic of *natural philosophy* (16).[7] This interest in natural philosophy, or *new science*[8], had taken shape in the wake of what became known as "scientific revolution," and encouraged the establishment of the Royal Society in 1660. Deeply critical of the mystical tradition of linguistic theory[9], Bacon claimed that Adam gave names to things "*ad placitum*" (meaning "according to pleasure, or convention"), not according to "an innate knowledge of nature" imparted to him by God at his creation (Lewis 13, 114). Bacon was, it should be noted, in agreement with mystical theorists of language that the Adamic speech was perfect. But this linguistic perfection of the original language, he contended, was achieved by "Adam's skill as the consummate natural philosopher" and not by his mystical, deific knowledge that defies scientific explanation (Lewis 17). Bacon thus laid the foundations for a revisionist exegetical interpretation of the biblical account quoted above. Aligning himself with Bacon's exegesis (which seemed heretical to those in support of essentialist doctrines of language), Hobbes afterwards argued that the act of naming described in Genesis was carried out *arbitrarily* according to the decision (*arbitrium* in Latin) of Adam, the name giver (Lewis 136). Consequently, it became generally agreed among the

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[7] Charles Taylor in his essay "Language and Human Nature" (1985) interprets the history of linguistic theories in terms of an antithesis between an "expressive" view and a "designative" view, two oppositional approaches to the question, "What is meaning?" (221). Expressive theories hold that language originated with God, the first expressivist himself, and thus perceive a series of natural analogies between language and the world. This idea of expressivism dominated the ontologies of the Middle Ages and the early Renaissance, but it came to meet the enormous challenges posed by the seventeenth-century scientific revolution. Such leading thinkers as Descartes, Bacon, and Hobbes advanced a designative theory of meaning called nominalism, which thoroughly repudiated the expressive conception by taking words to be

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"acquiring meaning only in being used as names for things" (224). For the practitioners of the new science, language was "an instrument of *control* in the assemblage of ideas" (226).

[8] In *The New Philosophy and Universal Languages in Seventeenth-Century England: Bacon, Hobbes, and Wilkins* (1995), Robert E. Stillman consistently uses "natural philosophy" in preference to "new science," the former—according to him—evoking "fewer misleading associations" than the latter (13). Stillman's study shares many concerns with Lewis's in that they both conduct rigorous research into the artificial (and philosophical) language schemes propounded by seventeenth-century theoreticians like Bacon, Hobbes and Wilkins. Moreover, both writers attempt to elucidate how those language planners' proposals for artificial languages grew out of their commitment to natural philosophy. While Lewis lays far greater emphasis on Wilkins and extends his discussion to include Locke, Stillman lays equal emphasis on each of the three philosophers with special attention to a close association of their activities with sovereign authorities. For instance, Hobbes, deeply concerned with authenticating a sovereign power, attempted to develop a new political philosophy "on the foundations of a universal linguistic order" (16).

[9] Jacob Böhme (1575-1624), a German theologian, was especially influential in fostering the beliefs about the divine origin of language. Enthusiastically embracing linguistic essentialism, he asserted that the *Ur*-language spoken by Adam directly revealed the divine essences of things. Stillman points out that "Böhme's reverence for the epistemic accomplishments of the *Ur*-speaker is typical of the time" (30). This "motivated" theory of language as Stillman calls it was also based on Plato's dialogue *Cratylus*, which argues that *natural*—not *conventional*—bonds exist between words and things (41).

language planners that, as Lewis sums up, “the words themselves were of Adam’s own invention, and were imposed according to his will”—that is, completely arbitrarily (228).

The artificial language movement in the seventeenth century aimed to devise a *universal* language that would repair the curse of Babel, i.e. an arbitrary symbol system that would make good sense to speakers of different languages. Though uninterested in reconstituting the Adamic tongue *per se*, the language planners sought in their language schemes to restore the perfect harmony between “language, mind and nature” (Lewis’s book title) which they believed to have been achieved in Adam’s own artificial language. The universal language they attempted to construct was meant to serve a *philosophical* purpose: that is, to illustrate clearly how the mind reacts to the natural world, and thus to remedy the defects of existing languages. To put this in the the words of Lewis and Stillman, the language planning movement emerged out of concern for linguistic shortcomings that stemmed from “ill-defined and inconsistent” terms (Lewis 135)—or, concern for a “crisis of representation” caused by the widening gap between words and things in the period (Stillman15). In order for a philosophical language to bridge this gap by means of its accurate, transparent signification, the language planners sought to invent visual symbols that would be universally understood. As Murray Cohen observes in *Sensible Words: Linguistic Practices in England, 1640-1785* (1977), they designed for their artificial languages visualizing devices such as “tables, lists, illustrations, shorthand [and] sign-language systems” (13). For them, as Stillman also comments, “[w]hat is not translatable into tables and axiomatic terms . . . no longer belong[ed] to the domain of learning” (100). Cave Beck, for example, proposed in *The Universal Character* (1657) a universal language that depended on a numerical system for a visual representation of the world. In the case of George Dalgarno, who constructed the first full-fledged artificial language in his *Ars Signorum* (*The Art of Signs*, 1661), what formed the basis of his scheme for a universal character was his interest in improving a shorthand system. He is also known to have devised sign-language alphabets for deaf people in 1680. Wilkins, too, introduced a sign-language system in *Essay towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language* (1668)—an invention that, as modern commentators concur, best exemplifies the ambitious projects in the Restoration period to construct a logically perfect language incorporating natural philosophical principles. In Lewis's view, Wilkins's *Essay* was "the fullest attempt to realize the Baconian vision" of a rational artificial language designed to "map the order of things, and of thought" (225, 2).

In summary, the seventeenth-century language projector assumed, to use Stillman's term, the posture of an "Adamic restorer" in an effort to heal the breach between *res et verba* (44). The projector's rejection of contemporary theories of natural language, however, led him to pursue this aim through arbitrary symbols of his own invention in the genuine belief that Adam—a natural philosopher of remarkable analytical skills—established *arbitrarily* a one-to-one correspondence between words and things. As Stillman has pointedly remarked, the language planner set himself a goal of creating "an artificial order of signs that mirrors logically and transparently the order of the world—an artificial order whose legitimacy depends upon the accuracy of his own reasoning" (45). For the projector of an artificial language, the arbitrariness of its signs was seen as indicative of his powers of logical and scientific reasoning—reasoning behind his project to accurately represent the order of things.

The Arbitrariness of Linguistic Signs in Locke's Theory of Language

What informed Locke's exposition of arbitrary signification, my research demonstrates, was this seventeenth-century notion of arbitrariness, which pointed to the name-giver's individual will, and which was therefore devoid of the negative senses added to it in later day. In accordance with a revisionist exegesis of the Genesis story, he posits that Adam arbitrarily imposed the first names. As Roy Harris and Talbot J. Taylor write in their *Landmarks in Linguistic Thought* (1989), the assumption underlying his speculation over Adam's name-giving was that "Adam did not have any special knowledge to guide him in giving names, but relied simply on his human sense perceptions (in the case of concrete objects) or on his own ideas (in the case of abstractions) (38). This speculation appears in Chapter 6, Book III of the *Essay*, where Locke pictures Adam deciding on words for gold (*zahab*), a material object, and for jealousy (*kinneah*) and adultery (*niouph*), abstract ideas. The following passage from the chapter describes the scene in which Adam gives the name *zahab* to a piece of gold:

> One of *Adam*'s Children, roving in the Mountains, lights on a glittering Substance, which pleases his *Eye*; Home he carries it to *Adam*, who, upon consideration of it, find it to be hard, to have a bright yellow Colour, and an exceeding great Weight. These, perhaps at first, are all the Qualities, he takes notice of in it; and abstracting this complex *Idea*, consisting of a Substance having that peculiar bright Yellowness, and a Weight very great in proportion to its Bulk, he gives the Name Z*ahab*, to denominate and mark all Substances, that have these sensible Qualities in them. (Section 46, 468)

Here Locke highlights Adam's intellectual capability to form a "complex *Idea*" about a given object based on his careful examination of its "sensible Qualities." In agreement with the theorists of a universal philosophical language, Locke refutes the innatist view of the Adamic language that Adam was already in full possession of all his faculties for inventing names at his creation. As Hans Aarsleff has remarked in his important book *From Locke to Saussure* (1982)[10], Locke lays great stress on "Adam's ordinary humanity in regard to language" (26). Yet the above passage also indicates where he parted company with his predecessors. In this exegetical account, the name *zahab* is conceived of as a vocal sign not of a lump of gold itself but of the "complex *Idea*" that Adam develops through his observation of that material—an idea that becomes increasingly "complex" as Adam expands his knowledge of gold. As noted in Section 47, Adam's "inquisitive Mind" leads him not simply to observe such "superficial Qualities" of the yellow metal as listed above but also to examine further the ingredients of its "peculiar Essence": e.g. "Ductility," "Fusibility" and "Fixedness," essential qualities of gold to be added to his idea signified by the word *zahab* (469).

Contrary to his predecessors, therefore, Locke was not in the least interested in reducing the already existing gap between *res et verba*. He actually did the opposite: words are only indirectly yoked to things in his system. In Chapter 2, Book III of the *Essay* (which is the most frequently quoted chapter for it puts forward a number of central propositions about the nature of language), he affirms:

> *Words in their primary or immediate Signification, stand for nothing, but* the Ideas *in the Mind of him that uses them*, how imperfectly soever, or carelessly those *Ideas* are collected from the Things, which they are supposed to represent. (405).

In this reasoning, the relation between words and ideas takes priority over that between words and things. For Locke, as Keach states, "words stand primarily for ideas and only secondarily for things" ("Romanticism and Language" 99). In fact, Locke's attention has shifted to the matters of language during the course of his epistemological study in Book II—a shift he did not originally intend—as he finds a close relationship between words and ideas. Having become aware that his epistemology and a discussion of language are inextricably tied together, he concludes the second book by saying, "[O]ur abstract *Ideas*, and general Words, have so constant a relation one to another, that it is impossible to speak clearly and distinctly of our Knowledge . . . without considering, first, the Nature, Use, and Signification of Language" (401). This emphasis upon the word-idea dyad, Cohen maintains, suggests that Locke's language study moved "from the taxonomic representation of words and things"—as had been practiced in artificial language planning—"to the establishment of the relationship between speech and thought" (Introduction xxiv). In the chapter where the above-quoted proposition is advanced, Locke points out that "[*Men*] *often suppose their Words to stand also for the reality of Things*"; he then dismisses outright this optimistic supposition as responsible for "perverting the use of Words" and "bring[ing] unavoidable Obscurity and Confusion into their Signification" (407).

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[10] Along with Aarsleff's other book *The Study of Language in England, 1780-1860* (1967), this book is seen to have laid the foundations for the subsequent studies of language.

Human beings take words to stand for the reality of things, contends Locke, owing to their erroneous assumptions of a "*double Conformity*" (386).[11] We bring our ideas into conformity with the things from which they derive, as well as with the words used to signify those ideas. To put it differently, we make a habit of establishing correspondences between idea and thing and between word and idea. This double conformity of ideas, supposedly a defining characteristic of the Adamic language, becomes a prime target for Locke. As stated in the above quotation from the second chapter, ideas often represent objects in the world "imperfectly" (even with as much analytical rigor as Adam demonstrated in examining a piece of gold) or, to make matters worse, "carelessly." And when it comes to the word-idea connection, in which Locke takes a closer interest, a tendency to ensure the conformity between them in turn leads to a mistaken assumption that "*Words* [are] *Marks of the* Ideas *in the Minds also of other Men, with whom they communicate*" (406). That is, it is often the case that our ideas do not coincide with the ideas that others have. Locke underlines this point again, saying, "[*Words*] often fail to excite in others (even that use the same Language) the same *Ideas*" (408). As he recurrently asserts throughout chapter two, words *primarily* or *immediately* signify ideas in the mind of the speaker—ideas that are "all within his own Breast, invisible, and hidden from others" (405).[12] In his semantic theory, ideas occur in complete subjectivity, with the result that the act of conveying one's ideas to others is likely to fail more often than not.

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[11] Locke insists in Chapter 32 of Book III: "Men are so forward to suppose, that the abstract *Ideas* they have in their Minds, are such, as agree to the Things existing without them, to which they are referr'd; and are the same also, to which the Names they give them, do by the Use and Propriety of that Language belong. For without this *double Conformity of* their *Ideas*, they find, they should both think amiss of Things in themselves, and talk of them unintelligibly to others" (386).

Besides, Locke postulates the signifying relation of words to ideas to be entirely arbitrary. A word is tied "arbitrarily" to the idea it stands for, he insists in the early part of chapter two, "not by any natural connexion . . . but by a voluntary Imposition" of the speaker (405). It is worthy of note here that, as Keach emphasizes, this arbitrary process of signification ("voluntary Imposition" in Locke's phrase) in its original context had nothing to do with collective acts, although his disciples often saw it as being involved in "convention," "compact," or "custom" (*Arbitrary Power* 5). What catches my further attention in the above proposition is the word "voluntary," which appears almost synonymous with "arbitrary." This synonymity is made fully explicit in Locke's similar statement that "[*Words*] *signify* only Men's peculiar *Ideas* . . . *by a perfectly arbitrary Imposition*" (408). This replacing of "voluntary" with "arbitrary" as a descriptive term for "imposition" points to a deep congruity between the two concepts in his mind. To restate what I pointed out earlier, "arbitrary" in Locke's linguistic discourse was meant to be perceived (as had been by seventeenth-century language planners) as a philosophical term referring to the individual's voluntary act of building links between words and ideas. Elsewhere in the chapter, too, words are defined as "voluntary Signs," the meaning of each word being determined by the individual speaker's choice (405). Towards the end of the chapter, Locke places stronger emphasis on each man's freedom to impose, voluntarily, "external sensible Signs" on his "invisible *Ideas*" (405):

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[12] Therefore, Locke's theory of signification leaves him vulnerable to "the charge of semantic idealism" as Land highlights, a charge that Locke confined language to the verbal exchange of our own ideas, since the use of a word presupposes the presence of its signifying idea in the speaker's mind (12). Norman Kretzmann springs to Locke's defense, stressing the need for a proper understanding of the phrase "primarily or immediately." The proposition in Chapter 2 quoted earlier, the main thesis of Lockean semantic study in Kretzmann's reading, can be by no means taken to simply say that "words signify *nothing but* the user's ideas" (182). In his in-depth analysis of the thesis, Kretzmann differentiates between *immediate* and *mediate* signification, and argues that Locke acknowledged a likely possibility that names refer *mediately* (or *secondarily*) to the things ("originals") represented by ideas (187-88). In this way, Kretzmann attempts to dismiss the charge that Locke lapsed into semantic idealism; and Land considers Kretzmann's strategy to "exonerate" Locke successful (12). But Losonsky treats Kretzmann's interpretation with a degree of skepticism, although he also admits that Locke cannot be charged with claiming that "all names refer *only* to ideas" (310).

> [E]very Man has so inviolable a Liberty to make Words stand for what *Ideas* he pleases, that no one hath the Power to make others have the same *Ideas* in their Minds, that he has, when they use the same Words, that he does. (408)

Interestingly, this account of the speaker's "inviolable" liberty to create the "arbitrary" word-idea dyads as he or she pleases—which are thus unobservable to other people—parallels the aforementioned account of "the law of nature" given in the *Second Treatise of Government*, a law that allows people "inviolable" liberty to defend their right to life and property against the injuries arising from the "arbitrary" political power of a ruler.

Given this similarity, it seems possible to argue that Locke regarded the voluntary (and arbitrary) act of assigning a name to a given idea as an exercise of one's natural right. For him, the meaning of words belongs to the private property of the one who utters them; and this suggests that his study of language bears the imprint of his political theory.

For this reason, I interpret the passage above as an illustration of how Locke himself (not his followers) weaved together, probably unwittingly, his political and linguistic accounts of the arbitrary. He is therefore responsible, at least in part, for the ensuing confusion between those two discourses, a confusion that continued up to the Romantic era. Many commentators of Locke have indicated that he deemed privacy, or subjectivity, to be the fundamental aspect of language. According to Aarsleff, "the impenetrable subjectivity of ideas," a central premise of Locke's semantics, makes each speaker's language "radically private" (27). And Stephen K. Land claims in *From Signs to Propositions* (1974) that the "most striking originality" of Locke's thought on language lies in his notion of meaning as "a private mental act" (10). In addition, David Rosen sees Locke's epistemology (which is inseparable from his linguistic propositions) as "solipsistic" to a large extent, because it assumes "each person [to be] locked in his or her own world" (21). Keach, and Harris and Taylor as well, make the same observations, too (See "Romanticism and Language" 99; 113-14). What I am adding to this discussion is that Locke's idea of *private language* has a close association with his political discourse, particularly with his concept of the property rights of an individual.

Having developed this understanding of human speech as a form of private property, Locke explores the possibilities of rendering language a reliable means of communication between individuals. For him, words turn out to be inadequate tools for sharing and advancing knowledge because of their privacy. In Chapter 9 of Book III, he states that “the very nature of Words”—their arbitrary referential ties to subjective experience—“makes it almost unavoidable, for many of them to be doubtful and uncertain in their significations” (476). Besides these imperfections that are inherent in the nature of language, what makes things worse in verbal communication is “wilful *Faults and Neglects*, which Men are guilty of . . . whereby they render these signs less clear and distinct” (490). As Michael Losonsky has noted, Locke had a “pessimistic” outlook on “the human capacity to communicate” (296). In spite of this skepticism about our ability to express ourselves in words, however, Locke takes them to be the sole vehicle for “the recording of our own Thoughts” as well as for “the communicating of our Thoughts to others” (476). And according to him, the fulfillment of this dual function of language depends upon making words “excite in the Hearer, the same *Idea* which it stands for in the Mind of the Speaker”—put differently, upon ensuring that the speaker’s and the hearer’s definition of a given word are identical (476-77). Two sections later, he repeats this assertion almost verbatim:

> To make Words serviceable to the end of Communication, it is necessary, (as has been said) that they excite, in the Hearer, exactly the same *Idea*, they stand for in the Mind of the Speaker. Without this, Men fill one another’s Heads with noise and sounds; but convey not thereby their Thoughts, and lay not before one another their *Ideas*, which is the end of Discourse and Language. (478)

In order for a vocal sign to obtain a meaningful use in conversational practice, we need to make certain that our hearers demonstrate the same idea as we do by that sign. The remedies that Locke suggests for the failings of language attributable to its arbitrary signifying processes—processes that are intelligible only to the speaker and thus a "hindrance of Knowledge amongst Mankind"—lie in having clearly and precisely defined terms (510).

In Locke's view, a high degree of precision in proposing definition is specifically required when it comes to complex ideas such as "sacrilege" and "adultery" (his own examples in Chapter 5), ideas of "mixed Modes" that are vital to philosophical and scientific discourse. This is because using the names of mixed modes without being certain about the ideas they signify poses a serious obstacle to the pursuit of knowledge and truth. In Locke's words, the philosophical uses of mixed modes must avoid "Obscurity, Doubtfulness, or Equivocation, to which Men's Words are naturally liable" (III.xi.509). He speculates that the liability of the names of modes to suffer from these abuses is consequent on the arbitrary processes involved in the making of those names. Compared to the names of "Substances" such as "gold" that presuppose the existence of "some real Being," and that, as such, are easy to achieve a common understanding, those of mixed modes are "made *very arbitrarily*, made without Patterns, or reference to any real Existence" (III.v.429). Locke reinforces this point in the subsequent section, stating that the complex ideas of mixed modes are formed by "a voluntary Collection of *Ideas* put together in the Mind"—a statement that, once again, shows a strong association between a voluntary (and arbitrary) aspect of language and individual privacy in his linguistic scheme (430). Owing to this voluntary, privative nature, "one Man's complex *Idea* [of mixed modes] seldom agrees with anothers, and often differs from his own, from that which he had yesterday, or will have to morrow" (III.ix.478)

Locke's conception of mixed modes as voluntary creations, and hence the importance of determining their meaning exactly, are more emphatically stated in

Chapter 11, the final chapter of Book III, titled "Of the Remedies of the foregoing Imperfections and Abuses." In Section 15 of this chapter, he stresses twice the voluntariness of mixed modes: they, especially moral terms such as "justice," are "Combinations of *Ideas*" that "the Mind puts together of its own choice" and that "the Mind of Man has arbitrarily put together" (516). And shortly afterwards, it is once again argued that "the Mind alone . . . collects them [the several simple *Ideas*], and gives them the Union of one *Idea*" (518). This privacy of the ideas of mixed modes makes it necessary for them to be "perfectly and exactly *defined*," to such an extent that "*Morality is capable of demonstration*, as well as Mathematicks" (516). Locke goes on to place great emphasis on definition, writing that: "*Definition is the only way, whereby the precise Meaning of moral Words can be known*; yet a way, whereby their Meaning may be known *certainly*, and without leaving any room for any contest about it" (517). The task of providing a precise definition for each name of mixed modes—a task that by its very nature is *prescriptive*—helps preclude in philosophical discourse "an ill use of Words" and "the fallacious and illusory use of *obscure* or *deceitful Terms*"; and on account of this prescriptive practice, language may operate as "the great Conduit, whereby Men convey their Discoveries, Reasonings, and Knowledge, from one to another" (510). Lockean linguistics holds that with every speaker in possession of the same copy of a single dictionary, language as the "common Tye of Society" is capable of drawing all people together as is declared at the beginning of the third book (402).

Johnson and Romantic Writers:

Responding to the Linguistic Notion of Arbitrariness

Given that Locke saw definition as a matter of grave importance in making language a vehicle for one’s thoughts, it appears reasonable to infer a causal link between his notion of definition and eighteenth-century prescriptive lexicography. In actual fact, while giving prominence to the role of definition in language reform, Locke himself was deeply skeptical about producing a dictionary that is such as to remedy the imperfection of words. Towards the end of Chapter 11, he remarks that compiling a dictionary of this sort “requires too many hands, as well as too much time, cost, pains, and sagacity, ever to be hoped for” (522). For him, a dictionary assigning all words to “determined and uniform *Ideas*” is in all likelihood an impossibility (509). We might infer, however, that Locke’s description of writing a comprehensive dictionary as hopelessly impractical actually helped bring about the opposite effect: the publishing of many English dictionaries over the course of the eighteenth century. That is to say, the insistence by Locke that the meanings of words be clarified and determined for philosophical purposes—but on the other hand, his own doubts as to whether such a huge project could ever be undertaken—generated the necessary motivation in later lexicographers to ascertain and fix the language in their dictionaries. This point has also been made by linguistic scholars. According to Harris and Taylor, Locke’s understanding of definition paved the way, at least to some degree, for the flourishing of linguistic prescriptivism (117). Hudson, too, makes the same point: “Locke’s warnings against the ‘imperfections’ and ‘abuse’ of words helped to inspire a great age of linguistic consolidation, as grammarians and lexicographers sought to make the spelling and construction of their languages more consistent and logical" (347). In this regard, the prescriptive practice of lexicography is justified on the grounds of Locke's emphasis on definition as crucial to the successful communication of thoughts. And furthermore, English's standardization in general offers itself as an affirmative response to Locke's reflections on the privacy of linguistic meaning. The prescriptivists agreed to rectify the defects of language that are due to its privative (and therefore arbitrary) qualities; they thought that these defects put up barriers to both the spread of knowledge and the attainment of the nationalist ideal.

Now that we have examined the link between Locke's linguistic notions and the rise of prescriptivism, it is inevitable to consider Locke's influence on Johnson, who is conventionally viewed as an iconic figure of prescriptivism. Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) was the most influential lexicographic work ever published before the completion of the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 1928. In my view, the *Dictionary*, as it were, was the realization of what Locke thought would be practically impossible—an extremely demanding task that requires "too much time, cost, pains, and sagacity." Moreover, it was written almost single-handedly, not by "many hands" as Locke supposed. As Elizabeth Hedrick indicates in her study of the *Dictionary*, Locke's notions of language were by far the biggest influence on Johnson's work, providing it with "the source of illustrations and the content of definitions" (423). I would cite as clear evidence of this influence the following remark from the Preface to the *Dictionary*: "Language is only the instrument of science, and words are but the signs of ideas" (24).[13] Johnson here explicitly restates Lockean principles outlined in the *Essay*. Not only does Johnson accept Locke's basic assumptions about language, he embarks on a Lockean project as well—a massive lexicographic project designed, to quote from the *Essay*, in the hope of "ascertaining the signification of Words" (III.xi.515). Johnson's heroic efforts are aimed at responding to the philosopher's call for the use of words with "clear and steady meaning," that is, the clarification of the ideas attached to words (510). As Johnson declares in the *Plan* (1747), a proposal he drafted prior to starting his dictionary project, "The chief intent of [the *Dictionary*] is to preserve the purity, and ascertain the meaning of our English idiom" (4). Once again, when the lexicographer affirms the importance of "stabili[zing]" pronunciation for the sake of the long "duration of a language," his Lockean attitude to language, which is prescriptive, is clearly displayed: "one great end of this undertaking is to fix the English language" (8).

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[13] All quotations from Johnson's Preface and the *Plan* refer to *A Dictionary of the English Language: An Anthology*, ed. David Crystal (New York: Penguin, 2006).

Furthermore, these Lockean aspirations towards fixing the language are coupled with imperial ones, as is illustrated in a famous passage from the *Plan*:

> [L]ike the soldiers of Caesar, [I] look on Britain as a new world, which it is almost madness to invade. But I hope, that though I should not complete the conquest, I shall, at least, discover the coast, civilize part of the inhabitants, and make it easy for some other adventurer to proceed further, to reduce them wholly to subjection, and settle them under laws. (19)

Johnson here envisions himself gazing intently at Britain as a Roman conqueror. As Adam R. Beach remarks upon this metaphor in his survey of English's standardization, Johnson imagines Britain to be inhabited by "linguistic savages," speakers of "primitive languages" that are subject to "fluctuation and change" (124-25). As the British Empire expanded overseas as the result of the Seven Years War (1756-63), English had become a pedagogical tool for promoting "an 'internal' cultural imperialism" and acquired privileged status as "the third 'classical' tongue [next to Greek and Latin], essentially a standard and permanent language that could withstand change across vast expanses of time and space" (Beach 118). In the above-quoted passage, Johnson regards a national standard language as the best effective means of educating, or "civiliz[ing]," linguistic savages residing in both Britain and its colonies. The standardization project will "settle" those savages "under laws"—laws regulating the process of signification and thereby ensuring consistency in the use of words.

Nevertheless, Johnson's lexicographic enterprise does not really fulfill Locke's desire to fix meaning—a desire that, to use Hedrick's words, definitions should be "single, clear" and also "remain fixed" (430). As with other prescriptive projects of the period, Johnson's ambition to ascertain English usage comes from his reading of Locke, albeit not entirely. Yet he departs from Locke's ideas about words when faced with handling different senses. In the next to last paragraph of Book III, Locke contends:

> [I]n all Discourses, wherein one Man pretends to instruct or convince another, he should *use the same Word constantly in the same sense*: If this were done . . . many of the Books extant might be spared; many of the Controversies in Dispute would be at an end; . . . and many of the Philosophers (to mention no other,) as well as Poets Works, might be contained in a Nut-shell. (523)

Despite this warning by Locke against using the same word in different ways, Johnson puts a good deal of care and attention into identifying accurately multiple meanings. According to Jack Lynch, the author of *The Lexicographer's Dilemma* (2010), this "minute discrimination of senses" is the greatest contribution Johnson made to lexicography (80). For example, as Lynch notes, his entry for the word "take" consists of 133 subtly different senses, each one carefully defined and illustrated by quotations from the literary canon (80). Hedrick also comments that Johnson's scrupulous attention to multiple meanings clearly distinguishes his definitional method from those of earlier lexicographers (433). Many of Johnson's definitions provide what Locke would have called “a very undetermined loose signification,” the likely cause of “a great deal of Obscurity and Confusion in [Men’s] own Minds” (513). As announced in the *Plan*, Johnson set to work on the *Dictionary* in the expectation of “fix[ing] the English language.” After devoting nine years to writing 40,000 dictionary entries, which contain approximately 114,000 illustrative quotations taken from the great authors of English literature, however, he confesses in the Preface to having “indulged expectation which neither reason nor experience justify” (38).[14] As Hedrick puts it, he became “less optimistic than Locke about the possibility of fixing meaning” (424). A lexicographer’s hopes for “embalm[ing] his language, and secur[ing] it from corruption and decay,” Johnson goes on to affirm, are to be greeted with derision (38).

In sum, Locke’s notion that definitions are key to preventing the abuse of words was the driving force behind eighteenth-century lexicographic projects, especially Johnson’s. The prescriptive policies he sets forth in the proposal for the *Dictionary* are designed to accommodate Locke’s request that words be “perfectly and exactly *defined*” (516). But I would like to indicate that the way Johnson treats multiple significations renders his lexicographical production substantially different from what Locke would have anticipated. The *Dictionary* does not conform to Locke’s expectations of single, clear definitions. “By the time [Johnson] had finished his *Dictionary*,” observes Lynch, “he became a less prescriptive and more descriptive lexicographer, concerned less with declaring laws than with describing the language as it is” (83).[15] Thus, given Locke’s influence on eighteenth-century prescriptivism, one might argue that Johnson’s attitude to language became less Lockean during the course of his project. While this is certainly true in light of the fact that Johnson had come to see efforts to fix the language as futile, it can be also argued that he became preoccupied with multiple meanings in the process of defining words with greater precision than had been demanded by Locke. To put it differently, Johnson concentrated on the exactness of his definition to the neglect of Locke’s other demand, quoted above, that we should “use the same Word constantly in the same sense.” In Johnson’s view, the constancy of this sort is incompatible with definitional precision.

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[14] For this reason, Johnson rejects outright a proposal for the English Academy (such as Swift’s) on the grounds that the academy’s attempt to fix the language is likely to pose a serious threat to “the spirit of English liberty” (Preface 40). Contemptuously calling Swift’s *Proposal* a “petty treatise on the English language,” Johnson refutes his assertion that none of the words whose meanings have been fixed by the academy will “be suffered to become obsolete” (though Swift does not say this explicitly): “But what makes a word obsolete, more than *general agreement* to forbear it?” (emphasis added, 39). This belief in “general agreement” as the best guide to correct usage makes Johnson attack not only the idea of founding a language academy in Britain but also those of other countries that have been instituted with the purpose of “guard[ing] the avenues of their languages” (38). The “vigilance and activity” of those existing academies proved to be “vain”; and their determined efforts to “enchain syllables,” just like the ones to “lash the wind,” were merely “the undertakings of pride” (38). By way of illustration, he indicates that the French language has undergone a visible change even with the supervision of the Académie Française, which seemed a model academy to early language reformers (38). The French Academy failed in its initial objective of preventing such a drastic change.

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[15] Although Lynch observes correctly, I will associate Johnson, largely for the sake of argument, with the prescriptive tradition throughout this dissertation. Yet it should be noted that in recent years, Johnson scholars such as Lynch have shown a tendency to question his prescriptivism, and have argued against portraying him as a stubborn prescriptivist. They stress that Johnson had come to reconsider his prescriptive approach while compiling the *Dictionary*. In the Preface, he presents himself as a lexicographer “who do[es] not form, but register[s] the language; who do[es] not teach men how they should think, but relate[s] how they have hitherto expressed their thoughts” (36). It thus seems unreasonable, as Anne McDermott comments, to view Johnson “as one driven by a prescriptive program” (121). He fully recognizes the paramount importance of common usage in making any decisions about language, as is proved in the following pronouncement from the Preface: “I have been often obliged to sacrifice uniformity to custom; thus I write, in compliance with a numberless majority” (23). By the time he came to prepare his finished work for publication along with a preface, Johnson found it simply impossible to fix the language.

The two essays respectively written by Geoff Barnbrook and McDermott, included in *Anniversary Essays on Johnson’s* Dictionary (2005), are illuminating in that the authors are arguing over whether Johnson is really a prescriptivist or not. Whereas Barnbrook “prosecutes” Johnson—to borrow a word from his essay title—for the adverse effects of prescriptivism, McDermott defends Johnson against such accusations of prescriptivism. From my perspective, however, the traditional distinction of prescription versus description is no longer workable in explaining satisfactorily Johnsonian lexicography. The very fact that Barnbrook and McDermott offer opposing explanations as to Johnson’s position on language points to the inadequacy of the dichotomy on which their reasoning is based. As far as Johnson is concerned, the basic criterion according to which their linguistic views seem conflicting is untenable. Johnson’s work resists being clarified by either of the two opposing views, prescriptive and descriptive.

In this regard, the following statement from Chapter 11 merits considerable attention: “The proper signification and use of Terms is best to be learned from those, who in their Writings and Discourses, appear to have had the clearest Notions, and apply’d to them their Terms with the exactest choice and fitness” (514). Johnson most likely found in this assertion ample justification for illustrating each word with quotations from the “Writings and Discourses” by the best authors. What Locke overlooks, however, is that there is no general consensus on “the clearest Notions” that authors intend by their words—that is, on which idea should be considered the *clearest* one among the ideas that a given word is made to signify. In addition, even the best writers do not always use words with “the exactest choice and fitness,” as is evidenced by Johnson’s illustrative quotations. The examples cited by him sometimes fail to illustrate effectively distinct senses of the word, because the writers themselves from whom those quotations are taken used that word confusingly. Locke’s exhortation to “learn” exact definitions from the greatest writers leads Johnson to arrange systematically different significations, each one exactly defined and illustrated, rather than to propose single definitions that can be constantly used in the same way. Interestingly, Johnson’s faithful adherence to Locke’s advice on the method of guaranteeing definitional precision results in what the philosopher had not in mind by the advice, i.e. presenting words as having multiple meanings. As far as precision is concerned, the *Dictionary* represents a greater achievement than Locke envisioned. It is a *radical* embodiment of Locke’s ideal of a precise definition. Consequently, I regard the *Dictionary* as the product of Johnson’s appropriation of Locke, particularly his notion of definition. And as we have seen, Locke emphasized the need for clear definitions as a means for avoiding “Obscurity, Doubtfulness, or Equivocation, to which Men's Words are naturally liable" (509)—the abuse of linguistic signs that he attributed to the inherent arbitrariness of them. To follow this line of reasoning, we might see Johnson's lexicographic work as his reaction to Locke's discourse of the arbitrary in the *Essay*. The *Dictionary* is the most ambitious and concentrated effort to rectify the problems arising from the arbitrary nature of language as it was elucidated by Locke.

In the eyes of Romantic writers, however, Johnson's and other prescriptivists' attempts at stabilizing arbitrary language took on some disturbing aspects, which the writers labeled as *arbitrary* in relation to Locke's condemnation of arbitrary political power. Instead of trying to overcome linguistic arbitrariness by regulating language as prescriptivists did, the writers, I argue, chose to capitalize on the arbitrary quality of the sign in their work. That is to say, they formulated a whole different response from Johnson to Locke's principle of arbitrariness. It is the various versions of this response that will be examined in the following four chapters. While Johnson regarded the arbitrariness of signs as a problem to be rectified by the clarification of the ideas that those signs represent, the writers to be discussed in the subsequent chapters find that the notion of arbitrariness allows them ample scope for individual creativity in the use of language. Johnson and other English experts built their standardization projects on literary precedents set during the previous centuries, thereby making it seem like, to quote Elfenbein again, there was no "pressing need for new literature." Faced with this crisis, the writers saw the possibilities for producing new literature that the conception of arbitrariness gave them.[16]

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[16] In his discussion of Shelley's *A Defense of Poetry*, Keach points out that Shelley enthusiastically embraced Locke's doctrine that words arbitrarily signify ideas (See his "Romanticism and

I contend that the Romantics' fresh approach to the arbitrariness of language owes its origins to Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, a French thinker who promulgated Locke's philosophy on the Continent.[17] To briefly introduce Condillac's linguistic ideas that bear on my argument, what distinguishes man from the animals is for him the use of artificial (or institutional) signs which evolved from a *langage d'action*, a natural language of gestures and emotional cries.[18] He follows Locke in understanding arbitrariness as the fundamental characteristic of institutional signs; and moreover, explicitly identifies the arbitrary with a voluntary act—identification that was not made explicit in Locke's text. Artificial signs are arbitrary in Condillac's argument, as Harris and Taylor note, in the

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Language" 114-19). According to Keach, Shelley urges poets to "take advantage of the potential in the arbitrary relation between words and thoughts" (116). And he believes, Keach writes, that "[l]anguage can only be revitalized from within, by making a virtue rather than a vice of the arbitrary signifying processes on which language depends" (117-18). Keach is here making almost the same point as mine concerning the Romantic comprehension of the arbitrary nature of language. So my claim that Romantic writers were intrigued by Locke's linguistic concept of "arbitrary" is, I admit, not genuinely new. I want to emphasize, however, that Shelley's Lockean position on language is beyond question. This is evidenced by his pronouncement that "language is arbitrarily produced by the Imagination and has relation to thoughts alone." This asserting indicates, as Keach also notes, Shelley's wholehearted acceptance of Locke's thesis that words are merely arbitrary signs of ideas. Therefore, Shelley's eager embrace of the arbitrariness of language is not something that has to be argued for; it is a plain fact. For this reason, Keach's remark on Shelley's relationship to Locke is not really a contention. I chose not to discuss Shelley in this dissertation because his subscription to Locke's theory of signification is obvious and thus leaves me little room for further inquiry. The writers whom I chose for discussion are far less explicit about their acceptance of Locke's linguistic propositions, thereby giving me enough room to make my own claims. Whereas Keach offers only passing comments on Shelley's appropriation of Locke's doctrine that language is arbitrary, I investigate closely what aspects of that doctrine would have attracted other Romantic writers. Moreover, I interpret their *return* to Locke in terms of the rise of prescriptivism. I would argue that Shelley was far from unique in embracing Locke's linguistic idea of "arbitrary"; and that Shelley actually inherited from earlier writers a positive approach to the role of arbitrariness.

[17] The renewed interest in Condillac—who has been neglected unjustifiably by modern scholars of linguistics—as (perhaps the most) influential figure in eighteenth-century speculations of language is one of the important contributions of Aarsleff to the field. Condillac's linguistic thought actually dominated language studies of the second half of the eighteenth century. The subtitle of the English translation of his major work *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines* (1746), "A Supplement to Mr. Locke's *Essay*," gives a clear indication that he was securely within Lockean school of philosophy, though with some objections to Locke's principles.

[18] In Condillac's account of the origin of language, the mutual exchange of emotive signs is a prerequisite for the development of human language. For a detailed discussion of his conception of *langage d'action*, see Sophia Rosenfeld's *A Revolution in Language: The Problem of Signs in Late Eighteenth-Century France* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2001), especially Chapter 1.

sense that they are “the voluntary creations of man’s will” and not in the sense that they are randomly chosen “without motivation” (131). With the invention of an artificial language, man gains “voluntary control over the operations and contents of the mind” (Harris and Taylor 124). Consequently, language emerges in Condillac’s work, to borrow Aarsleff’s words, as “man’s greatest and most decisive artificial creation” that forms “the foundation of human knowledge” (286). In my view, Condillac’s attention to the voluntariness of Lockean signification not only returns to the seventeenth-century language planners’ idea of naming as an act of the individual will but also prepares the way for the Romantic embrace of the arbitrariness of language as the source of their motivation for new literature.

In conclusion, I maintain that ironical as it may seem, the Romantic writers most deeply involved with linguistic issues of the period revisited Locke’s concept of private language, in which the arbitrary link between word and idea is individually established. They did so in an attempt to ward off the undesirable effects of linguistic standardization, ones that they habitually denounced as arbitrary in terms of Lockean political philosophy. And as noted above, one of the primary motivations behind language prescription was Locke’s urge for exact definitions, which he deemed crucial in making language a vehicle for the effective communication of ideas. Eighteenth-century linguistic theoreticians paid serious heed to his warnings about the potential dangers of arbitrary private language. To put it another way, the Romantics took an interest in, and added a new dimension to, Locke’s doctrine of linguistic arbitrariness as they reacted to the threat to their literary authority posed by the standardizers of English such as Johnson, who drew encouragement to codify and prescribe the language from Locke's complaint against the misuses of words ascribable to the arbitrary imposition of them on thoughts.

The central argument I will develop throughout the following chapters is that the Romantics' experiments with language marked a *radical* return to the original idea of the arbitrary as it was understood in Lockean linguistic discourse. This return was characterized by the privatizing of language to an intenser degree than in Locke's theory of linguistic meaning, as well as by the active projection of the writer's subjectivity (by whatever name they called it) onto language. This appropriating of the arbitrariness of language—rather than attempting to reduce it by writing authoritative reference books as in the case of Johnson—as a means for coping with the pressures of prescriptivism gave the writers exclusive rights to attach words to ideas and things, the task that lexicographers had been entrusted with. Romantic authors believed that their own arbitrary will—rather than the dictionary entries contributed by lexicographers—should be the determining factor in the relationship between signifier and signified in their work. By extending a range of semantic possibilities that language offers, they hoped to retain their status as meaningful producers of literature.

CHAPTER TWO:

CONNECTING WORDS WITH “THINGS OF CONSIDERABLE CONSEQUENCE”: THE ARBITRARY NATURE OF PRIESTLEY’S UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE

I began the preceding chapter by quoting a passage from Priestley’s *Observations on Style* (1761), a passage indicating that the standardizers have almost brought English to a point of perfection, thus discouraging living writers from making any further improvement to the language. Writers of the latter half of the eighteenth century, Priestly affirms, were left with virtually nothing to contribute to the “perfection” and “permanency” of the language (60). Using this observation as a basis, I argued that writers turned their attention to the principle of linguistic arbitrariness as a means of re-establishing their credentials as creative writers of the English language. This chapter examines how Priestley himself assimilated Locke’s idea of the arbitrariness of signs in terms of his reaction against the linguistic practices of the period. In fact, he was a hugely influential figure in late-eighteenth-century discussions of language.[1] By way of illustration, *The Rudiments of English Grammar* (henceforth *Rudiments*; first published in 1761), his seminal contribution to the teaching of English grammar, profoundly influenced all the succeeding grammarians, including Lindley Murray and Robert Lowth who authored the best-selling textbooks of grammar.

Priestley’s Preface to the *Rudiments*, as we shall see, offers important clues as to his general conception of language, as distinct from that of his contemporary linguists. The Preface also contains several illustrative examples of how Priestley used the word

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[1] Priestley is commonly recognized today for his unique contributions to liberal political theory, education, Unitarian theology, and chemistry. His high reputation as a scientist, in particular, rests on the discovery of oxygen in 1774.

"arbitrary" when dealing with linguistic matters. My study of Priestley, however, focuses more specifically upon his *Course of Lectures on the Theory of Language, and Universal Grammar* (henceforth *Lectures*), which was published one year after the *Rudiments* at Warrington academy, a renowned dissenting academy where he held a teaching position during the years of 1761-67. The importance of the *Lectures* for me is that the theory of a universal language advanced in it demonstrates a deep engagement with the arbitrary quality of the sign. In order to elucidate the nature of this engagement, we should examine not only Priestley's linguistic writings such as the *Rudiments* and the *Lectures*, but also his political writings reflecting the influence of Locke's political thought. Priestley draws an intimate connection between the linguistic idea of the arbitrary and the political idea of the arbitrary; hence, the former cannot be expounded without reference to the latter. I will investigate how linguistic and political meanings of "arbitrary" are interwoven in Priestley's texts; and then prove that his vision of a universal philosophical language, which he claims to be the most natural, is grounded in a desire to seize on the arbitrariness of language. Priestley's own desire for the arbitrary power of language throws into doubt the general view that he assumed a descriptive stance on language. In taking issue with other commentators on Priestley, I will underscore the significance of my own interventions.

Priestley's Conception of the Arbitrary

To begin with, I will explore Priestley's concept of the arbitrary in both his linguistic and political discourses. As is the case with other Romantic writers, his linguistic uses of "arbitrary" are uniformly negative. In the *Lectures* Priestley used the epithet “arbitrary” as a slur on the naturalness of language, in much the same way that Wordsworth and Coleridge were to do forty years later. To give one clear example, he argues in Lecture XII:

> Whenever a language hath emerged from its first rough state of nature, and hath acquired a sufficient *copia* of significant and harmonious terms, arbitrary and whimsical ideas of excellence have been superadded to those which were natural and becoming, till at length the latter have been entirely sacrificed to the former. (193)

The basic assumption underlying this argument is that, as the author postulates at the beginning of the lecture, languages “have a kind of regular growth, improvement, and declension” (191). What drives this “evolutionary” process of language development is[2], according to him, “the necessity of giving names to new objects, new ideas, and new combinations of ideas” (191). Priestley contends in the above passage that “arbitrary and whimsical” combinations of ideas—as opposed to “harmonious” and “natural” ones—bring about language corruption. Here I would like to reiterate the point highlighted in the previous chapter with regard to the Romantics’ notion of “arbitrary.” As shown by the fact that Priestley places “arbitrary” in juxtaposition with “whimsical,” the senses he intends by “arbitrary” in his linguistic discussion are inextricably tied to Locke’s theory of arbitrary political power, a rule that is subject to the whims of the absolute monarch. Moreover, the “arbitrary and whimsical” habits of expression denounced above are paralleled in subsequent paragraphs by “verbal conceits and turns” (as opposed to “true wit and just sentiment”) and “useless rules and refinements”—phrases similar to those used by Wordsworth and Coleridge for attacking the “arbitrary” regulations concerning literary language (194-95).

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[2] Robert E. Schofield writes in his biography of Priestley, *The Enlightenment of Joseph Priestley* (1997): “The *Lectures* systematically portray languages as an evolutionary development from sounds to letters, to combinations of sounds (and letters) into words, to the functional combinations of words into simple and then complex sentences” (104).

The term “arbitrary” in other lectures, too, carries derogatory connotations, as it does for Wordsworth and Coleridge. In Lecture XV, Priestley repeats the assertion made in the above-quoted passage: “[M]any of our compound ideas are not natural, but artificial and arbitrary combinations of simple ideas; particularly those of measures, customs, terms of art, and those relating to all the abstract sciences in general” (216). Once again, the “arbitrary” here, juxtaposed with the “artificial,” is conceived as the opposite of the “natural.” Additionally, Priestley points out in Lecture XVI that poetry is not as easily adapted to suit music as it was in ancient times (225). The connection between modern poetry and music is characterized by him as being arbitrary to such an extent that “the absurdity is not perceived”—“arbitrary” being taken to be synonymous with “absurd” (226).

When it comes to the *Rudiments of English Grammar*, the idea of the arbitrary is chiefly concerned with stylistic rules set out to define a polished form of language. In the third edition of the *Rudiments* (1772)[3], the word “arbitrary” appears four times in the Preface alone, serving as a modifier of “rules” in three instances out of the four, and only five times through the rest of the book. According to the Preface, “arbitrary rules” of refined usage demonstrate a blatant disregard for the “genius of the language” as well as for a “natural propensity, which is the effect of the general custom” (xii). I observed in the introduction that the widespread belief in the *genius* of the English tongue, a perception that it had innate superiority over foreign tongues, encouraged eighteenth-century grammarians to provide prescriptive strictures and norms that would make that linguistic genius easily recognizable. They sought to purge their mother tongue of what they saw as "impurities." But Priestley insists that those arbitrary acts of purification, contrary to expectations, strayed away from demonstrating the intrinsic value of English, which tends to lie instead in customary usage, a natural tendency for people to use particular forms of language. As he goes on to claim, therefore, such prescriptive writings as grammar books and handbooks of good usage do a poor job of describing English speech as it is: "It is not from the writings of grammarians and critics that we can form a judgement of the real state of any language" (xii).

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[3] The expanded third edition is twice as long as the first one. The Preface was also expanded.

This adherence to the principle of custom is further fleshed out several pages later in the Preface:

> [O]ur grammarians appear to me to have . . . taken a wrong method of fixing our language. This will never be effected by the arbitrary rules of any men, or body of men whatever; because these suppose the language actually fixed already, contrary to the real state of it: whereas a language can never be properly fixed, till all the varieties with which it it [sic] is used, have been held forth to public view, and the general preference of certain forms have been declared, by the general practice afterwards. (xvi-xvii)

Priestley here chastises his fellow grammarians for their misguided attempts to give the English language a permanent form, and then strongly advocates for the authority of general usage. Grammarians have formulated a set of linguistic rules with the aim of fixing the language. But their method is simply "wrong" in Priestley's view, since they lay down rules without due consideration for "the general practice" of the language. According to the *Lectures* (XII), this wrong method also involves citing the language usage of a select group of writers as the standard to be emulated: "In *modern* and *living* languages, it is absurd to pretend to set up the compositions of any person or persons whatsoever as the standard of writing" (emphasis in the original, 198). This attack on the practice of imposing some forms of language as a standard (and hence dismissing others) leads to the claim that custom provides guidance on writing and speech. Several lines later, Priestley affirms that "[t]he general prevailing custom, whatever it happen to be, can be the only standard for the time that it prevails" (198). Indeed, Priestley has been championed as the sole grammarian to take a *descriptive* stance towards the study of language in contradistinction to the prescriptive one adopted by most of his contemporaries. The chief representative of prescriptive grammarians was Bishop Lowth, whose *A Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762), one of the most influential books in the history of English grammar, appeared one year after Priestley's *Rudiments*. Studies of eighteenth-century linguistic thought have often contrasted Priestley's defense of custom with Lowth's judgmental attitude towards linguistic usage and dogmatic insistence upon the highest standards of grammatical correctness.[4]

On the grounds of this commitment to descriptivist doctrines as shown in the above extract Priestley denies the need for a linguistic academy that is aimed at suppressing the possible variability of English. In the later part of the Preface, he writes:

> As to a public *Academy*, invested with authority to ascertain the use of words . . . I think it not only unsuitable to the genius of a *free nation*, but in itself ill calculated to reform and fix a language. We need make no doubt but that the best forms of speech will, in time, establish themselves by their own superior excellence: and, in all controversies, it is better to wait the decisions of *Time*, which

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[4] For instance, Linda Mitchell begins her discussion of Priestley by introducing him as "a descriptivist, [who] believed that language cannot be fixed"; she regards his descriptivism as incontrovertible (60). Mitchell emphasizes the contrast between Lowth, the most prominent figure in English prescriptive grammar, and Priestley, whose "liberal practice of rules and custom" led him to conclude that "language moves of its own volition" (36-37). Crawley also understands Priestley's work in terms of the oppositional distinction of prescriptive / descriptive. His linguistic writings, according to Crawley, countered the view advanced in "many other texts that aimed to guide language-users in their writing and speech by prescribing particular forms and usages and proscribing others" (108). Crawley goes on to affirm that Priestley took an "anti-prescriptive stance" (108).

> are slow and sure, than to take those of *Synods*, which are often
> hasty and injudicious. . . . What would *Academics* have contributed
> to the perfection of the *Greek* and *Latin* languages? Or who, in
> those free states, would have submitted to them? (xix-xx)

It is instructive to compare this passage with the one from Johnson's Preface to the *Dictionary* where he scoffs at the proposal to establish the English Academy.[5] Johnson largely bases his opposition to the idea of an academy in Britain on his observation of the existing academies in other countries. According to him, these foreign academies failed to achieve their primary purpose; that is, they proved ineffective in preserving their languages intact—to use his words, in "guard[ing] the avenues of their languages . . . and repuls[ing] intruders" (38). Johnson denounces their efforts to fix and ascertain language as nothing other than "the undertakings of pride," something like "lash[ing] the wind" (38). And more importantly, he believes that "the spirit of English liberty will hinder or destroy . . . [a public academy's] cultivation of our stile" (40). Given that Johnson's dictionary predates the *Rudiments* by six years, therefore, Priestley raises a belated objection to a language academy. Johnson—one of the foremost authorities on linguistic issues during the second half of the eighteenth century—already judged it utterly absurd to have a national institution regulate language use. Furthermore, by the time Priestley wrote the *Rudiments* (1761), English's standardization had already progressed considerably, thus rendering the founding of the academy even more meaningless. There seemed to be little need for an official body of learned men to make language decisions, a task that grammarians and lexicographers had been *unofficially* engaged in. As Priestley himself noted in *Observations on Style* published in the same year, to repeat what I quoted at the start of Chapter 1, “If the English language hath not already attained to its maturity, we may safely pronounce that it never will” (60).

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[5] For my discussion of Johnson's attack on Swift's proposal for a language academy, see footnote 14 of the first chapter.

The reason I am paying special attention to the above excerpt is that, despite its anachronistic contention, it associates the development of English with the political liberty of the nation. Priestley maintains that “a free nation” will not grant a public body (“Synods”) the arbitrary authority to police its national tongue, which will naturally establish its best possible forms if left to “the decisions of Time.” Johnson also pointed out that “the spirit of English liberty” would resist the regulatory reform of English undertaken by an authoritative institution. Whereas the lexicographer used “liberty” in its broad sense, as a term meaning a protest against blind obedience to authority, however, Priestley is particularly interested in liberty as understood in political terms. In his argument, linguistic improvements result from the political liberty that the government of a *free* nation protects. For instance, what brought Greek and Latin to the highest point of perfection was not the “hasty and injudicious” judgments made by “Academics” as to their languages but political freedoms which the ancient republics of Greece and Rome, “free states,” highly valued. Priestley makes the same claim in the *Lectures*, too: “the body of a people, who . . . cannot but be free, will certainly assert their liberty, in making what innovations [in language] they judge to be expedient and useful” (198). Here, a connection between linguistic development and political advance is definitely established as in the above quotation taken from the *Rudiments*.

Actually, Jane Hodson has already identified this connection in her recent study of Priestley’s linguistic theories (2006), writing that: “Priestley ties the improvements made to a language to the political state of the nation" (70). As an illustration of this point, she cites the following passage from the *Lectures*:

> The time in which a language arrives at its perfection, it is natural to conjecture, will be when the people that speak it have occasion to make the greatest use of it; which will be when their power and influence abroad, and when arts, sciences, and liberty at home, are at the greatest height. As these grow less considerable, the language will naturally contract itself with the occasions of it, if it be not preserved by writing. (195)

In my view, this excerpt does not build as clear a link between linguistic improvements and political liberty as Hodson argues. The passage I quoted from the Preface to the *Rudiments* better illustrates her point than this one from the *Lectures*. Yet the implication of its line of reasoning is clear: that all the efforts to arbitrarily attain the perfection of language are doomed to failure, since whether a language improves or decays depends entirely on the political and cultural progress of the country that speaks it. Priestley finds this dependence to be "natural."

I maintain that Priestley saw the linguistic arbitrary (as he perceived it in the prescriptive practices of his day) as a product of the arbitrary rule of a government, a rule that restricts the political liberty of its citizens. Hodson's observation is a springboard for me to provide a fresh perspective on Priestley's study of language. Hodson notes the close ties between language and politics, but only in passing. Bringing these ties into sharp focus, I argue that the idea of the arbitrary is a crucial point where Priestley's linguistic and political theories are joined together. For him, arbitrary language is a manifestation of the governmental authority that arbitrarily violates political freedoms. As I demonstrated in the preceding chapter, Wordsworth's and Coleridge's criticism about the arbitrariness of language draws upon Locke's account of arbitrary monarchical power. This is also true of Priestley: his critique of literary language, as noted earlier, was infused with Locke's political ideas. While other authors' appropriation of Lockean political language was hinted at in their uses of "arbitrary," however, Priestley was uniquely explicit—I would like to stress—as to the relation between the arbitrary character of language and the arbitrary exercise of political power, the former arising from the latter. He established a causal relation between them.

Individual Liberty versus Arbitrary Government

Let me expound on this argument. To begin with, Priestley's idea of liberty as articulated in his political discourse needs to be clarified. It is interesting that he had two concepts of liberty: political and civil. In his *Essay on the First Principles of Government* (henceforth *Essay on Government*; 1768)[6], published six years after the *Lectures*, he draws an important distinction between political and civil liberty:

> POLITICAL LIBERTY, I would say, *consist in the power, which the members of the state reserve to themselves, of arriving at the public offices, or, at least, of having votes in the nomination of those who fill them*: and I would choose to call CIVIL LIBERTY *that power over their own actions, which the members of the state reserve to themselves, and which their officers must not infringe*. (emphasis in the original, 12)

In other words, as the writer himself rephrases these definitions in the following paragraph, political liberty is "the right of magistracy," a constitutional right to hold political office as well as to have a vote on who will fill those positions (12). Civil liberty, on the other hand, puts emphasis on individual autonomy. It “extends no farther than to a man’s own conduct, and signifies the right he has to be exempt from the control of the society,” an individual’s right that must not be infringed upon. In short, civil liberty gives prominence to the freedom of the individual. The reasoning behind this differentiation between political and civil rights is—it should be noted—based on Locke’s account of how civil society was created, which I discussed in the previous chapter. Priestley in fact aligned himself closely with Lockean political philosophy as articulated in the *Second Treatise of Government*; many of his arguments from the *Essay on Government* parallel those from the *Treatise* to the point of paraphrasing them. Drawing on Locke’s depiction of the state of nature, he assumes that people in a pre-social state did not recognize the necessity for political liberty because their natural rights to protect their private property—that is, “their lives, liberties and estates” as Locke puts it—were fully guaranteed in that state (72). Upon entering into civil society by mutual consent, however, the people were forced to relinquish some of their natural rights, and demanded political rights as compensation for that loss. What Priestley regarded as civil liberties were the natural rights that remained unaffected even after political society had been established—i.e. the *inalienable* rights of all men.[7] He illustrates this concept of civil liberty in the following remark: “a man’s civil liberty . . . is originally in its full force, and part of which he sacrifices when he enters into a state of society” (12). The right to political liberty, on the contrary, was practically non-existent in the natural state; it was “acquire[d]” (to use Priestley’s word) in the state of society (12). From his point of view, political liberty serves as “the chief guard” of civil liberty (32). Without political liberty which gives the people the "*security* for the continuance of the same laws, and the same administration," they are unable to safeguard their civil rights and might suffer at the hands of an arbitrary monarch who has no qualms about changing the law of the land to his advantage—a monarch who, to repeat Locke's phrase quoted in the preceding chapter, "set[s] up his own arbitrary will as the law of the society" (emphasis in the original, 32; 114). Priestley indicates a close correlation between the two kinds of liberty, writing that: "[T]he more political liberty the people have, the safer is their civil liberty" (33).

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[6] Along with his other political treatises, the *Essay on Government* demands that Parliament revoke the Test and Corporation Acts, the passage of which in the 1660's put severe limitations on the rights of Dissenters throughout the eighteenth century. In order for Dissenters to take political office or join the military, they had to accede to the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England—a stipulation to which many of them refused to agree. Despite their recurrent petitions against the Acts, the government continued to subject them to religious persecution. This institutionalized discrimination against Dissenters prompted Priestley to publish the *Essay on Government*, in which he defends religious liberty as the fundamental civil right of all citizens. The Acts were repealed in 1828.

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[7] In the words of H. T. Dickinson, governments were obligated to “convert”—or “translate”—people’s natural rights into civil liberties in order to secure those rights by civil law (198).

For Priestley, to sum up, political liberty needs to be secured so that it can offer the means of preserving civil liberty. And this implies that he placed a higher priority on civil liberty, which signifies the natural right of an individual to exercise "power over [his or her] own actions" without external interference (12). This is why he underscores the need to "fix reasonable bounds for the interposition of laws and government" in the section of his *Essay* devoted to the account of civil liberty (31). Undue governmental control, according to him, infringes "the natural rights and civil liberties of mankind"; it "lay[s] a man under unnecessary restrictions, by controlling his conduct, and preventing him from serving himself" (31). In particular, Priestley believes that individual liberty is essential to the pursuit of truth and the enhancement of knowledge. Although a concerted effort by a number of scientists often culminates in the advance of science, he draws attention to the fact that "they all act as *independent individuals*, giving voluntary information and advice" (30, emphasis in the original). He continues putting stress on individual independence, saying:

> Here, there is a case, in which society must always be benefited by individuals, as such, and not by numbers, in a collective capacity. It is least of all, therefore, for the advancement of knowledge, that I

> should be induced to wish for the authoritative interposition of society. (30)

In this extract, the capacity of an individual for intellectual inquiry takes precedence over that of a collective body. From Priestley's standpoint, allowing individuals perfect liberty to follow their various intellectual pursuits eliminates the chance that—as he puts it right before the quoted passage—"the better judgment of an individual" succumbs to "the prejudices of the many" at the expense of the progress of knowledge (30). To put it in broad terms, individuals can do best for the public good when left to themselves to serve their own interests on condition that each one's natural rights are respected. This idea of enshrining individual freedoms is predicated on the strictly limited role of government—to use the words of Martin Fitzpatrick, government existing for the sole purpose of "creat[ing] a framework of security in which individuals could enjoy personal liberty" (8).[8] Since for Priestley an individual's pursuit of happiness leads to the general good of the community, the government's authoritative interference in the former proves detrimental to the latter.

Consequently, what Priestley sees as arbitrary government turns out to be the one whose infringement of personal liberty knows no boundaries. He goes into detail about this arbitrary intrusion on civil liberty in his other political pamphlet *The Present State of Liberty in Britain and her Colonies* (henceforth *Present State*; 1769). In a key passage, he claims that each individual voluntarily surrenders himself to civil society,

> but only with respect to those things in which the public can make better provision for them than he could for himself; because the

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[8] Although Priestley admits that "the proper extent of civil government" seems difficult to be determined, he maintains that it will have been determined by the time "a sufficient number of experiments" are finished (32). Meanwhile, "it becomes the wisdom of the civil magistracy to take as little upon its hands as possible, and never to interfere, without the greatest caution, in things that do not immediately affect the lives, liberty, or property of the members of the community" (32).

> good of the whole requires this, and nothing more. Any power, therefore, which magistrates assume, farther than this, is tyranny, and an arbitrary invasion of men's natural rights. (134)

In other words, a government is considered to be arbitrary when it goes beyond the bounds of its authority by trampling the natural rights that men did not (and could not) alienate at the time of the creation of society—rights providing the basis of Priestley's concept of civil liberty. State interference is tolerated only as long as is deemed necessary for "the good of the whole." One example of intolerable intervention by government is the restriction of press freedom, that is, freedom of expression. The press has a dual role as "great security for every other branch of our liberty, and the scourge of their arbitrary proceedings" (138). Elsewhere in the *Present State*, Priestley states that a "free government" is not subject to "the determination of arbitrary pleasure," while the British government has brought "illegal and arbitrary proceedings" against its subjects' "essential rights and privileges," by which he means "*natural and civil rights*" of the individual (136-38, emphasis in the original). And towards the end of his work, the arbitrary exercise of state power (particularly, the use of military force) is condemned for its willful neglect of "the genius and spirit of our constitution," the English constitution that attaches the utmost importance to individual liberty (139). In sum, Priestley perceives the arbitrariness of political power as a grave threat to individual freedom, which he believes is vitally important for the continued progress of humankind. As he asserts in the *Essay on Government*, "we can never expect to see human nature . . . brought to perfection, but in consequence of indulging unbounded liberty, and even caprice in conducting it" (44). By distinguishing between political liberty and civil liberty and putting a high priority on the latter, Priestley—I would like to point out—linked the conception of the arbitrary to an infringement of individual liberty more explicitly than Locke had done.

But at the same time I would also like to draw attention to a passage from Priestley's *Essay on Government* in which this link seems to be severed. My analysis of this passage will show that Priestley's intense engagement with the nature of liberty led him to use the word "arbitrary" with a meaning that appears distinctly unusual in his political discourse. The passage deserves to be quoted at length:

> Civil liberty has been greatly impaired by an abuse of the maxim, that the joint understanding of all the members of a state, properly collected, must be preferable to that of individuals; and consequently that the more the cases are, in which mankind are governed by this united reason of the whole community, so much the better; whereas, in truth, the greater part of human actions are of such a nature, that more inconvenience would follow from their being fixed by laws, than from their being left to every man's *arbitrary will*. (29, emphasis added)

Priestley here gives preference to the "arbitrary will" of the individual, rather than to the majority view, or the "united reason of the whole community" as he calls it. His idea of "arbitrary" as expressed above is worth noting, for the term departs from its usual, predominantly negative senses in the *Essay*. In this excerpt, "arbitrary" embodies the very essence of civil liberty, i.e. an individual's will to act on his own initiative, whereas the same word elsewhere in the *Essay* and the *Present State* is an epithet characterizing government intervention in civil liberty. To put it differently, although "arbitrary" is intended to represent a threat to individual freedom in Priestley's political writings, the passage above illustrates an intriguing example in which the term, on the contrary, encapsulates the very notion of that freedom. While highlighting the crucial importance of civil liberty, Priestley unwittingly uses "arbitrary" as a neutral term referring to individual initiative. The word carries no negative overtones as it does in Locke's political treatises. Priestley appropriates a neutral meaning of "arbitrary" in order to emphasize the fundamental nature of civil liberty. Simply put, he argues for protection of the free exercise of everyone's *arbitrary* will in opposition to the *arbitrary* exercise of political power by the government. His *radical* insistence on individual liberty leads him to apply the term "arbitrary" to an act of individual will, in contrast to its other uses in his political discourse.[9]

The Role of Arbitrariness in Priestley's Universal Language Scheme

This exploitation by Priestley of individual voluntariness implicit in the notion of "arbitrary" also appears in his theory of language, which will be the focus of the rest of this chapter. As I pointed out above, the discourse of the arbitrary was of great significance to Priestley in that it served as a focal point at which his political and linguistic ideas were closely intertwined. He built, I argued, a causal relationship between the linguistic arbitrary and the political arbitrary, the former caused by the latter. In other words, what can be collectively termed "arbitrary" about language in his view (either the ways of imposing names on ideas or a set of rules regarding language usage) arises from the arbitrary power of the state that violates man's natural rights to liberty. This implies, conversely, that the overthrow of arbitrary government and the creation of a free society might lead to the elimination of the arbitrary and artificial character of language.[10]

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[9] Dickinson has noted that Priestley and other radicals developed further—or *radicalized*—Locke's concept of natural rights by allowing people to exercise more actively their sovereign authority: "to sit in judgement on their governors, to dissolve a government which did not protect their political rights, and erect a new one in its place" (198-99).

[10] In the *Essay on Government*, Priestley states: "If the Commons, representing the body of the people, had the choice of these public instructors, which is almost impossible, we should see a republic rise

Indeed, Priestley had a strong belief in the future progress of humankind—a millennialist outlook on history. In an often-quoted passage from the *Essay on Government*, he writes:

> [M]en will make their situation in this world abundantly more easy and comfortable; they will probably prolong their existence in it, and will grow daily more happy, each in himself, and more able (and, I believe, more disposed) to communicate happiness to others. Thus, whatever was the beginning of this world, the end will be glorious and paradisaical, beyond what our imaginations can now conceive. Extravagant as some may suppose these views to be, I think I could show them to be fairly suggested by the true theory of human nature, and to arise from the natural course of human affairs. (10)

It is human nature, the author believes, to develop towards perfection; man's natural capacities to make improvements hold great promise for the advent of an earthly paradise at the end of history. Even at the risk of sacrificing the analytical rigor of his claim due to its "extravagancy" as he admits, Priestley does not give up hope of building a "glorious and paradisaical" society—a society where the liberties of all, an absolute prerequisite for the evolution of society, are safeguarded against the arbitrary government. This vision of a future golden age of freedom and happiness derives from his embrace of "the doctrine of an over-ruling providence," according to which, in his own words, "every thing, even the grossest abuses in the civil or ecclesiastical constitutions of particular states, is subservient to the wise and gracious designs of him, who, notwithstanding these appearances, still *rules in the kingdoms of men*" (6, emphasis in the original). Priestley's

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out of the ruins of our present government" (51). For him, as Jack Fruchtman has noted, "The republic and the millennium were never two separate and discrete categories of thought" (29). The arrival of the future millennial kingdom—a free, just, and open society towards which human history is moving—is contingent upon the establishment of republican government which shall guarantee the liberty of the individual. Furthermore, Priestley affirms in the *Essay* that "*every government, in its original principles, and antecedent to its present form, is an equal republic*" (24, emphasis in the original). In sum, a republic gains enormous significance in his political philosophy not only as the final form of government, but also as the first political society which people created to protect effectively their life and property. It is notable that, as already mentioned, he claims in the Preface to the *Rudiments* that "the perfection of the Greek and Latin languages" was due to their "free"—and therefore republican—governments (xix). Linguistic perfection to be attained in the future republic had already been attained in the ancient republics.

millennialism is based on the assumption that, as Fitzpatrick puts it, “all things, evil as well as good, were necessitated by the will of God” (137). For him, the appalling state of current political affairs is part of the process by which God’s providential plan is unveiled.

This millennialist attitude towards human history also pervades his attitude towards the diversity of languages. In the *Lectures*, he maintains that:

> The study of different languages hath a most happy influence upon the human mind, in freeing it from many prejudices and errors, which arise from *verbal* associations and analogies. We see that persons who have no knowledge of more than one language, are perpetually confounding the ideas of words with the ideas of things; which the comparison of languages, and frequent rendering from one into another, helps to make us distinguish. (245, emphasis in the original)

In the passage from the *Essay on Government* quoted previously, Priestley showed a preference for a community where every member’s arbitrary will is equally valued over the one where the “united reason” of all members governs. In this extract taken from Lecture XIX, he similarly places a high value on the comparative study of different languages—in which the inherent superiority of one language over others is not assumed—for it *frees* us from “prejudices and errors” found among monolingual speakers. As noted in the paragraph that precedes this one, the diversity of human languages prevents “any one species of idolatry” from being established; this diversity, in particular, helped “check the propagation of vice and false religion” in the early days of civilization (245). From the perspective of Priestley, difference contributes importantly to the disclosure of the “mutual absurdities” of things, providing the truth with “a fairer opportunity of establishing itself” (245). The doctrine of progress he advocated in his political philosophy is also invoked here. He is convinced that the multiplicity of languages has given a “great advantage to us, both as individuals and a collective body”;

and he consequently registers sharp disagreement with the traditional view that the confusion of tongues is a curse that God put on humanity at Babel (245). Although variation in language causes, to borrow his words, "a great inconvenience to the human race" in that they are unable to communicate freely with one another, this inconvenience (like all other differences) turns out to be in his system "both *temporary*, and, while [it] continue[s], *salutary*"—actually, a blessing in disguise (245, 248). It therefore comes as no surprise when he suggests that the linguistic diversity commonly attributed to the curse of Babel occurred by "natural means" and not by "the interposition of the Divine Being" (243).

Turning back to the early quotation from the *Lectures*, what particularly interests me is the remark that the comparison of multiple languages has the advantage of preventing the human mind from "confounding the ideas of words with the ideas of things." I would like to underline that this remark is reminiscent of Locke's observation, which was discussed in great detail in the previous chapter, that people "*often suppose their Words to stand also for the reality of Things*." According to Locke, this insistence upon a direct correspondence between words and things—an essential aspect of the Adamic language, the originary language which God imparted to Adam—has "pervert[ed] the use of Words" and brought "unavoidable Obscurity and Confusion into their Signification" (407). Hence, it can be argued that Priestley was in agreement with Locke that people should break themselves of the habit of taking words for natural signifiers of things; and this suggests that he took a Lockean position in linguistic matters as modern commentators on his works have noted. For instance, Robert Schofield, a biographer of Priestley, indicates that "Priestley's reading of Locke may well have been the origin of his attitude toward language" (104). And Robert Alexander, who examines the implications of Priestley's theory of language in terms of his millennialism, also discusses points of similarity between Locke's and Priestley's opinions on language. Priestley was a follower of a Lockean school of philosophy, both Schofield and Alexander point out, in that he unequivocally rejected the Adamic doctrine that language was divinely bestowed on humanity. He writes in the *Lectures*: "the imperfection of all alphabets . . . seems to argue them not to have been the product of divine skill, but the result of such a concurrence of accident and gradual improvement as all human arts, and what we call inventions" (135). Subscribing to Lockean linguistics, Priestley views language as a human art, an invention of "rude, uncultivated men" (171). Far from perfect in its original form as the Adamic doctrine holds, language was "suggested by the necessities of beings in their first uncultivated state, and enlarged as their further occasions prompted and required" (170). The evolutionary development of language, this argument implies, takes place out of the continued necessity to assign names to new objects and ideas arbitrarily and (hence) voluntarily. In conclusion, as it had been for Locke, arbitrariness (which denotes the name-giver's own will) was for Priestley the defining characteristic of the linguistic sign.

Now let us look at how Priestley accommodated the concept of linguistic arbitrariness to his own framework for "a philosophical and universal language" that he envisages shall displace the present diversity of the world's tongues at some time in the future. Fascinated by the work of seventeenth-century language planners[11], he predicts with confidence in the final lecture (XIX) that the comparative study of many tongues, which "help[s] us to disentangle and distinguish our ideas," culminates in the construction of a universal, philosophical language (246). As he asserts in the Introduction to the *Lectures*, this language will not arise until "a perfect knowledge of the theory of language in general" is acquired (124). Similar to the one that Bishop Wilkins designed[12], this *artificial* language shall be comprised of "universal character[s]" that "represent ideas directly" and, as such, are perfectly intelligible to speakers of all languages (249). Free of "superfluities, defects, and ambiguities . . . with which all languages actually abound," the final language that Priestley dreams of shall be highly useful for philosophical inquiry, letting us understand thoroughly "the powers of language and of nature" (248, 250). In sum, he regards a philosophical language as a high point of human achievement, to quote his phrase, "one of the *last* and *greatest* achievements of human genius" (124, emphasis added). In these respects, the fragmentation of language, though a formidable barrier to verbal communication, brings us a huge advantage of its own. It facilitates the comparison of different languages, and by so doing, motivates us to progress towards a perfect language. As Priestley expects, like other evils with their own "final causes," "the diversity of languages, when it hath completely answered all the present uses of it, may also contribute to its own extermination" and thereby to the development of a philosophical and universal language as well (250).

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[11] I discussed in the previous chapter seventeenth-century language planning in relation to Locke's linguistic discourse of the arbitrary.

The prospect of a universal sign-language, however, as Alexander has noted, was already deemed a quaint anachronism by the time the *Lectures* was published (25). According to Lewis, the artificial language movement drew to a close as early as the

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[12] Priestley admired Wilkins's *Essay Towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language* (1688), a book formulating, in his view, "[t]he most rational plan of an universal and philosophical language" (249).

1680's, in less than two decades after the publication of Wilkins's *Essay* in 1668. Furthermore, Stephen K. Land comments in his *From Signs to Propositions* (1974) that the focus of linguistic studies shifted markedly as the eighteenth century progressed: away from "individual words" towards "matters of syntactic, metaphorical, and morphological structures" (Preface v). Eighteenth-century linguists began to think of language as "a formal system," not "an aggregate of signs" as in philosophical language schemes (8). In a similar fashion, Cohen also states that language texts of the last few decades of the seventeenth century marked a significant shift in attitudes to language. They substituted "the analogy of the function of speech to the operation of the mind" for a search for "the correspondence of language to nature," which was the primary concern of the language planners (27). Because of this change of focus in language study and for other reasons, expectations for a perfectly philosophical language seemed simply unrealistic at the time Priestley published the *Lectures* in 1762.

Why did, then, Priestley take a close interest in old-fashioned philosophical languages? What aspects of this unsuccessful project attracted him? The following passage from Lecture XIX gives hints about how to answer these questions:

> To appearance, this [i.e. the value of the comparison of languages] is an affair of words only; but these *words* are, more closely than men imagine, connected with *things*, and things of considerable consequence. (247, emphasis in the original)

I pointed out earlier that Priestley generally concurred with Locke's ideas on language, and mentioned as a telling example his statement that we are able to avoid "confounding the ideas of words with the ideas of things" through the study of diverse languages. Yet just two paragraphs later, interestingly, he makes the above remark, in which a meaningful relationship between words and things—things "of considerable consequence" to be precise—appears to be established as the fruits of comparative linguistics in a manner evocative of the Adamic tongue. Accordingly, on the surface, this claim seems at variance with the earlier one that, in conformity with Locke's linguistic thinking, takes the unbridgeable gap between *res et verba* for granted. In the Lockean system the word-idea dyad takes precedence over the word-thing dyad; to put it another way, words are yoked primarily to ideas and only secondarily to things. However, this apparent contradiction in Priestley's claims—his warning against assuming an innate identity between words and things on the one hand, and his seemingly mystical belief in that identity on the other—is resolved once the second claim is recognized as an outgrowth of his agreement with Locke's theory of signification as exemplified in the first claim. I argue that while following Locke in opposing linguistic essentialism, which contends that natural connections exist between words and things, Priestley opens up the possibilities of connecting words *arbitrarily* with "things of considerable consequence." The universal, philosophical language he envisions is a language in which the potential of arbitrary signification is exploited to the full.

Let me delve further into the reasoning behind this argument. I interpret Priestley's theory of a philosophical language as his response to a tendency for linguistic prescription to be arbitrary. He admits in the *Lectures* that attempts to establish standard English—especially those to achieve a "uniformity in writing"—have brought the language to near perfection (196); as he reports, "the English seems to be as near to its meridian as possible" (241). Nevertheless, it also seems to him that English has been prescribed beyond appropriate limits, its distinctive "genius" being somewhat tarnished. He writes in Lecture XII:

> There are certain limits beyond which the growth of a language cannot extend. . . . [A]ll the pains that we bestow upon a language, when it is sufficiently perfect for all the uses of it, serve only to disfigure it, to lessen its real value, and encumber it with useless rules and refinements, which embarrass the speaker or writer, and are of no advantage to the hearer or reader. (195)

In short, there have been more than enough practices on standard language usage. Priestley is acutely aware of the ill effects of excessive preoccupation with a fixed language. The “rules and refinements” intended to regulate language to a greater extent than is necessary can be best described as “arbitrary,” given that his linguistic uses of this word are, as noted earlier, uniformly negative. He remarks that strict guidelines for correct forms of language are embarrassing, or not even remotely useful, to ordinary speakers because they fail to take how language is actually practiced into due consideration. In the same lecture, he similarly comments that language standardization has brought about “arbitrary and whimsical ideas of excellence,” i.e. rules of literary, polite usage, which “have been superadded to those which were natural and becoming, till at length the latter have been entirely sacrificed to the former” (193). In his mind, this arbitrary nature of prescriptive approaches to language, as has already been argued, reflects the political conditions under which each person’s rights to the freedom of conscience are arbitrarily restricted. For Priestley in the 1760’s, the most glaring example of civil rights violation committed by the state was the Test and Corporation Acts, which refused Dissenters like him equal rights on religious grounds throughout the eighteenth century (see footnote 4). The unjustness of these laws provoked outrage from him and provided a strong motive for his argument for limited government intervention in individual freedoms in the *Essay on Government*. He anticipates that the building of a liberal society in the millennial period, and hence the achievement of perfect freedom, shall have languages purged of all arbitrary and capricious habits of expression. Put differently, the removal of arbitrariness in political sphere leads naturally into the removal of arbitrariness in language use. Priestley presents the philosophical (and universal) language to be used in the future millennial kingdom as the very embodiment of social perfection towards which humans are gradually progressing. In the Introduction to the *Lectures*, Priestley insists that a philosophical language "shall be the most *natural* and *perfect* expression of human ideas and sentiments, and much better adapted than any language now in use, to answer all the purposes of human life and science" (124, emphasis added). That is, this final language, purified from "superfluities, defects, and ambiguities" that infest modern languages, is considered entirely suitable for freedom of thought and the free exchange of differing views which an open society—and its republican government—guarantees (248).

Yet the perfectly *natural* language to be used in the earthly paradise turns out to be distinctively *arbitrary* due to the way it unites words and things, i.e. the connecting of words with "things of considerable consequence." The naturalness of a perfect language is the result of the arbitrary signifying processes that occur in it. In Priestley's system, as we saw above, a universal philosophical language emerges out of the findings of the study of linguistic multiplicity—a comparative study that provides penetrating insight into the nature of language, and that consequently makes us able to discover the connections between words and things of consequence, connections that are in fact much closer than we imagine. To put it briefly, he perceives a philosophical language to be constructed by taking words to conform to things of consequence. This process of signification is arbitrary in terms of Locke's linguistic philosophy, since it is the voluntary act of the individual’s will that determines the semantic relation between signifier and signified. For Priestley, words stand for things of consequence, to quote Locke, “by a perfectly arbitrary imposition” of the individual speaker (408). In his universal language project, the true meaning of a word is not immediately comprehended as in a dictionary but unfolded by the speaker (or the writer) in the course of time as he pays attention to the consequences that the thing signified produces. From Priestley’s perspective, therefore, the current dictionary definitions given by lexicographers are only part of the process by which words acquire their ultimate meanings with the arrival of the millennium. The arbitrary signs of the philosophical language he envisages defy predetermined, standardized clarification of their meanings.

A Universal Language: Priestley’s Reaction to Prescriptivism

Now, I would like to accentuate the points I made in the preceding section by comparing my reading of Priestley with those of other critics: Robert Alexander and Jane Hodson. Actually, my knowledge of Priestley’s conception of language owes a great deal to Alexander’s 2008 article “The Language of the ‘Naked Facts’: Joseph Priestley and the Apocalypse of Language.” To my best knowledge, this is the first (and to date, only) serious study of Priestley’s idea of language universals.[13] For these reasons, a comparison of my study with that of Alexander not only seems inevitable but will also enrich our understanding of Priestley's linguistic thought. His *apocalyptic* theory of language, according to Alexander, was produced as a result of his attempt to "accommodate the 'voluntary' quality of the Lockean sign to his own millennial framework" (29). Words for him, Alexander continues to argue, thus "take on the status of events, mute facts, the absolute intelligibility of which is deferred to the distant future and the millennial moment in which the difference between words and things will (it is predicted) vanish" (31). The natural bonds between words and things that once existed in Adam's perfect language, Priestley predicts with confidence, will be restored in the future perfect language—i.e. a universal and philosophical language. Alexander contends that in this language scheme "a word's meaning is the place it takes in the chain of temporal events, the final consequence of which will be the millennium" (30).

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[13] Roy Harris, who wrote an introduction to Priestley’s *Lectures* in 1993, comments that “the work is not remarkable for any evident breadth of linguistic erudition” (vii). What interests Harris instead is Priestley’s *scientific* approach to the study of language, an attempt to explain “the natural principles underlying language” (vii). Concerning Priestley’s notion of a universal language, Harris makes a passing remark that he was full of hope for constructing such a language on the basis of those “scientific principles” (xi). In Schofield’s biography (published in 1997), too, Priestley’s language planning is not the source of much comment. He says: “Priestley’s universal grammar is . . . not in the seventeenth-century mode of a philosophical and universal language” because of his adherence to the scientific method of linguistic studies, which Harris also emphasizes (114). Schofield then makes a brief comment that “[Priestley’s] notion of universality is limited to functions common to most languages,” functions which are “the consequence of unalterable ‘rules of right reason’” (114).

Alexander's essay provided me with impetus for developing my own argument concerning Priestley. What I found highly intriguing was his discussion of Priestley's agreement with Locke's ideas on language[14]—more to the point, how Locke's doctrine of linguistic arbitrariness inspired Priestley to expose in language "a pocket of undecideability, a space of liberty" in which "the ultimate significance of a word is never . . . immediately intelligible" (30). In Alexander's argument, it seems to Priestley that Locke's idea of linguistic arbitrariness raises the possibility of making progressive improvements to a language until it attains perfection. Priestley finds the voluntary, privative nature of the Lockean sign to fit tidily with his millennialist concept of linguistic change. Although I concur with this view, I am more inclined to regard Priestley's engagement with the arbitrariness of signification as his response to the processes of standardization, which he thinks have become increasingly arbitrary. In my view, he emphatically denies that a word's meaning can be determined in reaction to the linguistic authority wielded by professional lexicographers of his day. Linda Mitchell's study of eighteenth-century grammar indicates that lexicographers had assumed full authority to make language decisions since the publication of Johnson's *Dictionary* in 1755—the authority, as Johnson states in the Preface, to "correct or proscribe . . . improprieties and absurdities" of the English language (22). Their status as authoritarian codifiers even became superior to that of grammarians by the latter half of the century as their dictionaries included more and more comments on grammar issues.[15] For Priestley, this unchallenged supremacy of professional lexicography is highly conducive to the arbitrary prescription in language, like unrestrained governmental power is conducive to arbitrary reign. He thus advances a universal language theory that provides "a space of liberty" (Alexander's phrase) to meaning as a means for opposing the linguistic tyranny of lexicographers who aim to make words "permanent, like the things which they denote" as Johnson declared (24). His endorsement of Locke's linguistic account of "arbitrary" enables him to see endless possibilities for forging the word-thing connections that evolve beyond the boundaries of standard lexicography.

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[14] Despite this agreement, in Alexander's account, the distinct difference between Locke and Priestley lies in the way they perceive the multiplicity of languages. For Locke, this variety points to nothing but the arbitrary relation between the two components of the linguistic sign. As he reasons in the *Essay*, "a natural connexion . . . between particular articulate Sounds and certain Ideas," if it had really existed, would have produced "one Language amongst all men" (405). On the other hand, however, as explained above, Priestley's millennialist sensibility led him to consider the linguistic diversity a necessary evil that creates favorable conditions for fulfilling the perfectibility of a universal language.

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[15] Mitchell observes that "the linguistic authority held by grammarians in the seventeenth century was transferred in the eighteenth century to lexicographers" (17). She reinforces this point later, writing that: "In the beginning, grammar embraced lexicography, but later, lexicography embraced grammar" (38).

My discussion of Priestley lends far more weight to the arbitrary than Alexander's does.[16] Whereas Alexander briefly introduces Locke's exposition of arbitrary signification in terms of his repudiation of the Adamic doctrine, I closely investigate how Locke's political and linguistic conceptions of the arbitrary contributed to the shaping of Priestley's political radicalism and theory of language. I see the discourse of the arbitrary as an essential link between Locke and Priestley, though they differently approached the problem of the arbitrary. I explained in the previous chapter that Locke was careful—albeit not extremely—to distinguish between political and linguistic senses of the word "arbitrary," a distinction that had been almost obscured by the time Priestley engaged in debates on language. As has been revealed by my analysis of his political pamphlets and language texts, Priestley confused the political arbitrary with the linguistic arbitrary, thus weaving together his views of liberty, government, and language. To restate this argument: his failure to separate the meanings of "arbitrary," ironically, caused his political theory and study of language to be closely entwined, bringing a sense of coherence to his works.

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[16] In his reading of Priestley's texts, Alexander pays closer attention to J. A. Austin's speech-act theory that throws a spotlight on the *performativity* of language—in Alexander's words, "language's capacity to perform actions rather than merely to represent a pre-existing state of affairs" (22-23). According to him, by foregrounding this active and creative dimension of language, Priestley conceives of language—especially, a prophetic discourse which is actually aimed at persuading its audience in the present to *perform* political acts—as undergoing "a process towards full meaningfulness," towards "the millennial moment of consummate meaning" (23, 31). Alexander holds that because of the operations of the performative, "meaning is not present and prescribed but rather promised and thus open to contest" (33).

In fact, there is nothing new about the concept of performativity being applied to the reading of late-eighteenth-century texts. In *The Romantic Performative: Language and Action in British and German Romanticism* (published in 2001), Angela Esterhammer traces the origins of the discourse of performativity back to eighteenth-century epistemology, specifically to the texts of such influential figures as Thomas Reid, Kant, Humboldt, and Coleridge. According to Esterhammer, Romantic authors were deeply conscious of linguistic performativity. They were "concerned with speech acts not only as phenomenological interactions between mind and world, but also as sociopolitical interactions between individuals and institutions" (5). This remark applies equally to Priestley, considering his belief in the mind's potential for unlimited improvement and in the arrival of the millennial kingdom, as well as his insistence upon individual liberty and free government. I acknowledge that Alexander puts forward a convincing argument in illuminating the performative aspect of Priestley's linguistic thought. But I regard Priestley's concern with performative language as a reaction against prescriptive lexicography that tends to make only *constative*—as opposed to performative—statements about a word's meaning.

From my point of view, furthermore, Priestley's notion of arbitrariness brings into question the traditional association of him with descriptivism, which regards linguistic change as a *natural* phenomenon—not as being subject to *arbitrary* regulation—and intends to offer an objective account of it. Priestley's use of "arbitrary" as a pejorative term for prescriptive practices does not support the general belief that he, unlike most of his contemporary grammarians, took a descriptive approach to language (see footnote 2). Jane Hodson's 2006 essay, "The Problem of Joseph Priestley's Descriptivism," also raises doubts as to Priestley's descriptive attitude. As we shall see, however, her reasoning is partly based on a misreading of Priestley's text. Using Hodson's misreading as a starting point for my discussion, I will show that Priestley's linguistic project blurs the arbitrary / natural distinction that lies at the heart of the prescriptive / descriptive distinction. In the early part of her essay, Hodson expounds the conventional view that "the enlightened forces of descriptivism" were engaged in a battle with "the dark forces of prescriptivism" in the eighteenth century—an oppositional framework within which Priestley has been depicted as a descriptivist (58). This framework has come under attack for its inadequacy in recent years. Some of the recent Johnson scholarship, for instance, challenge the validity of his label "prescriptivist" by emphasizing the descriptive nature of his labor.[17] In a similar fashion, Hodson questions the portrayal of Priestley as a prominent figure of descriptive linguistics by drawing attention to the prescriptive aspects of his work. She quotes the following passage from the *Lectures* in support of her view:

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[17] See Anne McDermott's article "Johnson the Prescriptivist? The Case for the Defense" (2005); and Jack Lynch's *The Lexicographer's Dilemma* (2009).

> [T]he best forms of speech, the most commodious for use, and the most agreeable to the analogy of the language, will at length establish themselves, and become universal, by their superior excellence: (195)

Hodson interprets this quotation as demonstrating Priestley's commitment to the underlying ideology of standardization. Priestley believes, in her reading, "some forms of the language are qualitatively better than others" (66)—i.e. a prescriptive belief contradicting his descriptive statement in the *Lectures* that "[t]he general prevailing custom . . . can be the only standard for the time it prevails (198). From her viewpoint, however, the apparent incompatibility between these two opinions regarding language does not pose a problem when "the idea of linguistic perfectibility is recognized as central to [Priestley's] linguistic theories" (58). The assumption behind his claim in the quoted passage is that, in Hodson's argument, "*the best possible form* will establish itself *naturally* through the processes of time"—a position that rejects the antithesis between *good* descriptivism and *bad* prescriptivism (68, emphasis added). In Priestley's linguistic thinking, Hodson reasons, a specific variety of a language will naturally become standard and realize its perfectibility over a period of time on account of its inherent superiority to other varieties. Hodson's study of Priestley fits in well with the recent approach to the prescriptive / descriptive opposition within linguistics[18]; and I share her deep skepticism about characterizing him as a descriptivist in the modern sense of the word.

Nonetheless, Hodson is mistaken in thinking that "the best forms of speech" mentioned in the above extract refer to standard varieties. The best possible form of language Priestley has in mind is a universal language that will some day supersede the multiplicity of languages, of which Hodson makes no mention. She fails to take into consideration Priestley's remark immediately following the extract: "at the time that a language hath begun to be spoken and written with *uniformity*, it may be taken for granted to be arrived to its maturity and perfection" (196, emphasis added). Given his prophetic vision of the millennial period as articulated in the *Lectures*, this maturity and perfection, certainly, are attributed not to a standard language but to a philosophical language that shall ensure linguistic *uniformity* in a paradisiacal future. In his system, a standard language—though it seems so perfect as not to demand further changes—marks only an intermediate, albeit important, stage in the development of a completely perfect language.[19] Moreover, establishing normative rules even in defiance of customary usage, which he denounces as arbitrary, attests to arbitrary governmental intrusions on basic civil liberties of his time. Evidently, the language befitting freedom of expression and free inquiry has yet to be awaited. And as the above passage from the *Lectures* suggests[20], the formation of this language is not guided by the standardizers' judgments; instead, it naturally arises over time by virtue of its innate superiority to all preceding languages. Given that a universal language is premised upon the arbitrary quality of the sign, Priestley presumes that, it can be argued, the ultimate *arbitrary* language emerges *naturally* as time goes on. Consequently, he disrupts the binary discourse of 'arbitrary versus natural,' and in so doing, that of 'prescriptive versus descriptive' as well—two binarisms that have been typically associated with each other in language studies.

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[18] That is, questioning the effectiveness of the dichotomy in studying linguistic phenomena. I discussed in the introduction Deborah Cameron's deconstructive account of the prescriptive / descriptive opposition (See footnote 6).

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[19] As I quoted at the beginning of the first chapter, Priestley states in his *Observations on Style* (1761) that "the schemes of some still more modern writers, to add something considerable to the perfection of the English language, in order to contribute to the permanency of it, cannot, according to the course of nature, produce any effect" (60). Here, he claims that standard English no longer calls for judgment on the part of prescriptivists, for it has already attained perfection and maturity as a national language. Accordingly, further codification and prescription will do little more than set out arbitrary rules and corrupt the language. In the *Lectures* published one year after the *Observations*, Priestley is convinced that an incorruptible, defect-free language will arise through natural processes alone: a language which, "furnished with an universal character, . . . shall represent ideas directly, without the intervention of any sounds" (249).

[20] Priestley repeats this passage almost verbatim in the Preface to the *Rudiments*: "the best forms of speech will, in time, establish themselves by their own superior excellence" (xix).

To sum up, Priestley is attracted to philosophical language projects since they seem to offer the possibilities of forming word-thing connections on the basis of the speaker's (or writer's) private perception of the world. In accordance with Locke's doctrine of linguistic arbitrariness, Priestley's theory of language postulates that words are produced by the arbitrary, and therefore voluntary, act of the individual speaker's will. More importantly, Priestley capitalizes on the voluntariness of the Lockean sign as he envisions a philosophical language that shall be used in a liberal, open society. This language's claim to perfection and naturalness is predicated upon the potentialities of arbitrary signification. Priestley's language scheme offers a virtually infinite range of choices as to the ways that signs are assigned to their referents; and this carries profound implications for the writers of his age who are trying to redefine their role in English literature in the face of an unprecedented challenge from the standardizers. Now, writers are uniquely able to impose words on the things that have, potentially, significant consequences, and thereby to ponder meanings outside the range of signification provided by standard lexicography. As such, they come to occupy a unique role—a role that clearly distinguishes them from the standardizers, and that confirms their special status in literature.

CHAPTER THREE:

“THE OVERTURNING OF AN ARBITRARY GOVERNMENT”: PIGOTT’S REVOLUTIONARY CHALLENGE TO STADNARD LEXICOGRAPHY

Now I would like to draw attention to Charles Pigott, a radical pamphleteer in the early years of 1790s. Today he is best remembered for his posthumous work *A Political Dictionary Explaining the True Meaning of Words* (1795), which was published by Daniel Isaac Eaton, the authorized publisher of Thomas Paine’s works. Although Pigott did not live to see his *Dictionary* in print, it proved an instant publishing success. The third edition was quickly released the following year, and extracts from the book appeared in print, too.[1] Nevertheless, the *Dictionary* has been deemed unworthy of serious critical attention. Modern scholars have discussed it only in passing as one of the radical pamphlets published during the turbulent years of the French Revolution. Though often quoted as a scurrilous—and hugely entertaining at the same time—publication in the studies of late eighteenth-century radical discourse, the *Dictionary* has not been considered a valuable resource in its own right so far. For instance, Amanda Goodrich, the author of *Debating England’s Aristocracy in the 1790s: Pamphlets, Polemics and Political Ideas* (published in 2005), devotes three pages to the discussion of Pigott’s another scandalous pamphlet, *The Jockey Club,* an exposé of the private lives of the aristocrats whom he knew personally. But there is no mention of the *Political Dictionary* in her book. Given the fact that Goodrich examines the political debate on the role of aristocracy that erupted between radicals and loyalists in the 1790s, it is strange that she takes no notice of the *Dictionary*, which unleashes a vitriolic attack on aristocracy. Pigott calls an aristocrat "a fool, a scoundrel, generally both; a monster of rapacity, and an enemy to mankind"—even though he himself was born into an aristocratic family (7).

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[1] The bookseller named Richard “Citizen” Lee at the “British Tree of Liberty” assembled at least seven collections of extracts from Pigott’s work: *The Blessings of War*, *The Excellence of the British Constitution*, *The Rights of Priests, The Rights of Princes, The Rights of Nobles*, *The Rights of Man*, and *The Voice of the People*—each pamphlet with its ironic title that contains entries selected according to its subject. The reprinting of these pamphlets consisting of extracts indicates that *A Political Dictionary* enjoyed huge popularity with the public.

Pigott himself has received insufficient attention in the history of radicalism, too. To take an example, Iain Hampsher-Monk—an authority on the Revolutionary controversy of the 1790s—adds none of Pigott's writings to his anthology *The Impact of the French Revolution: Texts from Britain in the 1790s* (2005), which offers fourteen excerpts from both loyalists and radicals who intervened in the pamphlet wars of the period.[2] Even the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, which collects official biographies of 55000 people from British history, does not contain a separate entry on Pigott. Instead, the *DNB* includes a one-paragraph account of Pigott's life in the biography of his brother, Robert Pigott (1736-1794), a food and dress reformer. The author of the biographical article assigns the last paragraph to Charles Pigott, introducing him as a "radical and satirist" and "an ardent champion of the French Revolution." His notorious works, *The Jockey Club* (1792), and *The Female Jockey Club* and *The Whig Club* (1794), are given a brief note explaining that they "offered a scurrilous account of elite London society, with which he seems to have been well acquainted." Concerning *A Political Dictionary*, however, the author states nothing but the simple fact that it was published posthumously in the year following Pigott's death. Neither is he a notable figure in the *DNB* article on Eaton, the publisher of the *Dictionary*. Eaton had the audacity to publish works of radical thought, even those that "other printers considered too dangerous to handle," as the author of his biography notes.[3] According to the biography, the best-known work published by Eaton is Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason*, for which the publisher served a sentence of 18 months' imprisonment. In comparison with this emphasis on Eaton's partnership with Paine, Pigott's dictionary gets only a passing mention that it was one of the libelous pamphlets for which Eaton was prosecuted.

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[2] Interestingly, David S. Karr, the reviewer of Hampsher-Monk's book, raises the same point as mine. He comments: "Indeed, an excerpt from one of the works that more creatively engaged with form as well as content (such as one of the radical satirical dictinaries), would have been a useful addition to this excellent volume" (1-2). Karr has Pigott's *Dictionary* in mind.

This chapter on Pigott, therefore, gains significance in that it devotes itself entirely to the study of *A Political Dictionary*. It is, to my best knowledge, the first full-scale survey ever conducted of Pigott's lexicographic work.[4] But at the same time I

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[3] Many of Eaton's ideas on politics and religion were ones Pigott shared. According to the *DNB*, Eaton was severely critical of the Pitt government's policy, and was also a strong advocate of universal suffrage of manhood. He had no hesitation in making libellous statements about the king. And he was among the most outspoken proponents of freedom of expression "by word and deed" as his biographer puts it. On top of all these, he rejected Christianity and became a deist. As I will demonstrate henceforth, all of this liberal thought went into Pigott's *Political Dictionary*.

[4] Jon(athan) Mee is the only critic who undertook a thoroughgoing investigation of Pigott. Mee wrote two essays focusing solely on Pigott: "Libertines and Radicals in the 1790s: The Strange Case of Charles Pigott I," *Libertine Enlightenment: Sex, Liberty, and Licence in the Eighteenth Century*, eds. Peter Cryle and Lisa O'Connell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) 183-203; and Part II of this essay, "'A Bold and Free-Spoken Man': The Strange Case of Charles Pigott," *"Cultures of Whiggism": New Essays on English Literature and Culture in the Long Eighteenth Century*, eds. David Womersley, Paddy Bullard, and Abigail Williams (Newark: U of Delaware P, 2005) 330-50. In both essays that read Pigott's pamphlets within the context of popular radicalism in the 1790s, Mee takes little interest in *A Political Dictionary*, citing only a few passages from it. His primary focus is on *The Jockey Club*.

But in his article, "Language," contributed to *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture, 1776-1832*, eds. Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite (New York: Oxford UP, 1999), Mee makes an insightful, though passing, remark about the *Dictionary*. He introduces Pigott as an "imitator" of Paine. Pigott learned from Paine how the plain language of the common people could be instrumental in bringing about political change. According to Mee, the *Dictionary* demonstrates "the importance of language in determining the political nation," as did Paine's works (376). Given the critic's presentation of Paine as a formative influence on the *Political Dictionary*, it is worth noting that Pigott's clear, forthright writing style in the dictionary is reminiscent of Paine's prose. I would also like to point out that Eaton served as publisher for both of them.

Mee has a lengthy discussion about Pigott in his recent article, "Popular radical culture," written intend this chapter to be read as an outgrowth of my previous discussions of Locke and Priestley. My analysis of the *Dictionary* seeks to establish the continuity with the preceding chapters. Pigott's *Dictionary* has special importance to my doctoral project since it offers a good illustration of Priestley's idea of the word-thing connection—that is, the connecting of words with things of consequence on the basis of the author's subjectivity. And this relation between the signifier and the signified itself can be attributed to the influence of Locke. My main contention is that Pigott's lexicographical production bears a direct relation to Priestley's linguistic thought, and hence to Locke's as well. To put it another way, I interpret the *Political Dictionary* as epitomizing Priestley's account of signification (which in turn owes a great deal to Locke's semantics) in reaction to the regulatory authority of English prescriptivism. As the full title of his dictionary—which claims to explain "the true meaning of words"—clearly implies, Pigott poses a radical challenge to prescriptive lexicographers, Samuel Johnson being foremost among them. That is, Pigott openly boasts that only *he*, rather than Johnson or other lexicographers, can offer "true" definitions of words.

To introduce one of the entries of *A Political Dictionary* that exemplifies this resistance to standard lexicography, the meaning of "pacification" is explained as follows: "By Dr. Johnson, termed the art of making peace. In modern cabinets, this word has no accurate definition; in fact, by them it is an art frequently talked of, but seldom practiced"

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for *The Cambridge Companion to British Literature of the French Revolution in the 1790s*, ed. Pamela Clemit (New York: Cambridge UP, 2011). Pigott's *Dictionary*, Mee astutely observes, "offered ribald and irreverent revisions of the language of politics" (122). I am centrally concerned with the wider implications of these revisions. Mee's research on Pigott also yields valuable information regarding his association with Eaton. Both Pigott and Eaton joined division 25 of the London Corresponding Society, a radical society established in January 1792 by a group of artisans with the aim of getting parliamentary reform implemented. More importantly, according to Mee, Eaton was an ardent advocate of a "freethinking aspect of radical culture," a tendency towards "Jacobin libertinism" which Pigott's writings display (122).

(111).[5] This entry consists of Johnson’s definition of the word and Pigott’s sarcastic comment on the political conditions in the country relating to that word. He remarks that the Cabinet led by the current prime minister (William Pitt the Younger) is unable to keep the peace at home. Despite (or because of) domestic policies designed to maintain order in the face of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, the Pitt ministry is actually making things worse. It is notable here that Pigott refuses to accept Johnson’s standard definition as “accurate” as far as the Cabinet is concerned, for its members are not “making” peace rather but merely “talking of” it to no effect. Pigott mocks the government’s flawed policy by questioning the validity of Johnson’s authoritative dictionary against a political backdrop of the 1790s.

The True Revolution as Opposed to the Glorious Revolution of 1688

As illustrated by its entry for “pacification,” *A Political Dictionary* interests me in its attempt to take issue with received (or prescribed) meanings in a way that reflects the writer’s view of contemporary events. Not only does Pigott contest standard meanings, he goes on to revise them as well—this is the most intriguing aspect of his *Dictionary*. In the case of “pacification,” Pigott does not redefine the given meaning; but on numerous occasions, he provides alternative “true” definitions which take a stand against not only lexicographic standards but also the existing political system. I maintain that the *Dictionary* was a bold attempt to reconceptualize the dictionary genre, as well as a vehicle for incisive political comment. For Pigott, these two goals, linguistic and political, were inextricably intertwined.

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[5] In fact, the word “art” in Pigott’s entry is “act” in Johnson’s. Johnson defined the word as “the *act* of making peace.” It is uncertain whether this change was intentional or not.

Before opening up a full discussion of the *Political Dictionary,* however, we need to address the following questions: Why did Pigott choose to present himself as a lexicographer? Why did he write his political commentary on Britain in the 1790s in the form of a dictionary? To answer these questions, we should first investigate the status of lexicographers in the late eighteenth century. According to Linda C. Mitchell, the author of *Grammar Wars: Language as Cultural Battlefield in 17th and 18th-Century England* (2001), it was grammarians who exercised the authority to make decisions about linguistic issues in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. But they had to transfer this authority to lexicographers by the latter half of the eighteenth century, as evidenced by the fact that eighteenth-century dictionaries started encompassing grammatical material (See 38-42). Mitchell writes: "Dictionaries now held linguistic authority, while grammar texts served a purely pedagogical function" (42). We might therefore see the publication of Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* in 1755 as the decisive moment when the transfer of linguistic authority that Mitchell identifies became irreversible. Johnson specifically confirmed the status of lexicographers as the proper authorities respecting language decisions. In the early part of his Preface to the *Dictionary,* he states that the obligation of lexicographers is defined as "correct[ing] or proscrib[ing]" the "improprieties and absurdities" of English, although some "spots of barbarity" in the language seem so deeply "impressed" as to be beyond rectification (22).[6] To use Mitchell's words, Johnson assigned to lexicographers responsibility for preventing "undesirable language habits" from being "perpetuated and reinforced"; they now became recognized as "the guardians of language," men of letters with the full authority to “legislate rules of language” (41-42). This special role carved out by Johnson for a lexicographer is still assumed by modern dictionary editors. Much indebted to him, indeed, is the status as professional prescriptivists that lexicographers have unquestionably enjoyed since the middle of the eighteenth century. Johnson makes his prescriptive stance firm in hoping that entries in his *Dictionary* are “permanent, like the things which they denote” and “less apt to decay” (24). I argue that Pigott attempted to maximize the impact of his radical politics by appropriating, and thereby challenging, the linguistic authority that lexicographers assumed at that time. This appropriation indicates that he was highly conscious of the significance of language in advancing the political cause. He knows that the achievement of his revolutionary ideals rests largely on who has the authority to determine a word’s meaning. In passing himself off as a lexicographer, Pigott revises accepted definitions in accordance with his radicalism in the firm belief that language is a chief agent for political and social transformation. When an ideal political society that he anticipates is built, his radically informed definitions will be acknowledged to be final ones, which are permanent and non-decaying.

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[6] Strictly speaking, in terms of linguistics, "proscription" condemns or forbids particular forms and usages, whereas "prescription" recommends.

The aspirations that Pigott seeks to fulfill in assuming the role of lexicographer are best demonstrated in his entry for the word “revolution.” My discussion of Pigott will center on his concept of revolution, because I believe that revolution acts as the principal focus of *A Political Dictionary*. To put it differently, I consider the *Dictionary* a call for a revolutionary uprising against despotic rule, all its entries converging in the idea of revolution. At the core of Pigott’s political language is revolution. In addition, Pigott’s resistance to English standard lexicography becomes strongest when he defines “revolution.” The entry reads:

> The sudden overturning of an arbitrary government by the people. Tyrants change a free government into a despotic one, by slow gradations; but it is a comfortable reflection to the patriot, that a united nation can overthrow in a moment the work of whole ages of Tyrants. The Revolution of 1688, no good and wise man can applaud. It was the despicable patch-work of a few addle-pated, whig noblemen. The people soon found they had only made an exchange of Tyrants: in fact, it was out of the frying-pan into the fire. (135)

Here, Pigott specifically targets Johnson, who wrote the *authoritative* dictionary of the English language. The word "revolution" in Johnson's *Dictionary* has four senses, the third of which is "change in the state of a government or country." He then takes as an example the Glorious Revolution of 1688, "the change produced by the admission of king William and queen Mary." Pigott quotes this definition by Johnson in the paragraph that follows the above excerpt, thereby making it clear that his idea of revolution was formed in direct response to Johnson's. Unsatisfied with the vague sense of "change" in Johnson's entry, Pigott specifies the nature of the political "change" effected by the outbreak of a revolution—i.e. a forcible overthrow of the tyrannical regime that arbitrarily tramples man's civil rights to freedom, and, given Pigott's republican sensibility, the establishment of republican government. Not only this, but he is also dismissive of the conventional view of the Glorious Revolution as it was reinforced by Johnson, a view that the peaceful, bloodless revolution of 1688 exemplifies the struggle to abolish absolute monarchy as well as to build a society based on the rule of law. By the time *A Political Dictionary* was published, this conviction was further strengthened as Britain witnessed the chain of cataclysmic events that had been occurring in revolutionary France, e.g. the September Massacres (1792), the Execution of Louis XVI (January 1793), and the Reign of Terror (1793-94). Indeed, the *gloriousness* of the

English revolution of 1688 seemed to be best appreciated when Pigott's work appeared—and when it became apparent that the early enthusiasm of the French revolution spilled over into brutal violence. By comparison with the bloody revolution in France, the Glorious Revolution was held up as an example of a successful revolution in that it promoted the evolutionary, peaceful development of parliamentary sovereignty against the threat of absolutist rule.

In Pigott's view, however, the revolution of 1688 did not bring an end to tyranny in Britain. Actually, it did nothing but bring about "an exchange of Tyrants." He condemns the revolution as a "despicable patch-work," for it never intended overthrowing monarchy *per se*. The English people remained under the rule of the monarch, though his or her power became significantly limited as a result. On this account, the 1688 revolution for Pigott was, at best, "only an amendment, and a very partial one" as he asserts later in the same entry (136). His enthusiastic republicanism leaves no room for hereditary monarchy, or for any other hereditary institutions. In the entry for "hereditary," he writes, "Worse and worse. The claim of folly; the boast of infamy; and the pride of vice" (67). And his entry for "monarch" reads as follows: "A word which in a few years is likely to be obsolete" (93). As for the word "king," he makes a scornful, and witty, remark that "king" is actually an abbreviation, standing for "cunning or crafty" (78). The word, according to him, derives from a Saxon word "Kuening, or Kuyning," which was used for "the usual distinction and epithet for knaves" (78). The most scurrilous attack on monarchy is delivered in the entry for Nebuchadnezzar, a biblical king who went insane and lived like a wild animal for seven years. He did "eat grass as oxen . . . with the beasts of the field" (Daniel 4:32). Pigott compares the mad King Nebuchadnezzar to King George III, who had suffered occasional bouts of insanity since 1788, writing that: “It is thought by physiologists, that it would greatly conduce to the welfare of the people, if the king of *Georgia* was turned out to grass before the meeting of every session of Parliament” (98).[7] This is obviously among the most vicious slanders on the king in the literature of radicalism in the 1790s. Additionally, Pigott calls the day that the English monarchy was restored (May 29, 1660) “the saddest day England ever saw,” on which “Tyrant Charles II” proclaimed himself king (135). From his point of view, any form of monarchy, whether absolute or constitutional, potentially threatens the sovereignty of the people, a basic principle of republicanism. He firmly rejects the idea that monarchy is the natural state of affairs. Consequently, given this intense hatred for the monarchical system, his disparaging comment on the Glorious Revolution—which took as a given the continuation of the monarchy—makes perfect sense.

Moreover, Pigott states that the 1688 revolution did not simply elect a new tyrant to replace the previous one but made matters worse by paving the way for a more oppressive government to come to power—jumping “out of the frying-pan into the fire” as he puts it. In my view, this “fire” alludes to the office of prime minister which gradually evolved in the process of transferring political power held by the sovereign to Parliament after the Revolution. And it seems that Pigott took the phrase “frying pan” from Thelwall’s notorious broadside, “King Chaunticlere,” in which the author attacked monarchy for inflicting “the tortures of the frying pan.”[8] Pigott is therefore arguing that the people are enduring even more brutal torture—the torture of fire—under prime ministerial government. Indeed, Pigott’s definition of “(prime) minister” is filled with a deep loathing of the office itself. He writes that the term “comprehends all that imagination can conceive of the corrupt, the treacherous, the cruel, the vindictive, and the oppressive” (91). To put it another way, prime ministerial government exhibits all the traits associated with absolute monarchy, which it claims to have replaced in the course of constitutional changes initiated by the revolution of 1688. Pigott criticizes the premiership on the grounds that under the current system, ministers are left with little choice but to subject themselves to the whim of the monarch. They, he pointedly remarks, “must be servile, and compliant with every humor and caprice of the sovereign” (91). In fact, prime ministers of the eighteenth century were chosen by the king, not by Parliament, and could stay in office only on condition that they secured the support of the crown, not of the electorate. They were not prime ministers in the modern sense. For this reason, they acquiesced, willingly or not, in the arbitrary will of the monarch—at least Pigott thinks so—and in so doing, “learn[ed] to despise the rights, and undermine the privileges, of the People” (91). He goes on to remark that this unconstitutional infringement of people’s civil rights, in turn, afforded prime ministers “a surer chance of obtaining the royal patronage and favor” (91-92).

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[7] Pigott’s seditious words recall the notorious fable of the radical orator John Thelwall, “King Chaunticlere,” in which a tyrannical gamecock, King Chanticleer, is decapitated. It was printed in Eaton’s weekly journal *Hog’s Wash* in November 1793. See Daniel Issac Eaton, “*Politics for the People* [also known as *Hog’s Wash*]: ‘King Chaunticlere; or, The Fate of Tyranny,’” *Burke, Paine, Godwin, and the Revolutionary Controversy*, ed. Marilyn Butler (New York: Cambridge UP, 1984) 185-88. The gamecock is described as follows:

> I had a very fine majestic kind of animal, a game cock: a haughty, sanguinary tyrant, nursed in blood and slaughter from his infancy—fond of foreign wars and *domestic rebellions*, into which he would sometimes drive his subjects, by his oppressive obstinacy, in hopes that he might increase his power and glory by their suppression (187, emphasis in the original)

Here, George III is compared to a brutal gamecock, which, even after beheading, “continue[s] the same hostile kind of action, bouncing, and flapping, and spurring, and scuffling about” for a while (188). Eaton, the publisher, was brought to trial in February 1794 for including Thelwall’s item in his journal, but the trial ended in his acquittal. This verdict in favor of the radical movement would have encouraged Pigott in his biting satire on the king.

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[8] Eaton, “King Chaunticlere” 186. Thelwall repeats the phrase “*the frying pan of despotism*” (his italics) two times in the fable.

The Arbitrary Government of William Pitt

Seen from Pigott’s viewpoint, the prime minister who best learned how to violate political freedoms of the people in order to court the king’s favor is William Pitt the Younger, who retained office for a period of 19 years: from 1783 to 1801, and again from 1804 until his death in 1806. Pigott believes that Pitt’s current administration had reduced the English people under despotism to an unprecedented degree.[9] In the entry for “candour,” Pitt is bitterly denounced for “supporting the necessity for extending the prerogative of the Crown, and justifying himself for keeping up and enlarging the system of corruption” during the course of the war against revolutionary France (12). Pigott notes with some indignation that the prime minister broke his former pledge to oppose the corrupt political regime[10]; instead, he strengthened it, in all “candour,” under the pretense of protecting the nation against its traditional enemy, France. In fact, the French Revolution and the subsequent war in Europe led the Pitt ministry of the first half of the 1790s to enact a series of repressive measures aimed at quashing all political dissent and restricting civil liberties: for instance, a ban on seditious publications[11] and political gatherings[12], the persecution of radicals suspected of spreading French ideas, and the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus. This campaign of repression—which became known as “Pitt’s Reign of Terror”—drew widespread condemnation from his Whig opponents including Pigott. In Pigott’s eyes, Prime Minister Pitt is putting the English people through “hell” with “neither liberty of speech, nor liberty of thought, nor liberty of action”—a living hell “where men can be imprisoned at the will of a minister, without ever being brought to trial” (66).[13]

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[9] Pigott attacks gross corruption in Pitt’s ministry by comparing him to Robert Walpole, who is traditionally regarded as the first prime minister (1721-42). Pigott writes that if Walpole—who himself was a thoroughly corrupt politician—succeeded Pitt as prime minister, Walpole would appear blameless: “Walpole was once thought to be too corrupt for a minister; but were such a man as Walpole to succeed Pitt, the utmost corruption of which Walpole was capable would be innocence and purity itself, compared to the black and detestable policy, the tricks, the baseness, and the low cunning, of his predecessor” (92).

[10] In 1785, Pitt proposed a parliamentary reform bill that would disfranchise rotten boroughs, but it was defeated in the House of Commons. He never raised this issue again.

[11] The king issued Royal Proclamations against seditious publications in May and December 1792.

This lambasting of Pitt for taking away freedom of expression was probably incited by the sedition trials of 1792 and 1793 against three radicals: Thomas Paine, John Frost and Daniel Isaac Eaton. Frost was a member of the London Corresponding Society, which Pigott joined too (see note 4); and Eaton, another member of the LCS, was brought to trial for printing Thelwall’s pamphlet “King Chaunticlere.” Paine was also closely associated with the LCS, which widely distributed cheap copies of the *Rights of Man*.

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[12] When defining the word “association,” Pigott mentions that there has recently been a “revolution” in the way “association” is understood owing to this repressive legislation against public meetings. He writes:

> In former times it was deemed legal for Englishmen to associate, for the purpose of discussing political principles and their own rights. Such meetings were once held constitutional and meritorious; . . . Now, government deems them unconstitutional and *seditious*, and the associators stand a good chance of being confined four years in Newgate, or, if in Scotland, of being loaded with *irons*, and transported to Botany Bay. (7)

While Johnson makes fine discriminations between five senses of “association,” each with an illustrative quotation, Pigott is concerned exclusively with a “revolutionary” change that the political meaning of “association” underwent in the aftermath of the French Revolution—from constitutional to seditious. The once constitutional right of individuals to associate with each other for political purposes—i.e. freedom of association—was now held liable for seditious actions and thus severely restricted.

[13] However, as H. T. Dickinson indicates, “[o]nly a few radicals were in fact imprisoned without trial.” He remarks that many of Pitt’s repressive policies proved “more significant as indicators of government alarm and as threats to hold over the radicals, than as effective means to bring radicals before the courts.” See Dickinson’s “The political context” in *The Cambridge Companion to British Literature of the French Revolution in the 1790s*, 12.

The Pitt administration indicted the three of them for treason after a royal proclamation against seditious writings was issued in May 1792. Eaton was acquitted, but Paine and Frost were declared guilty. Pigott's definition of "trial" in *A Political Dictionary* seems to reflect his sentiment towards these treason trials: "A pantomimic farce, where there is a *show* of justice, who is represented full of eyes, like Argus, to express her *impartiality* . . ." (179, emphasis in the original).[14] It also appears that Pigott has in mind the trials of his LCS associates in his entry for "sedition": "any thought, word or action of your life, if brought into a court of—justice; and determined so by a corrupt judge, and settled so by a packed jury.—Dreams may be seditious!" (149). Frost is known to have said "Equality, and No King" as he got involved in an argument over the French Revolution in a tavern.[15] He was prosecuted for this statement and convicted of seditious libel. Mee reports that Pigott had a similar experience. He was put under arrest for having "utter[ed] seditious words after an incident at a coffee house" ("Popular radical culture" 121). The arrests of Frost, Pigott and other radicals were made possible by the "system of spies and informers" as he characterizes Pitt's administration (74). The government spies infiltrated radical societies including the LCS and gave to the authorities detailed information about their suspicious activities.[16] For this infringement of basic civil liberties—"liberty of speech," "liberty of thought," and "liberty of action" as Pigott identifies them—Pitt comes under scathing criticism from Pigott, being dubbed the "murderer of human happiness," "butcher of liberty," and "destroyer of all the dearest ties of love" (155).

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[14] Here Pigott seems to be aware of the theatrical nature of the treason trials, their participants performing in court like theatre actors for the purpose of soliciting public support. This is fully discussed in Judith Pascoe's "The Courtroom Theater of the 1794 Treason Trials," the second chapter of her *Romantic Theatricality: Gender, Poetry, and Spectatorship* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1997). Having died in June 1794, Pigott could not see the trials of Thomas Hardy, Horne Tooke and John Thelwall, which took place towards the end of the year. Yet he would certainly have witnessed the theatricality of a treason trial in the cases of Paine, Frost and Eaton.

[15] For a full discussion of Frost's trial, see James Epstein, "'Equality and No King': Sociability and Sedition: the Case of John Frost," *Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain 1770-1840*, eds. Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002) 43-61.

[16] See Dickinson, "The political context" 11.

As shown above, Pigott treats Pitt very harshly—and often unfairly from the viewpoint of modern historians—throughout the *Political Dictionary*. Pitt's name appears as many as 37 times, more frequently than any other name in the *Dictionary*. Pigott never loses an opportunity to castigate the incumbent prime minister. As Johnson quoted extensively from great writers to offer examples of what each word means in his *Dictionary*, so Pigott mentions Pitt as an illustrative example in a number of dictionary entries. In this regard, the front pages of their dictionaries are instructive. On the front page of his work, Pigott notes that "the True Meaning of Words" is to be "Illustrated and Exemplified in the Lives, Morals, Character and Conduct of the Following Most Illustrious Personages, Among Many Others: The King, Queen, Prince of Wales . . . ." On the other hand, the front page of Johnson's book reads: "A Dictionary of the English Language: in Which the Words Are . . . Illustrated in Their Different Significations by Examples from the Best Writers." These two different front pages reflect the differences between the way Johnson and Pigott executed their dictionary projects. Considering Pigott's account of how his materials are explained, he appears fully aware of his difference from Johnson with respect to lexicographic methods. While Johnson thoroughly grounded his lexicography in literary precedents set by previous writers, Pigott tends to illustrate the concept of a word by applying it to "the lives, morals, character and conduct" of the prominent figures of his time, among whom Pitt is his prime target. For example, Pitt is vilified as embodying all the attributes of an "apostate" and a “necromancer” in each entry: an “apostate . . . who barters his political principles for a sum of money,” and a “necromancer . . . who, by means of charms and spells, and his opiate wand, conjures up the House of Commons and the Privy Council to his opinions,” which specifically refers to Pitt’s extraordinary speaking skills (5-6, 98-99).[17] By labeling Pitt as the most infamous apostate and necromancer, Pigott publicly accuses him of having strengthened arbitrary political system to the utmost degree in an attempt to counteract the influence of the French Revolution at home.[18] As Pigott emphasizes, Pitt would rather have “ARBITRARY POWER” established than see a “GUILLOTINE” decapitate the monarch—in other words, than let a French-inspired revolution break out in the country (62).

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[17] Pigott actually makes several references to Pitt’s speech style. Having accused Pitt of misusing his magical powers as a necromancer in the above-quoted passage, Pigott continues to write: “by the force of his incantations, he kept Liberty bound up in a little bottle, containing a solution of gold in the *sudorous acid*, extracted from the brows of the laboring poor” (98). Here Pigott notes that Pitt led the nation into tyranny with his superb oratory, which had an almost magical quality. Elsewhere in the *Political Dictionary,* Pigott calls Pitt’s speeches “bombast” and mentions “malevolence” as a distinctive rhetorical figure of them (9, 87).

Sometimes Pigott uses wry humor to make his points. For example, after having defined “financier” as “a Chancellor of the Exchequer who excels in taking money from the people’s pocket in the easiest and *genteelest* manner,” he states that Pitt has a good “*reputation* of a most accurate calculator, of an excellent *Financier*” (45, emphasis in the original). It is however true that Pitt was an excellent financial manager, as Pigott comments sarcastically, for he significantly reduced the national debt incurred by the American Revolution by implementing effective measures to increase government revenue. Pigott’s account of “irony” is also given with a touch of humor. He explains that irony is “a mode of speech, in which the meaning is contrary to the word,” and then praises Pitt as “a great and worthy character,” obviously for ironic amusement (77).

[18] But it should be also noted that Pigott’s strong antagonism to Pitt’s political career occasionally lacks intellectual rigor and produces merely vile slander. For instance, as for the word “hideous,” Pigott gives the following short definition: “the countenance of William Pitt” (69). Another telling example is “reprobate.” Pigott’s definition of the word—“an abandoned wretch, lost to all sense of virtue” (133)—is almost the same as Johnson’s, “A man lost to virtue; a wretch abandoned to wickedness.” In other words, Pigott repeats Johnson almost verbatim in defining “reprobate.” Yet, whereas Johnson quoted three writers including Shakespeare to illustrate the concept of the word, Pigott recounts the following story of Pitt, which seems a pure fabrication: “It has been said of Pitt, that while he was begging his mother’s blessing on his knees, at her death-bed, he stole her purse out of her pocket, underneath her pillow” (133-34). This is nothing but defamation of character.

To recapitulate, Pigott's full endorsement of the French Revolution led him to reject the standard definition of "revolution" given by Johnson: "Change in the state of a government or country." Not only did Johnson fail to clarify the nature of this "change," he offered a poor example of it as well, that is, the Glorious Revolution. In light of the ongoing revolution in France, the English revolution of 1688—which had been highly regarded as an exemplary revolution as Johnson affirmed—does not qualify as a revolution by Pigott's standards. First, as was indicated earlier, it raised no questions about the idea of hereditary monarchy. Worse still, the premiership, which had emerged out of political developments facilitated by the revolution, served to bolster the existing regime since the prime minister was dependent on the support of the king. A case in point was Pitt's administration, which passed repressive legislation to halt the spread of revolutionary ideas, and which was therefore vehemently condemned throughout Pigott's dictionary. In strong disagreement with the prevailing view on the legacy of the 1688 revolution, Pigott provides, as quoted above, an alternative definition of the concept of revolution: "The sudden overturning of an arbitrary government by the people" (135).

Interestingly, this redefining of the meaning of revolution is not unique to Pigott. Mark Philp indicates that the meanings of revolution underwent a dramatic transformation during the years from 1775 (the American Revolution) to 1848 (European revolutions), and that the French Revolution was the most important factor in this lexical change. According to Philp, revolution was initially taken to mean "restoring a political system . . . to some historically prior and uncorrupt state," but the term extended its scope to "encapsulate a sense of social and economic, as well as political, restructuring"; and, moreover, a growing emphasis was placed on "the independent role" of "the common people" in revolutions (17). Pigott's dictionary entry for "revolution" reflects this change in the sense of the word. He dismisses the importance of the 1688 revolution, for it did little more than *re*-establish Protestant dominance in the country, the traditional constitution being left largely intact. In addition, the common people took little part in this replacement of the Roman Catholic ruler (James II) with Protestant ones (William III and his wife Mary II)—which actually was close to a palace coup in some respects. Considering his deep loathing of monarchism, it is no wonder that a complete break from the past is at the top of Pigott's agenda for revolution, which should be a "sudden overturning." This overturning does not involve bringing about a previous state of affairs in circular fashion as implied in another sense of revolution.[19] Equally important, Pigott makes it clear that the subject who drives the revolutionary process is the people.

Pigott's Absorption of Locke's Political Philosophy

In light of the tradition of political philosophy, the revolution Pigott envisioned—the "overturning of an arbitrary government"—was essentially a Lockean political project. This point is illustrated in the way he uses the term "arbitrary" in the *Political Dictionary*. As exemplified in his definition of "revolution," Pigott uses "arbitrary" on many occasions as a pejorative epithet for a despotic regime in accordance with Locke's discussion of arbitrary political power.[20] This point is nowhere better illustrated than in his account of "power" in the *Political Dictionary*. By putting "arbitrary" in parentheses next to the entry word "power," Pigott highlights a strong collocation between the two words. Whereas Johnson differentiates between 13 senses of "power," Pigott focuses exclusively on a tyrannical executive power:[21]

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[19] In fact, this is the first sense of the word in Johnson's *Dictionary*: "course of any thing which returns to the point at which it began to move." The second sense, "space measured by some revolution," is derived from the first one. Revolution as a change in the political system comes third, which suggests that Johnson was not inclined to give as much weight to this sense as to the first one. However, the third had become the more usual sense of the word in the period from the French revolution to the middle of the nineteenth century.

> Power (arbitrary). Where any one person or body of men, who do not represent the whole, seize into their hands the power in the last resort, there is properly no longer a government . . . . I look upon *Arbitrary Power* as a greater evil than *Anarchy* itself; as much as a savage is a happier state of life than a slave at the oar. Whoever argues in defence of absolute power in a single person, ought in all free states to be treated as the common enemy of mankind. (122, emphasis in the original)

This passage exactly echoes Locke's view of political absolutism as outlined in the *Second Treatise of Government*. If the ruler, to quote Locke's words, "set[s] up his own arbitrary will"—not the represented will of the people—"as the law of society," such a government serves absolutely no purpose, for it has abandoned a duty to its members to protect their life, liberty and estate (114). Under this arbitrary government, people would be worse off than in the anarchic state of nature. Pigott stresses that absolute arbitrary power, which "do[es] not represent the whole" as he condemns it, is a greater evil than anarchy itself.

This line of thought can only lead to one conclusion: that the people have a right, or even a duty, to bring down a government that acts against their common interests.

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[20] The word "arbitrary" appears 15 times in the book, most of them being used in a negative sense: for example, "arbitrary conditions" (10); "arbitrary princes" (40); "arbitrary measures" (99); "arbitrary caprice" (113); "an arbitrary minister" (150); "an arbitrary act" (195).

[21] The first sense of "power" in Johnson's entry is "command; authority; dominion; influence." It is interesting that Johnson illustrates this sense by a quotation from Locke's *First Treatise of Government*: "No man could ever have a just *power* over the life of another, by right of property in land." The sense of "power" upon which Pigott focuses, "government; right of governing," comes eighth in the entry. This exemplifies how far Pigott departed from Johnson's conception of lexicography.

Pigott formulates this concept of the right of revolution in his dictionary entry for "government," the longest entry which spans as many as eight pages:[22]

> Government. An universal contract, the object of which is the happiness of a state, for whose benefit it was formed. Whenever the object is not attained, it is *natural*, *lawful*, and *right* to alter the *government*, and the only competent judges in these cases are the people themselves, who, . . . will murmur and complain, and, at length resist, when they find themselves oppressed by sumptuary and sanguinary laws . . . . [T]he *natural* strength lies in the *people*, and whenever they are roused to exert it, all factitious *unnatural powers* will be at once destroyed and buried in the dust. (53-56, emphasis in the original)

Pigott here lays claim to the right of resistance to unjust oppression in terms that brings him close to Locke. In the final chapter of *The Second Treatise of Government*, titled "Of the Dissolution of Government," Locke insists that the people retain in the face of absolute despotism "a right to resume their original liberty, and, by the establishment of a new legislative . . . [to] provide for their own safety and security, which is the end for which they are in society"—an argument that is faithfully reflected in Pigott's entry (114). This right logically entails allowing the people to stand in judgment over their leader and to ponder the following question: Does he work to their benefit? "The people shall be *judge*," Locke asserts, of whether civil society "act[s] contrary to their trust" to such an extent that it must be dissolved (124, emphasis added). Pigott applies the term "judge" to the people in the above passage, too, when formulating the doctrine of popular sovereignty. Apart from this dominant influence of Locke's political theories, what is especially noteworthy in Pigott's concept of "government" is—as he himself highlights in italics—his advocacy of the *natural* power of the people as opposed to the *unnatural* power of an arbitrary government.[23]

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[22] Considering that *A Political Dictionary* is 195 pages in length, assigning eight pages to a single entry "government" shows the high importance of the subject to him.

This linking of "natural" to democratic rule (and hence of "unnatural" to a tyrannical, arbitrary one) was to appear again in Wordsworth's and Coleridge's literary project as they were conceived in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* a few years later and in the *Biographia Literaria* (1817). Wordsworth and Coleridge both pursued natural language as the sole means of fulfilling their democratic aspirations in opposition to the unnatural, arbitrary language of neoclassical writers, who tended to consider it a badge of a privileged elite to have the capacity for adhering to the rules of propriety and refined usage. We might argue that a sharp distinction drawn between the *natural* and the *unnatural* (or *arbitrary*) in the political context of the 1790s had come to lie at the heart of the two Romantic poets' pronouncements on the reform of poetic language. They shifted onto a linguistic plane the opposition between natural and arbitrary political power articulated in the Political *Dictionary*. This illustrates how closely, and confusingly, political discourse was interwoven with linguistic discourse in the decades around the turn of the nineteenth century.

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[23] Interestingly, Johnson also notes a similar distinction between the two kinds of executive power in his entry for "government." The first sense of the word reads: "form of a community with respect to the disposition of the supreme authority." Johnson illustrates this meaning by quoting William Temple (1628 – 1699):

> There seem to be but two general kinds of *government* in the world: the one exercised according to the arbitrary commands and will of some single person; and the other according to certain orders or laws introduced by agreement or custom, and not to be changed without the consent of many.

In this argument strongly reminiscent of Locke's political treatise, Temple differentiates a government resting on the consent of the people from the other one subject to the arbitrary will of a tyrant. Johnson's attention to the source (or "disposition" to use his own word) of governmental authority, it can be argued, not only harks back to the seventeenth-century conception of the social contract but also anticipates the insistence by late-eighteenth-century radicals that the people *should* exercise "supreme authority" (his words) in a civil state.

Turning back to Pigott's entry for "revolution," his belief in the duty of the people to instigate a revolution, that is, to summon up their "natural strength" in the face of "factitious unnatural powers," actually goes one step further than Locke. In the entire entry, the clear concise definition of "revolution"—"the sudden overturning of an arbitrary government by the people"—is followed by another, longer definition, which further elaborates on the points Pigott covered in the shorter one. He writes: "A Revolution is a total alteration of the forms of government, and a re-assumption by the people of their long lost rights; a restoration of that equality which ought always to subsist among men" (136). Given the words "*re*-assumption," "*re*storation" and "long *lost*," Pigott is apparently convinced of the actual existence of the state of nature prior to the dawn of civilization—a pre-political state in which the natural rights of all men were recognized on equal terms. According to H. T. Dickinson, who examines the political radicalism of the later eighteenth century in his *Liberty and Property*, the radicals appealed to the concepts of natural rights and popular sovereignty on the grounds that there truly was a time in the distant past when these concepts were fully embraced. Dickinson points out that "Locke's concept of the state of nature had been highly abstract and he had made no effort to prove that it had once existed at any particular time or place"; by contrast, the natural state for Pigott and other radicals was not a speculative hypothesis proposed just for the sake of argument but "man's actual historical condition before the creation of artificial government" (199). Individuals in this condition voluntarily gave up some of their natural freedoms and consented to obey the political order created for the purpose of protecting more successfully their lives, liberty and property—i.e. their *inalienable* rights that could never be taken away—against those intent on inflicting harm on them. But when the executive body does not fulfill this original purpose and tramples on the citizens' natural rights, civil society should be brought down by a revolution and replaced with a new one seeking to *restore* the people's "lost rights" and consequently to *re*-achieve, albeit imperfectly, the natural equality that really existed in the primitive past.

In order for this equality to be established in civil society, all citizens—Pigott contends—should be granted voting rights. In his entry for "equality," he takes the word to signify "EQUAL RIGHTS . . . a right of voting for the election of those who are to make laws by which he himself is to be bound; by which, his liberty, his property, and his life are affected" (26). This is, according to Dickinson, one of the points of difference between Locke and the late-eighteenth-century radicals. In Locke's argument the people remained subordinate to the legislature until the dissolution of government[24], whereas the radicals insisted that "[a] man's liberty could not be guaranteed unless he had a say in the political decisions which would affect him and his family" (Dickinson 198). As Martin Fitzpatrick has also pointed out, the radicals demanded that active steps be taken to exercise the sovereignty of the people, which was passive for Locke (117). But this constituted, Fitzpatrick goes on to indicate, not so much a fundamental disagreement with Locke's ideas as a radical reading of his theory of social contract (118). Pigott's insistence upon the vote as the active means to defend natural rights—his radicalization of Locke—draws him close to another radical thinker of his time, Priestley, who promoted political liberty as a legal right "to arriv[e] at the public offices" and "to hav[e] votes in the nomination of those who fill them" (*Essay on Government* 12). As I discussed in the previous chapter, Priestley distinguished political liberty from civil liberty (which signifies the natural inalienable right of an individual), the former serving as "the chief guard" of the latter (32). As he affirms, "[T]he more political liberty the people have, the safer is their civil liberty" (33). Strongly influenced by this idea of liberty, Pigott holds that men are free to rebel against an unjust government which not only commits civil rights violations but also infringes on their political right to vote in the elections, a right that ensures greater equality among the members of society. Compared to this radical stance, Locke's championing of the cause of revolution seems relatively moderate. He is careful to avoid the impression that his text is "lay[ing] a ferment for frequent rebellion" (*Second Treatise* 115)[25]; he stresses that the people restrain themselves from opposing the government unless they have suffered "a long train of abuses" by governing institutions (116). Pigott takes Locke's system further, and allows the people to be a more liberal judge of their leaders.[26]

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[24] Locke states that "the legislative can never revert to the people whilst that government lasts because, having provided a legislative with power to continue for ever, they have given up their political power to the legislative, and cannot resume it" (125).

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[25] Pigott defines *rebellion* as "an unsuccessful attempt of the people in a generous struggle for liberty and equality of the rights of nature" (129). In other words, "rebellion" for him is synonymous with "revolution" except that rebellion is a failed revolution. They both seek to promote natural rights and equality of man. On the other hand, however, Johnson clearly differentiates rebellion from revolution, defining the former as "insurrection against *lawful* authority" (my emphasis).

[26] To further discuss where Pigott parts company with Locke, Locke ends the *Second Treatise of Government* by claiming that it is legitimate for people to "act as a supreme and continue the legislative in themselves; or erect a new form, or under the old form place it in new hands as they think good" (125). The last part of this sentence seems to allude to the Glorious Revolution, which actually placed the legislative in new hands of William and Mary under the old monarchical form. It is said that Locke composed his *Two Treatises* with the aim of justifying William's succession to the English throne. Indeed he writes in the Preface that he intends to "establish the throne of our great restorer, our present King William; to make good his title in the consent of the people . . . to justify to the world the people of England . . . saved the nation when it was on the brink of slavery and ruin" (5). As noted above, however, Pigott treats William III's Revolution as wholly unworthy of his respect. As he stresses in the longer definition of the word, a true revolution is "a total alteration of the forms of government."

This radicalization of Locke’s political thought leads Pigott to uphold the republic as an ideal form of government that will be created as the result of successful revolution. He provides the following definition of “republic”: “A popular government founded on the eternal and immutable principles of liberty and equality, truth and justice”—that is, a just government committed to the doctrine of popular sovereignty, with particular emphasis on civil liberty and social equality (134). Pigott goes on to highlight the cost efficiency of republican government, since it “is conducted with a tenth or twentieth part the expence . . . that it costs a monarchical one” (134). Further, its representative—not hereditary—institutions limit the scope for government corruption and protect better the right of civil liberty. The common good of the citizenry can be achieved, Pigott implies, nowhere else but in “a Representative Republic,” which is “the best” and “the most rational” government (134). I would like to emphasize that this republican enthusiasm forms the basis of his *Political Dictionary*. All its definitions I have thus far examined are aimed at inflaming republican sentiments. While dictionary writers like Johnson derived their definitions from the common usage in metropolitan areas, Pigott’s dictionary is grounded in republican thought, thereby being uniquely able to transcend the usual semantic limits imposed by standard dictionaries.

A Political Dictionary *as the Realization of Priestley’s Millennialist Vision*

Now, let us explore what Pigott learned from Priestley, one of the foremost republican enthusiasts of his day. I consider Priestley the biggest influence upon the development of Pigott’s lexicographic project. In fact, Pigott mentions Priestley on one occasion only in the *Political Dictionary*. Defining the word “refugees,” Pigott writes that “Dr. Priestley and family . . . were obliged to quit a country pregnant with bigotry and persecution, to spend the rest of their days beyond the reach of Arbitrary Power . . . in the calm regions of tranquil liberty and uninterrupted harmony” (130-31).[27] Here Priestley is described as a person who flew into exile after a long, tough fight against arbitrary political power. Pigott forms a close bond with Priestley in that they both have suffered “bigotry and persecution” under a repressive regime of William Pitt.[28] It appears that Pigott feels a sense of comradeship with Priestley.

However, Priestley’s influence on Pigott’s *Political Dictionary* was not limited to a radical ideology of the later eighteenth century which owed much of its origin to social contract theory by Locke. In other words, it was not that Pigott inherited from Priestley only the republican agenda. I claim that Pigott undertook in his dictionary a Priestleyan linguistic project as explained in the preceding chapter: that is to say the connecting of words with “things of considerable consequence” and the constructing of a universal, philosophical language as a result. Accommodating Locke’s linguistic discourse of the arbitrary to his language scheme, Priestley based the forging of the word-thing connection on the individual speaker’s world view—in Pigott’s case, his republicanism. As was the case for Priestley’s universal language planning, this Lockean view of words as being produced by the arbitrary (and voluntary) act of individual will lays the groundwork for Pigott's practice of lexicography. Pigott seeks to capitalize on the potentialities of *arbitrary* language implicit in Locke's theory of signification for the purpose of condemning the *arbitrary* abuse of power by the Pitt ministry. The authorial freedom embodied in Locke's concept of a "voluntary imposition" of the sign enables him to create a radical political language as a means of fighting against arbitrary tyranny. As I noted in the first chapter, Locke regarded "voluntary" as synonymous with "arbitrary" in his linguistic discussion of the *Essay*, while highlighting the contrast between them in the *Second Treatise of Government*, the voluntary consent of the governed versus the arbitrary rule of the monarch. *A Political Dictionary* demonstrates Pigott's desire to enjoy this voluntariness of the Lockean sign to the full in spreading a Lockean political propaganda, i.e. the immediate downfall of Pitt's arbitrary government, which is what he means by "revolution." As has been shown in the entries I quoted, Pigott's uses of the epithet "arbitrary" in the *Dictionary*—his joining of the term to "power" in particular, four occurrences in the book—consistently fall into line with Locke's political philosophy. In a nutshell, Pigott absorbed the political and linguistic theories of Locke through the mediation of Priestley.

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[27] Priestley’s unwavering support of the French Revolution caused a mob to burn his house and laboratory to the ground in July 1791. In 1794 he eventually emigrated with his family to the United States and spent his remaining years in Pennsylvania.

[28] According to a brief biography of Pigott given in *Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age,* he attempted to go into exile in Switzerland to escape a prosecution against him in 1793. But he failed and was arrested on charges of seditious libel. After having been released from one month’s imprisonment, Pigott died the following year of diseases caught in prison (647).

To further elaborate on the Priestleyan aspects of Pigott's lexicography, I argue that his political language is best understood within Priestley's millennial historical framework, which was discussed at length in the previous chapter. According to Priestley, humankind had been progressing steadily towards God's millennial kingdom, whose republican government was going to achieve the freedom of the individual as well as the common good of the people. This millennial period—which was to commence with the building of a perfected republic—would also bring language to the highest point of perfection and witness the emergence of a perfectly universal language. In this millennialist view of linguistic change, the signifying relation of signs to referents—that of words to things of consequence—is arbitrary in the context of Locke's semantic study. To explain this in greater detail, the ultimate meaning of a word for Priestley is not considered to be definitively determined as for professional lexicographers but rather deferred until the end of human history. In the meantime, individual writers are engaged in the task of exploring the meanings of words in the light of a sequence of consequential events (like those in France in the 1790s) that shall lead eventually to the arrival of the millennium. To put it differently, the final significance of a word is gradually realized as the writer (or speaker) ponders socio-political implications (i.e. "consequences") of the thing represented. The writer therefore takes arbitrary decisions about how to establish sign-referent relations on the basis of his or her own understanding of the current state of affairs. This arbitrary process of signification often works outside the bounds of standard semantics developed by dictionary makers, as best exemplified by Pigott's concept of "revolution" formulated in reaction to Johnson's.

Not only does Pigott's lexicographic work put into practice Priestley's theory of signification, but it also fits in with Priestley's expectations of the final language to be used in the future millennial kingdom. It is worth noting that Priestley saw the French Revolution as a sign from God that world history was drawing to an end, as the fulfillment of Biblical prophecies of the Second Coming of Christ which was to usher humanity in the golden age of happiness. In a letter to a younger Dissenter, he wrote: "You may probably live to see it [the Second Coming]. I shall not. It cannot, I think be more than twenty years" (qtd. in Clarke Garrett 62). For this reason, Priestley thought of

Napoleon, as he told another friend, as “only the *precursor* to the *great* deliverer,” that is, Christ (qtd. in Garrett 65, emphasis in the original). Priestley was convinced that the present revolution in France was providentially ordained in preparation for an everlasting kingdom ruled over by Christ. This conviction finds a clear expression in his reply to Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). In *Letters to the Right Honourable Edmund Burke* (1791), Priestley affirms: “This great crisis, dreadful as it appears in prospect, will be a *consummation devoutly to be wished for*, and though calamitous to many, perhaps to many innocent persons, will be eventually most glorious and happy” (Letter XIII, 122-23, emphasis in the original).[29] And this glorious future, according to him, had been “distinctly and repeatedly foretold in many prophecies, delivered more than two thousand years ago” (119). Priestley championed the French Revolutionary cause in the firm belief that massive upheavals in France would be an essential prerequisite for the building of a free, just, and egalitarian society—the true republic, in other words. The providential nature of the French Revolution as he understood it led him to consistently uphold Revolutionary principles, while many of the initial supporters of the Revolution had turned to conservatism, appalled at escalating violence perpetrated by the French Jacobins.

With this vision of the millennium to be fulfilled imminently (within two decades as Priestley expected), the rise of a perfectly universal and philosophical language seems imminent as well. In Letter XIII to Burke, Priestley famously declares:

> Such events as these teach the doctrine of *liberty*, *civil* and *religious*, with infinitely greater clearness and force, than a thousand treatises on the subject. They speak a language

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[29] This statement is reminiscent of one from *The Essay on Government*: “[W]hatever was the beginning of this world, the end will be glorious and paradisaical, beyond what our imaginations can now conceive” (10).

> intelligible to all the world, and preach a doctrine congenial to every human heart. (114)

Here, the events in Revolutionary France themselves acquire the status of words, forming a universal language that—thanks to being "intelligible to all the world"—proclaims with great clarity radical doctrines of politics and religion, doctrines which shall prove "congenial to every human heart." The passage above recalls Priestley's account of a universal language in *A Course of Lectures on the Theory of Language and Universal Grammar* (1762). He explains that a universal language, as epitomized by the one designed by Bishop Wilkins, "represent[s] ideas *directly*, without the intervention of any sounds" and is thus "*equally understood* by people using any language whatever" (249, emphasis added). In the universal language consisting of the historical events in France, meaning is not prescribed but becomes *directly, equally understandable* to all people in light of the consequences of the revolution. The language spoken by the French Revolution therefore provides a fascinating glimpse of the final language that Priestley envisages shall arise *soon* with the arrival of the republic. In the paragraph following the above quotation, he claims that the French Revolution has achieved "a liberating of all the powers of man from [a] variety of fetters, by which they have hitherto been held" (114). With this statement in mind, the universal language to be used in the millennial period, which shall evolve out of French principles, appears ideally suited for the extension of human liberty, that is to say the free exercise of conscience and the free exchange of different ideas. As such, the final language shall continue to serve the same philosophical purpose as the French Revolution, which enabled human beings to "see what men really are, and what they can do" for the first time in their history (115). Within the framework of Priestley’s millennialism, the French Revolution marks the last stage of the development of the perfect language.

I interpret Pigott’s *Political Dictionary* as demonstrating the language that Priestley identified with the French Revolution *per se*. All of his definitions are solidly grounded in the radical ideas and practices of French Revolutionaries. Thus it can be argued that the definitions given in the *Dictionary* approximate to the ones to be adopted by the future speakers of the perfect language. Put differently, Pigott’s revising of standard meanings brought them very close to the final meanings that shall become intelligible in the millennial kingdom. Pigott was not a millenarian like Priestley, however. He denounces religion as the apparatus of absolutist government, as is illustrated in his definition of “church”: “A patent for hypocrisy; the refuge of sloth, ignorance and superstition, the corner-stone of tyranny” (12). And Pigott’s description of “Adam” exemplifies his irreverent, republican-inflected reading of the Bible: “The only *man* of his time, a true *Sans Culottes*, and the first revolutionist” (3, emphasis in the original). His definition of “bishop,” too, is highly insulting: “a wolf in sheep’s cloathing” (9). Pigott delivers the fiercest attack on the Church in the entry for “faith.” Having introduced the word as a synonym for “credulity, superstition,” he writes:

> The FAITH inspired by *priestcraft* and *state-craft*, is the prime cause of [the] misery and tyranny, which, to this hour, continue to rage through the universe. . . . [A]s [priests’] empire is terribly convulsed by the revolution in France, which has served so essentially to enlighten the human understanding, may it soon be totally destroyed, and may Wisdom, Peace and Philanthropy erect a lasting throne, on the wreck of FAITH, Error, and Superstition! Their reign has been too long; they have ruled with an iron sceptre. It is time for Peace to fix her residence amongst us. The Millennium, however, can never arrive, till FAITH in *priests* and sovereigns be annihilated. (29-30, emphasis in the original)

From Pigott's perspective, Church and state have colluded for so long in establishing and strengthening the tyrannical regime. However, the Catholic Church in France was, as Pigott puts it, "terribly convulsed" by the dechristianization campaign during the French Revolution. Many priests were coerced into abdicating and leaving the country, and others faced the guillotine. Most churches were destroyed, too. Pigott enthusiastically welcomes this attempt to annihilate the Christian faith in Revolutionary France as significant progress towards "the Millennium" in which Wisdom, Peace, and Superstition will be on "a lasting throne." Although Pigott, an advocate of unbelief, does not envision the millennium fulfilling scriptural prophecies, he apparently looks forward to the building of an ideal political society with eager anticipation. This millenarian sensibility also underlies the entry for "France": "The day probably is not far distant, when *all the governments of Europe* will make *amende honorable* to the French Republic, and when *all the people of Europe* will invoke benedictions on it, as their saviour, their deliverer, in having enabled them to purge the earth of their tyrants and oppressors" (48, emphasis in the original). In this solemn declaration, Pigott is convinced that the ongoing revolution in France will ultimately result in lasting benefit to all humanity. The ideology of the French Revolution will be spread all across Europe, culminating in the downfall of the old, oppressive regime and the formation of republican government modeled on the French one in all countries. This will happen, he affirms, in the not-too-distant future. And the revisions of standard language he offers in the *Dictionary*, though they are now considered unacceptable due to their scurrility and republican sentiments, will be universally accepted in the future republic. Pigott's lexicographical work will be acknowledged as having clarified the true, and ultimate, meaning of words as he insists in the title.

To sum up, Pigott adapted the genre of dictionary-making to his political purposes. Pigott's enthusiasm for the French Revolution, coupled with his republican thought, spurred him on to undertake a dictionary project beyond the boundaries of standard methods of lexicography developed by Johnson. Lexicographers had begun to be recognized as foremost authorities on linguistic matters since the mid-eighteenth century; they had high status as professional prescriptivists, i.e. legislators rendering judgments on the use of language. Pigott passes himself off as a lexicographer for the purpose of furthering his political cause effectively. His republican propaganda takes the form of a dictionary, whose entries incorporate French Revolutionary principles. Pigott uses his dictionary as a means to spread those principles in the country and ultimately to instigate a *true* revolution (not like the English one of 1688) aimed at toppling the arbitrary government of Prime Minister Pitt. Indeed Pigott's *Political Dictionary* centers on the concept of revolution, which he frames in direct contradistinction to Johnson's. I argue that Pigott's radicalization of Locke's political ideas—particularly the idea of the right of revolution—is accompanied by a radical application of Locke's semantic theory. The arbitrariness of signification as expounded by Locke allows Pigott liberty—the cardinal virtue for all radicals—to revise prescribed meanings in a way that conforms to the lofty ideal of a republic, a form of government which he believes shall be established in every country in the near future as the result of a French-inspired revolution.

CHAPTER FOUR:

THE LANGUAGE OF RUSTICS: ITS DURABILITY, NATURALNESS, AND ARBITRARINESS IN WORDSWORTH'S LINGUISTIC THEORIES

In 1785, Francis Grose, an antiquary, published *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*, the first important assemblage of dialect in the history of English. The title of this dictionary is provoking, because of its odd mixture of two seemingly incompatible words, "classical" and "vulgar." In the Preface to his work, Grose writes:

> [T]he freedom of thought and speech arising from, and privileged by, our constitution, gives a force and poignancy to the expressions of our common people, not to be found under arbitrary governments, where the ebullitions of vulgar wit are checked by the fear of the bastinado, or of a lodging during pleasure in some gaol or castle. (ix)

The author praises vernacular English for enunciating the principles of liberty enshrined in the English constitution. According to him, the "vulgar wit" couched in the vulgar language with "a force and poignancy" attests to the extension of individual liberty in the country. This became possible, Grose implies, by the fall of arbitrary government, by which he seems to mean the Glorious Revolution of 1688. The freedom of expression achieved in vulgar English presupposes that the English people broke free from despotic rule—at least Grose thinks so.[1] Not only does he celebrate provincial speech as embodying the spirit of English liberty, he also goes on to boldly claim that he collected non-standard words from "the most *classical* authorities; such as soldiers on the long march, seamen at the capstern, ladies disposing of their fish, and the colloquies of a

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[1] As I discussed in the previous chapter, Charles Pigott, the author of *A Political Dictionary* (1795), would never have agreed with this thought.

Gravesend boat” (xiv, emphasis added). This statement directly challenges the whole basis on which the concept of “classical” was framed in the last half of the eighteenth century. Here Grose calls into question the conventional distinction between “classical” and “vulgar”—a distinction already erased visually in the title—drawn by the standardizers of English, especially Samuel Johnson.

Grose’s defense of regional dialects represents an oppositional stance against Johnson’s exclusion of them from standard vocabulary—an exclusion that seems to the antiquary arbitrary along the lines of arbitrary governmental regulation. Grose suggests that this arbitrary linguistic exclusion, for which he holds Johnson responsible, should be at an end given that the nation no longer remains under an arbitrary government. In the Preface to his *Dictionary,* Johnson denounces “cant” and “low terms” as “the spawn of folly or affectation, which arise from no just principles of speech, and of which, therefore, no legitimate derivation can be shown” (10). As illustrated by etymologies provided for almost all of the words in the *Dictionary*, he considers only words of “legitimate” origin worthy of record. In contrast, cant terms used by “the laborious and mercantile part of the people” do not count as “the durable materials of a language,” because many of those words “are formed for some temporary or local convenience, and though current at certain times and places, are in others utterly unknown” (37). Johnson insists that the “mutable”—or “fugitive”—nature of cant makes its omission from his dictionary reasonable (37). By dismissing the language of the masses (e.g. laborers and merchants) as unworthy of inclusion in his lexicon, he establishes, whether intentionally or not, the criteria of linguistic politeness that reinforce class divisions. According to Olivia Smith, the *Dictionary* was principally accountable, due to its wide distribution, for making “the demarcation of pure and corrupt usage along class lines” a general assumption about language in the late eighteenth century (16). This demarcation of class differences is made evident in the following passage from the Preface: “illiterate writers will at one time or other, by publick infatuation, rise into renown, who, not knowing the original import of words, will use them with colloquial licentiousness, confound distinction, and forget propriety” (39). As Smith indicates, “illiterate writers” here refer to those who lack knowledge of the *classical* languages, i.e. Latin and Greek, the learning of which was an exclusive privilege of the upper classes (13). Hence, this statement is based on the assumption that only classically educated elites are capable of giving careful thought to how to express their ideas in correct English. Johnson remarks disparagingly that the fame of “illiterate” authors rests solely on “publick infatuation”—the changing tastes of the common people who supposedly speak “fugitive cant.” From his point of view, these authors of colloquial language are to blame for obscuring class distinction and breaking the rules of propriety.

In rejecting this elitist view of language that confirms a disparity between the privileged few and the less privileged, Grose redefines the parameters for the concept of “classical.” His sense of “classical” derives not from ancient Greece and Rome but from a notion of *genuine* English—that is, actual English idioms used by a specific group or in a specific area. For this reason, Grose refers to those from whom he collected a vast body of vulgar usages as “classical authorities.” The real value of the dictionary he compiled lies in his in-person interviews with these authorities on the vernacular. Whereas Johnson’s lexicography drew on his reading of the English literary canon, Grose’s is grounded solidly in his extensive fieldwork, on which his other antiquarian studies are based, too.[2] How Grose conceives a radically new idea of "classical" in opposition to Johnsonian lexicographical principles is also illustrated by his reference to "those burlesque phrases, quaint allusions, and nick-names for persons, things, and places, which, from long uninterrupted usage, are made *classical* by *prescription*" (xi, emphasis added). This prescription by which non-standard expressions are labeled "classical" is markedly different from the prescriptions promoted by English's standardizers.[3] The standardizers often based their judgments about language usage on class-bound notions of propriety. In Grose's view, however, many coarse terms have been elevated to classical status due to their "long uninterrupted usage." They, according to him, "so frequently occur in our common conversation and periodical publications" that the making of a canting dictionary like his "is extremely useful . . . not only to foreigners, but even to natives" (x)—though Johnson would still have regarded such vulgar terms as not belonging to standard vocabulary because their usage (albeit "long uninterrupted") has no precedent in the works by prominent authors. Johnson and other standardizers prescribed language on the basis of the books of old writers, while Grose insists that prescription be a fair reflection of the language of the living.

My ultimate objective in this chapter is to provide new insight into Wordsworth's theory of poetic language, especially in terms of his relationship to Locke. Grose's

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[2] A man of lifelong passion for relics of the past, and a fellow of the Society of Antiquarians, Grose conducted during his lifetime an extensive fieldwork on British antiquities such as dialect, folklore, and military music. This research produced the following publications: *A Provincial Glossary, with a Collection of Local Proverbs, and Popular Superstitions* (1787); *Military Antiquities* and *A Treatise on Ancient Armour* (1786); *The Antiquities of Scotland* (1791); and *The Antiquities of Ireland* (posthumous, 1796). In 1811 *Lexicon Balatronicum*, the expanded edition of his *Classical Dictionary*, was published, with the subtitle "A Dictionary of Buckish Slang, University Wit, and Pickpocket Eloquence."

[3] Susan Manly makes the same point in her brief discussion of the *Classical Dictionary*. Concerning the quoted passage, she comments that "[t]his prescription is quite distinct in its political tendencies from the arbitrary linguistic exclusion . . ." (72). See her *Language, Custom and Nation in the 1790s* 71-72.

Classical Dictionary serves as a useful starting point for my reading of Wordsworth. Although Wordsworth follows the example of Grose in praising the language of rural classes in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, he—unlike the antiquarian—ascribes to it durableness, which has been thought of an important feature of standardized English. Yet linguistic durability in Wordsworth's theory does not spring from the same source as the standardizers' language. I will locate this source in Wordsworth's texts, and demonstrate how his idea of durable language being used in a rural village links him to Locke's linguistic principles as regards the arbitrary relation of words to thoughts. Additionally, I will argue that Wordsworth's longing for poetic diction to be natural is concomitant with a desire to arbitrarily privatize the language of rustics—a desire to capitalize on Locke's concept of arbitrary private language. The final section of this chapter discusses Wordsworth's explanatory note to "The Thorn," a poem included in *Lyrical Ballads*. I will show that his sense of words-as-things, which apparently dissociates him from Lockean linguistics, has its roots in Locke's view of words as voluntary signs.

Francis Grose and Wordsworth: the Question of a Durable Language

A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue has special significance for my discussion of Wordsworth in two respects. To the best of my knowledge, I am the first to bring Grose's work up for the study of Wordsworth's linguistic theories. Obviously, in the first place, Grose's careful recording of the vulgar language set a precedent for Wordsworth's celebration of the language of rustics.[4] Despite no mention of Grose in his work, it is highly likely that Wordsworth knew the *Classical Dictionary,* which was a bestseller of the time. Moreover, Grose's dictionary was the largest ever collection of its kind, containing more terms (about 9000) than any previous vulgar dictionary.[5] And most important, according to Janet Sorensen, the *Classical Dictionary* differed significantly from its predecessors in that it made no effort to criminalize substandard English (See 437, 446-50).[6] Whereas collections of cant of the early to mid eighteenth century attributed cant language in a deprecating way to outsider groups such as criminals, beggars, or gypsies, Grose renames it simply as the "vulgar tongue" and associates it with the "common people" of Britain all of whom are entitled to enjoy British liberty, which distinguishes the country from *anciens régimes* on the Continent. His lexicographical project aims to revalue cant words—which became representative of the vulgar population in general (no longer of social outsiders)—as "part of a free national-popular culture" (Sorensen 437). This attempt to advance the broader concept of national culture to include the vulgar, a culture in which class boundaries are blurred, profoundly influences Wordsworth.[7]

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[4] But it should be noted that while Wordsworth is interested in the language actually spoken in a rural locale, Grose's lexicon includes slang words used in urban areas, that is to say "[t]he fashionable words, or favourite expressions of the day" that have "f[ound] their way into our political and theatrical compositions" (x).

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[5] A number of cant and vulgar dictionaries had appeared by the late eighteenth century. In the third edition of the *Classical Dictionary* (1796), Grose himself lists the four canting dictionaries he consulted for the new additions to his collection: Thomas Harman, *A Caveat for Common Cursetors, Vulgarly Called Vagabones*, 1566-66; 2) Richard Head, *The Canting Academy; or, Villanies Discovered: Wherein Are Shewn The Mysterious and Villanous Practices of That Wicked Crew*, 1674; 3) Tuus Inimicus, *Hell Upon Earth; Or the Most Pleasant and Delectable History of Whittington's Colledge, Otherwise (Vulgarly) Called Newgate*, 1703; 4) [Anon.] *The Scoundrel's Dictionary; or, an Explanation of the Cant Words Used by Thieves, Housebreakers, Street Robbers, and Pickpockets about Town*, 1754.

Other eighteenth-century cant dictionaries Grose might have known are: B. E., *A New Dictionary of Terms, Antient and Modern of the Canting Crew, in its several Tribes of Gypsies, Beggers, Thieves, Cheats, &C*, 1699; [Anon.], *New Canting Dictionary* (1725); Humphrey Potter, *New Dictionary of All the Cant and Flash Languages, Both Ancient and Modern*, [late eighteenth century]. Most of these collections, as clearly indicated by their titles, tended to criminalize and isolate *low* language, regarding it as something outside national culture.

[6] Although Sorensen's essay "Vulgar Tongue: Canting Dictionaries and the Language of the People in Eighteenth-Century Britain" (2004) is not a single-minded devotion to the study of Grose's work, it provides the most comprehensive analysis of the *Classical Dictionary* to date.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that Wordsworth vindicated the vulgar language in exactly the same way as Grose had done. As indicated above, Grose embraces the “fugitive” character of vulgar terms, against which Johnson fulminated. They, as Grose himself observes, “generally originate from some trifling event, or temporary circumstance, on falling into disuse, or being superseded by new ones, vanish without leaving a trace behind” (x). On the grounds of this did Johnson omit vulgarisms from his dictionary, but it is on the same grounds that Grose legitimizes his recording of those words, i.e. leaving traces of them.[8] As a collector of antiquities, he showed a lifetime commitment, to quote from the article on him in the *DNB*, to “mak[ing] the remains of the past more intelligible and accessible to his lay readers.” With this aim in view, Grose wants to demonstrate, as Sorensen has pointed out, that cant and vulgar languages “have histories that must be preserved” and be made available to modern readers, arguing against Johnson’s dismissal of them as having no *legitimate* history (449). Grose’s entry for “Carvel’s Ring” illustrates what kind of history he thought worth preserving:

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[7] This reappraisal of the vulgar is prompted in Pigott’s *Political Dictionary*, too. He defines “vulgar” as “the aristocratic epithet given to the most useful, the most industrious, and the most valuable part of the community” (189). He introduces “vulgar” as a pejorative term connoting an aristocratic disdain for the laboring classes, rather than as a neutral one as Grose uses it. But those referred to by “vulgar,” Pigott asserts, hardly deserve this term; they are unfairly awarded the epithet.

[8] In the entry for “barber,” for example, Grose states that the expression “That’s the barber” was used among “the common people about the year 1760” to show “their approbation of any action, measure, or thing.” He does not explain—probably because he himself does not know—why the word “barber” became associated with unqualified approval. Whatever the reason, this association was no longer formed after 1760’s. Sometimes, as in the case of “bore,” he indicates when a given term was especially popular among speakers. Meaning “one who *bores* the ears of his hearers with an uninteresting tale,” the word “bore,” according to Grose, was “much in fashion about the years 1780 and 1781” (emphasis added). But the reason is not given. As suggested by his use of the verb “bore” in the entry, the noun “bore” signifying someone who is very boring seems to have derived from its verb form. Interestingly, however, the entry for “bore” (n.) in Johnson’s *Dictionary* differentiates three senses all of which are related only to a hole, although Grose’s “bore” is now among the standard English vocabulary. Did Johnson regard the word as having *il*legitimate origin and therefore leave it out of his dictionary? It is uncertain whether he knew the term “bore” as it was defined by Grose. The *OED* lists two senses of “bore” (n.) that are close to Grose’s: “A thing which bores or causes ennui; an annoyance, a nuisance” (the first recorded occurrence in 1778); and “A tiresome or uncongenial person; one who wearies or worries” (in 1812).

> Carvel’s Ring. The private parts of a woman. Hans Carvel, a jealous old doctor, being in bed with his wife, dreamed that the Devil gave him a ring, which, so long as he had it on his finger, would prevent his being made a cuckold: waking, he found he had got his finger the Lord knows where.

Grose here presents etymological research that is not in accordance with Johnson’s lexicographical standards. “Carvel’s Ring” has its roots in a folk tale, an unreliable source from Johnson’s perspective. Grose suggests that the legitimate history of a word can be traced not only by the scholarly study of etymology but also in folklore and legends. Though “Carvel’s Ring” fell into disuse, the recording of it has value for Grose in that such a vulgar expression deriving from the local folklore reveals something about the minds of local people.[9] Furthermore, as Jon Mee has similarly noted[10], the mutability of slangy usages for Grose renders them fit for freedom of speech and expression. The unique strength of the language of the vulgar comes, Grose implies, from what Johnson saw as its major defect, i.e. its lack of durableness. A mutable aspect of the common people's language makes it a "forceful" and "poignant" vehicle for "vulgar wit" as Grose puts it.

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[9] The importance that Grose places on folklore is demonstrated in his entry for “dun,” too.

> Dun. An importunate creditor. Dunny, in the provincial dialect of several counties, signifies *deaf*; to dun, then, perhaps may mean to deafen with importunate demands: some derive it from the word *donnez*, which signifies *give*. But the true original meaning of the word, owes its birth to one Joe Dun, a famous bailiff of the town of Lincoln, so extremely active, and so dexterous in his business, that it became a proverb, when a man refused to say, Why do not you *Dun* him? that is, Why do not you set Dun to arrest him? Hence it became a cant word, and is now as old as since the days of Henry VII.

Unlike “Carvel’s Ring,” the term “dun” is still used today, though mostly as a verb. Johnson also included the word in his *Dictionary*, defining it (noun) as “a clamorous, *importunate*, troublesome *creditor*” (emphasis added). As indicated by my emphasis, Grose’s definition itself was taken from Johnson’s *Dictionary*, but he deliberately neglected the lexicographer’s account of the origin of “dun.” According to Johnson, “dun” (v.) was derived from the Saxon *dunan* signifying “to clamour”; hence, “dun” came to mean “to claim a debt with vehemence and importunity.” Johnson regards “dun” (n.) as a derivative of its verb form. On the other hand, Grose provides two possible etymologies of “dun” and then refutes them by identifying a folk story of Joe Dun as the source of “the true original meaning of the word.” In fact, the passage concerning Joe Dun appears verbatim in a journal titled *The British Apollo: or, songster’s magazine: containing a choice selection of English, Irish, and Scotch songs, cantatas, duets* . . . (No.60, published in 1708). The *OED* quotes this passage from *The British Apollo*, not Johnson’s dictionary, as clarifying the etymology of “dun” (n.). This is an illuminating example that Grose’s preference for folklore over Johnsonian lexicography led to the identification of a correct etymology.

[10] See Jon Mee, “Language” 373-34. He states that “Grose celebrated that mutability [of dialect] as the product of English liberty” (373). But this statement seems to me slightly misleading. Mutability is intrinsic to regional language, not the product of something else. It seems more right to say that people felt

Wordsworth, however, does not share with Grose this new appreciation of the mutability of vulgar English. In the Preface to the third, expanded edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1802)[11], Wordsworth remarks that rustic language proceeding from the "*durable* . . . manners of rural life"—as the poet himself paraphrases, from "*repeated* experience and *regular* feelings" in rural communities—is a "*more permanent*" language than that which is used by neoclassical authors who are "indulg[ing] in *arbitrary* and *capricious* habits of expression, in order to furnish food for fickle tastes, and fickle appetites, of their own creation" (60-61, emphasis added). In other words, the speech of rustics he envisages consists, to quote Johnson's phrase again, of "durable materials," which in turn display the simple (hence tending to be durable) lifestyle of rustic people. At this moment, Wordsworth seems to bring himself surprisingly close to Johnson—whose ideas about language and prose style, in his view, contributed enormously to the forming of later writers' *arbitrary* habits of expression[12]—in that they both attribute

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less constrained in expressing their thoughts when they used non-standard terms owing to their mutable qualities.

[11] The 1798 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* had the short Advertisement, but it was replaced by the far lengthier Preface in 1800. This Preface was expanded again in the third edition of 1802. I am using the 1802 Preface included in Michael Mason's edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (New York: Longman, 1992).

[12] Although Wordsworth here does not mention Johnson's name, it is obvious that the lexicographer is a prime target in his criticism of contemporary writers. In the case of Hazlitt, as I noted in Chapter one, he openly criticizes Johnson's literate style for being grounded in "arbitrary pretension."

durability to their idioms. As I will illustrate, there are a number of significant differences in the way that Wordsworth and Johnson each conceive of linguistic durability. Yet Wordsworth’s craving for durable language certainly distances him from Grose, with whom he appears to align himself in the revaluation of the language of the middle and lower classes. This poses something of a paradox to Wordsworth. He praises a rustic’s language, a language *really* spoken by his contemporaries in English countryside, as the paradigmatic form of natural poetic language. Nevertheless, this real language, as Johnson and Grose both pointed out, lacks durability that is usually ascribed to standardized English. Many of the rustic diction will definitely fall into disuse sooner or later. Grose transforms this mutable nature of vernacular forms of English into a source of freedom of expression, whereas Wordsworth wants his new poetic diction to be even “more permanent” than the refined language of the educated class. How can he make the language of rural classes, which is potentially liable to change, more durable than the standard literary language which, in its fixed form, appears to have very little room for further change?

I will address this question in the present chapter by exploring the complex relationship that Wordsworth cultivated with the arbitrariness of language, as will be the case of the next chapter on Coleridge. To this end, I first find it necessary to examine their responses to linguistic prescription in the eighteenth century. Wordsworth and Coleridge largely embraced the codification of English. They did not model themselves, therefore, after some late eighteenth-century poets who, frustrated with linguistic standardization, invented pseudo-archaic English in order to revive the supposed vigor and originality of a primitive language.[13] Nonetheless they thought, as did other authors of their time, that English had deteriorated to the point of being totally unsuited to poetry due to the arbitrary standards of the refined language that the standardizers laid down. English appeared to have been deprived of its original poetic properties. As Smith has noted, critics and readers at the turn of the eighteenth century did not find the poems of the *Lyrical Ballads* "exceptionally challenging," for many of them shared a "desire for a simpler poetic language" in the belief that "*artificiality* was detrimental to the writing of good poetry" (208, emphasis added). Richard M. Turley in his *The Politics of Language in Romantic Literature* (published in 2003) also points out that from the standpoint of Romantics, "the misguided attempts of grammarians" to Latinize English—along with their "classical rules of grammar and literary composition"—produced an "*artificial* and contrived idiom" (5, emphasis added).

"Arbitrary" was a derogatory term that Wordsworth and Coleridge often applied to these artificial qualities of late eighteenth-century literary styles. The 1802 Preface of *Lyrical Ballads* contains several occurrences of the word "arbitrary." Wordsworth criticizes his neoclassical antagonists for having fallen into "arbitrary and capricious habits of expression" as well as into "false refinement or arbitrary innovation" (61-62). Their poetic diction, he continues to disapprove, is "arbitrary and subject to infinite caprices" (79). At the back of his mind, however, is a nagging worry that his language, too, may have been affected by "arbitrary connections of feelings and ideas with particular words and phrases" (84). In the Appendix of the 1802 edition, Wordsworth again attacks neoclassical poetic diction for lacking "natural connection[s]" with thoughts and feelings, and thus for “differing materially from the real language of men in *any situation*” (88, emphasis in the original). Contrary to the poets of this *un*natural language, “[t]he earliest Poets of all nations,” he claims, “generally wrote from passion excited by real events; they wrote *naturally*” (88, emphasis added). In the *Essay, Supplementary to the Preface* (1815), too, the poet is wary of language being “subject to endless fluctuations and arbitrary associations.”[14] As these statements illustrate, “arbitrary” in Wordsworth’s texts refers to not only a general tendency towards artificial diction but also an individual writer’s norms of correctness, which he dismisses as capricious. In both cases, arbitrary language prevents writers from accessing the “elementary feelings” of ordinary people (Preface 60). Wordsworth derides these writers, saying that they erroneously “think that they are conferring honour upon themselves and their art, in proportion as they separate themselves from the sympathies of men” (61). Coleridge uses the word “arbitrary” in the same sense as Wordsworth. His attack on eighteenth-century literary styles is delivered in a manner reminiscent of Wordsworth’s. He holds in the *Biographia Literaria* that “faulty elder poets,” followers of Alexander Pope, produced “fantastic and arbitrary” language because they sought “the subtleties of intellect” and “the starts of wit” at the expense of “the passion and passionate flow of poetry”—that is to say, the naturalism of poetic language (168). Besides weakening English’s kinship with genuine passion and thereby making it unfit for the composition of poetry, the highly elaborate diction as practiced by neoclassicists built a linguistic barrier between them and less educated people as I noted in the discussion of Johnson. In protest of this arbitrary and undemocratic language, Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s linguistic projects aspire to an egalitarian vision based on the assumption, to quote Smith, that "'mere native English' is the basis of everyone's language" (217). As she correctly phrases, "arbitrary" in Wordsworth's and Coleridge's theories of language denotes "what is socially imposed and socially divisive" (214). Summing up, neither nostalgic about the mythic past nor happy with the intense prescriptions of professional grammarians, Wordsworth and Coleridge aim to create the literariness of their work in the language that is in accord with the real world and the commonness of humanity. In other words, their goal is to produce a *natural* literary language, as opposed to *arbitrary* (i.e. unnatural) diction of mid to late eighteenth-century literature.

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[13] Most notably, Chatterton. See Elfenbein's "Romantic poetry and the standardization of English" 81-82.

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[14] William Wordsworth, *The Major Works including* The Prelude, ed. Stephen Gill (New York: Oxford UP, 2000) 660.

To begin with, I would like to delve more deeply into Wordsworth's idea of linguistic durability as presented in the Preface. Frances Ferguson in her *Wordsworth: Language as Counter-Spirit* (1977) explains this idea in terms of his use of figures. She maintains that for Wordsworth, the durability of poetic diction is achieved by "the persistence of figural language itself at all levels and in all varieties of speech"; and that figures in his poetry "are seen as figures only through the temporal changes which repeated experience reveals in them" (20). This argument by Ferguson is not entirely clear to me, because she does not illustrate her point with examples drawn from the poems of the *Lyrical Ballads*. But it is clear that Ferguson understands linguistic durability as being achieved by the texture of figurative language. Although her argument is valid in its own right, I see Wordsworth's pursuit of a durable idiom in the context of English's standardization that had reached completion by the time he prepared *Lyrical Ballads* for publication.[15] He asserts that the common language of English peasants is

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[15] All the important texts of linguistic standardization had been published by the last decade of the eighteenth century: Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755); Robert Lowth, *A Short*

"more permanent" and "far more philosophical" than classically-based English, for the former arises out of "the sameness and narrow circle of their intercourse"—in short, their "durable" way of life (60-61). The word "permanent" or "durable" was often associated with aspirations towards correcting and improving language in the prescriptive tradition. Priestley in his *Observations of Style* (1761), for instance, remarked that modern authors found themselves nearly unable to "contribute to the permanency" of the English language because of much effort that language reformers had devoted to fixing the tongue (60). And Johnson expressed in the Preface to his *Dictionary* the hope that his "signs might be permanent, like the things which they denote" (24). His lexicon was meant to include only "durable materials." Another use of "durable" in this sense is found in Swift's *A Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue* (1712), which I discussed at length in the introduction. Swift proposed founding a language academy that would make "Words more durable than Brass," and that, as such, could help produce literature that "our Posterity may read a thousand Years hence, with Pleasure as well as Admiration" (38). In addition, Wordsworth's attribution of "philosophical" properties to rustic language appears to link his poetic project to seventeenth-century philosophical language schemes, whose aim was to construct an artificial language that would be perfectly understood by speakers of all languages thanks to its universal, permanently fixed signs.

Introduction to English Grammar (1762); Thomas Sheridan, *A Course of Lectures on Elocution* (1762); George Campbell, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776); Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783); Robert Nares, *Elements of Orthoepy* (1784); John Walker, *Critical Pronouncing Dictionary* (1791); and Lindley Murray, *English Grammar* (1795). According to Elfenbein, Murray's *English Grammar* sold three million copies in the first half of the nineteenth century, and Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* had sales of approximately 18,500 during the decades around the turn of the century (26-27). Elfenbein writes: "The works that literary scholars have come to think of as major publications of the early nineteenth century [i.e. those of canonical Romantics] were, for the most part, small drops in a flood of works disseminating pure English" (35).

The Durability of Rustic Language and Its Claim to Naturalness

As we have seen, Wordsworth's conception of linguistic durableness derived from prescriptive expectations. It should be noted, however, that what renders the vulgar language of the poor durable (or permanent) in his philological theories as outlined in the Preface is not a received set of rules as for prescriptivists but the communal homogeneity that rustic settings supply. This is made explicit in the familiar passage from the Preface where he raises a spirited defense of the ordinary language of rural workers:

> Low and rustic life was generally chosen, because in that condition the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; . . . and lastly, because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature. The language, too, of these men is adopted (purified indeed from what appears to be its real defects, from all lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust) because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived; and because, from their rank in society and the sameness and narrow circle of their intercourse, being less under the influence of social vanity they convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions. Accordingly, such a language, arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings, is a more permanent, and a far more philosophical language . . . . (60-61)

This line of thought might lead to the conclusion that a close-knit community in the country Wordsworth pictures has a durable language as long as its members continually (or "hourly") check whether their language usage successfully conveys the everyday realities of their communal life. To put it another way, the durability of a language peculiar to a specific rural area is to be attained as its inhabitants fit their words continually to their "repeated experience and regular feelings." This communal homogeneity, which for Wordsworth forms the basis of linguistic durability, results from those people's low social status and the simplicity of their lifestyle—living conditions under which "our elementary feelings . . . may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated" in a language that is "plainer and more emphatic" than the one of learned people (60). Another contributing factor in the formation of a durable language in a rural town is the immediacy of a natural landscape. A diction of peasants and shepherds is made durable by their exposure to "the beautiful and permanent forms of nature." To elaborate further, the unchangeability of natural features in the immediate vicinity makes it easier for rustic peasants to reach agreement about the particular expressions to be imposed on their first-hand, shared experience of those features. When Wordsworth says that rural inhabitants have talked "hourly" with the forms of nature around them into which their "essential passions" are incorporated, he refers to their *constant* effort to stabilize (and thereby make durable) the language on the basis of their "regular [i.e. genuine] feelings" about the immediate surroundings. This point seems to be highlighted in the following remark by Ferguson: "[Rustic language] is not a language which sprang forth fully formed and without check, but is instead one which has refined itself from within—by bringing its words to the test of 'repeated experience'" (19).

In sum, Wordsworth argues that the language of the people in a rural community is plain and truthful (thus suitable to express real human passion), and has achieved its stability, and durability as well, by general agreement among community members, not by the arbitrary standards set by a group of self-proclaimed experts on language. In other words, the rustic speaks a *natural* language. For this reason, the poet should closely examine the language of rural dwellers in order to "write naturally" as the earliest poets did. Particularly, Wordsworth calls for investigation into how workers in rural occupations have been in *communication* with “the best objects from which the best part of language [that is, the language of those workers] is originally derived.” This statement appears to affirm the poet’s commitment to the doctrine of natural language; it seems a polemic against Locke’s linguistics founded on the propositions that words signify only ideas, not things, and that these word-idea connections are purely arbitrary, by no means natural or essential. In his system words stand for things only indirectly. But the Wordsworthian rustic does not suffer from the gap between words and things, a gap that became unbridgeable as Locke assigned priority to the arbitrary ties between words and ideas. As William Keach notes, the natural world into which the rustic’s words and passions are directly incorporated in Wordsworth’s theory “exists beyond or outside language and can therefore legitimize authentic references to it” (“Romanticism and Language” 108). Of crucial importance in representing nature *authentically*, accordingly, is the intimate familiarity with the thought and language of the poor living in close proximity to such natural objects as lakes and mountains. In this sense, the *real* language of countrymen serves as a focal point of reference in measuring the authenticity (i.e. naturalness) of poetic utterance. This implies that the profound influence of nature on the human mind can be demonstrated only through the native idiom of a rustic locale. Wordsworth’s letter of January 1816 to Francis Wrangham clearly formulates this idea: “Throughout, objects . . . derive their influence not from what they are actually in themselves, but from such as are bestowed upon them by the minds of those who are *conversant* with or affected by those objects” (De Selincourt 276, emphasis added). Despite a span of approximately 15 years between this letter and the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth’s theory of poetic language is surprisingly consistent as suggested by his choosing of analogous words “communicate” (Preface) and “conversant” (letter).

It seems worthwhile at this point to compare Wordsworth’s notion of the rustic with that of Charles Pigott, whose radical lexicography was the subject of the previous chapter. His *Political Dictionary* contains the entry for “rustic,” which reads:

> The poor labourer, who toils all the live long day, to procure, by the sweat of his brow, enjoyment for another. He tills the ground, and sows the seed, but another comes to reap the harvest. He is mocked with the beautiful profuseness of nature; but denied to partake of her bounties. He cultivates her flowers, but cannot share her fruits. Great God! if this is ever to be the state of man on earth, happy had it been had he never been born! (139)

Defined in terms of class antagonism, the rustic here is a farm worker ruthlessly exploited by the landowner. In light of Wordsworth’s reflections on rustic life, the above picture of the rustic becomes particularly dismal when he is portrayed as being “mocked with the beautiful profuseness of nature,” not as talking with the beautiful forms of nature as in the Preface. Given the fact that the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) appeared only three years after the *Political Dictionary*, this difference in the way the two writers perceive the rustic is striking. While Pigott thinks of the rustic as a representative of those suffering oppression under the tyrannical regime, Wordsworth credits the rustic with speaking a passionate language directly derived from nature, a language free of the arbitrary signifying relation between word and idea. To put it differently, Pigott’s rustic was conceived as a refutation of absolute arbitrary power as it was denounced in Locke’s political writings, whereas Wordsworth’s rustic refuses to accept the principle of arbitrariness upon which Locke’s linguistic theories are based. This illustrates that

Locke's linguistic and political conceptions of the arbitrary were deeply influential in shaping the idea of the rustic in the late eighteenth century.

The Arbitrary Quality of Natural Language

Wordsworth's presentation of the rustic as opposing Locke's doctrine of linguistic arbitrariness appears to be highly problematic, however. He states that the rustic's conversation with nature takes place hourly, the implication being that rustic language held up as a model for natural poetic diction has in fact arbitrary properties. As I have shown so far, his belief in the durableness of rustic dialect is posited on the premise that a rural community provides an ideal environment for the meaning of words to be decided on by common consent. According to James C. McKusick, what truly attracted Wordsworth to the language of "[l]ow and rustic" people is the apparent ease of linguistic "rectification" that a rural environment brings, i.e. a constant process of "determin[ing] the referents of arbitrary signs by establishing shared conventions" (112).[16] A country village, in Wordsworth's view, is likely to be a perfect setting for *rectifying* language on a communal basis by virtue of "the sameness of narrow circle of [the villagers'] intercourse" (61). Hans Aarsleff, whose study of language (and opinion of Wordsworth as well) influenced McKusick considerably, also explains that rectification occurs "within the communal context of shared experience" (376). Especially, "[n]ature and the simple tasks of rural living," Aarsleff goes on to indicate, create the communal context in which “the best referents for the rectification [are] afford[ed]” (377). A rural town in this respect turns out to be, I would like to emphasize, a place where the stabilization of language by voluntary, mutual consent is taking place most successfully. The homogeneity of rural life and the plain language (“simple and unelaborated expressions”) of lowly speakers cause linguistic rectification to proceed in a smooth way—even more smoothly than in urban towns where grammatical and lexical rules drawn up by linguists, which themselves often disagree on details, at best merely reflect models of right usage, not exactly actual usage of language. Accordingly, rural settings offer an outsider like Wordsworth a good opportunity to observe clearly how the people of a particular region have absorbed beautiful natural scenery into their language.

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[16] Aarsleff in *From Locke to Saussure* attributes the term "rectification" to Destutt de Tracy, a French Enlightenment philosopher, to whose ideas Wordsworth would have been first exposed while he toured France in the early 1790's. According to Aarsleff, "De Tracy's writings on the subject date from the late 1790s, a few years before the first Preface of 1800, and de Tracy again published on it just after 1800" (376). From these facts Aarsleff infers that de Tracy's concept of rectification strongly appealed to Wordsworth as he wrote prefaces. "Wordsworth's entire problem," Aarsleff opines, "center[s] on rectification" (376).

In short, he conceives of the task of rectification as being fulfilled most effectively in a country town. But at the same time, this process is assumed to take place regularly in rural areas. Why does Wordsworth postulate that rustic language, which appears to have already been successfully rectified, needs further rectification at regular intervals? I want to stress that it is because of his implicit acceptance of the theory of linguistic arbitrariness as it was formulated by Locke. The arbitrariness of all linguistic signs requires that those in rustic life keep checking whether they are designating the same things using particular signs. Consequently, Wordsworth’s rural village, I would argue, proves to be a place where the arbitrary quality of the Lockean sign is displayed in an exemplary fashion, all the more exemplary given his presupposition that the process of rectification in rustic settings occurs without intervention from outside—given that, to recall what Ferguson said, rustic language “has refined itself from within,” unaffected by external factors. To state this argument again, the idealized community in the countryside serves as a *vivid* illustration of the way the arbitrary power of language performs. The hourly communication of peasants with their natural surroundings confirms that their shared words, whose meaning has been determined by reference to those things, are innately arbitrary. Actually, Aarsleff, and McKusick following suit, already pointed out Wordsworth's subscription to Locke's theory of language. Aarsleff claims that "Wordsworth's critical defence is deeply indebted to the dominant eighteenth-century philosophy," which, under the influence of Locke, put forward as its basis the arbitrariness of language (380). McKusick, in agreement with Aarsleff's view, emphasizes that Wordsworth's reflections on language are not opposed to, but rather "entirely within the mainstream of Lockean linguistics" (118). According to McKusick, Wordsworth uses the term "natural language" to refer simply to "ordinary language," whereas for Coleridge linguistic naturalness results from "individual acts of creation" (114). Building on these discussions, I contend that Wordsworth's idea of the language of humble life as being rectified on a regular basis comes from his recognition that the signs of that language, despite their supposedly vital links with the material world, cannot escape being arbitrary. Rustic language, which he considers naturalistic, turns out to be composed of arbitrary signs.

Now let me consider again his contention that the vulgar language of peasantry is more permanent than the artificial diction of neoclassical poets—a bold assertion even from the standpoint of Grose who unabashedly vindicated provincial speech. What Wordsworth intends to convey here, I would argue, is not that the simple language of rustic speakers is to be lastingly fixed once it undergoes the process of rectification, but rather that they *always* ensure conformity between their words and the objects represented by means of continual rectification. To put it simply, they *never* fail to communicate successfully. No misuse of language attributable to its ineluctable arbitrariness is found in their language. Moreover, their linking of word-forms to referents avoids all kinds of rhetorical and stylistic excess. The presence of the immovable forms of nature and the homogenized community of rural laborers guarantee that their language remains “plainer and more emphatic” all the time than that of metropolitan speakers who have long fallen “under the influence of social vanity.” Wordsworth’s concept of linguistic durability, therefore, is related less to the fixing of language than to the genuineness, or authenticity, of language—that is, how closely its words are connected with “the passions produced by real events” as he puts it elsewhere in the Preface (71).

In consequence, the durableness of language in Wordsworth’s philology differed significantly from that of prescriptive writers, although the former was derived from the latter. As I observed in Chapter one, linguistic prescriptivism in the eighteenth century was motivated, at least partly, by Locke’s warnings against the likely failings of language that are due to its arbitrary aspect. Prescribers of English, especially lexicographers, sought to assure its reliability by fixing the meaning of idiom for good. But Wordsworth responds somewhat differently to Locke’s doubts about adequate communication between speakers. He envisions “the durable materials of a language” (Johnson’s phrase) being produced by a constant process of validating the usage on a communal basis—not on the basis of the rules issued by a few elites. The rustic language emerging out of this process is believed to be natural, entirely free of all the defects that Locke pointed out spring from linguistic arbitrariness—to quote him, free of “the fallacious and illusory use of *obscure* or *deceitful Terms*" (*Essay* 510, emphasis in the original), or to quote Wordsworth again, of "capricious habits of expression" and "false refinement," which he collectively terms "arbitrary" in a derogatory sense. The meaning of a rustic's word is not supposed to be distorted at personal whim. Hence, the language of rustic men functions flawlessly, to borrow Locke's wording, as the "common Tye of Society" (402). Wordsworth describes the words of rural language as not being fraught with the problems arising from their inherent arbitrariness. The regular occurring of rectification within a communal context seems to counter the undesirable effects of arbitrary language. Nonetheless, the very fact that this act of clarifying meaning should be regularly called for indicates how acutely Wordsworth is conscious of the arbitrary nature of *all* linguistic signs. Furthermore, the fundamental prerequisites specified by him for the continuous rectification—i.e. a beautiful landscape in the vicinity, a tight-knit local community, and villagers with deep sensitivity to natural features—betray his anxiety about rustic language being vulnerable to the arbitrary abuse of words against which Locke warned. To qualify as a Wordsworthian community in rural surroundings is far from easy. The common language of peasants and shepherds seems to be redeemed from its arbitrariness only under strictly controlled conditions.

In summary, Wordsworth's celebration of a diction of rustic people reveals its arbitrary nature and the resulting vulnerability to the capricious habits of expression. The natural poetic language he aspires to, which arises out of "[l]ow and rustic life," proves to have already possessed arbitrary qualities. Not only this, but the ways that Wordsworth assimilates the language of ordinary people in conversation into his poetic practice are also arbitrary in the same sense that he attacks eighteenth-century diction. In the lengthy passage from the Preface cited above, he says that the real language of country folk has been "purified indeed from what appears to be its real defects, from all lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust." This statement instantly poses two questions: What standards does the poet apply when labeling some of the vulgar expressions of a farm worker as "real defects" and "causes of disgust"? If he does not adopt the vulgar language of rural laborers in its original form (just like Grose or his friend Roberts Burns did[17]) but rather normalizes its peculiarities so as to make it readily intelligible to the general public, what big differences would there be between that vulgar language and the typical language of the educated class? The only significant difference, according to Coleridge, is that "notions, which the rustic has to convey, are fewer and more indiscriminate."[18] This is one of the places in Chapter 17 of the *Biographia Literaria* where Coleridge directly takes issue with the claims made in his friend's critical manifesto. He reasons that the coarse language of peasants and plough-boys is to be barely distinguishable from educated standard English provided that the former is rid of "all provincialism and grossness, and [is] so far reconstructed as to be made consistent with the rules of grammar" (*CMW* 341).[19] Wordsworth begins the Preface by announcing that the principal aim of his poetic program is to fit “a selection of the real language of men . . . to metrical arrangement” (56-57). Elsewhere in the Preface, again, he maintains that “this selection, wherever it is made with true taste and feeling . . . will entirely separate the composition from the vulgarity and meanness of ordinary life” (69-70). And “if selected truly and judiciously,” he quickly adds, rural language “must be necessarily be dignified and variegated, and alive with metaphors and figures” (70). What these remarks suggest is Wordsworth’s voluntary privatization of rustic language, which he praises for faithfully reflecting common human nature, in his words, “the primary laws of our nature” (60). This act of privatizing a language draws him close to Locke, who premised that language has an inherently private, or subjective, nature. As Coleridge astutely observes, “the very power of making the selection”—a private act of selection based on the writer’s own standards of literary taste—“implies the previous possession of the language selected” (*CMW* 345).

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[17] According to the *DNB* article on Grose, he first met Burns on his field trip to Scotland in summer 1789, and they became close friends. Burns wrote a number of verses on Grose, and commented that he had "never seen a man of more original observation, anecdote and remark."

[18] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Major Works including* Biographia Literaria, ed. H. J. Jackson (New York: Oxford UP, 2000) 341. Hereafter abbreviated as *CMW*.

[19] Did Coleridge rightly paraphrase Wordsworth? Don H. Bialostosky examines the accuracy of Coleridge's interpretation of the Preface with scrupulous attention to detail. He concludes that Coleridge "not merely refuted the Preface but re-created it" by means of effective yet occasionally misleading vocabulary (912). With regard to the above quotation from the *Biographia*, Coleridge's paraphrase of Wordsworth's words ("real defects," "causes of dislike or disgust"), Bialostosky specifically attacks his use of the term "provincialism." The critic sees "provincialism" as a derogatory term that implicitly establishes linguistic usage in urban communities as an acceptable standard of the entire society. "Provincialism" therefore dismisses language practice of rural folk as gross and undesirable. As Bialostosky has aptly pointed out, Wordsworth would not have intended "lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust" to be

Hence, there was no need to make the selection from the very beginning. Wordsworth’s poems about the incidents of rustic life consist almost entirely of words commonly used by all English speakers, although he depicts his diction as a modified version of the language of peasants and plough-boys. He assumes that prior knowledge of the language of the poor is a prerequisite to writing about their lives, but this knowledge lacks the depth that it is assumed to have. The familiarity with the language and thought of the vulgar actually required for his poetic composition turns out to be far less intimate

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such prejudices of city dwellers towards provincial language. The grammatical flaws of this language may be one of those “causes of dislike,” but Coleridge is wrong, from the viewpoint of Bialostosky, in presenting the lack of grammar as something of a distinguishing mark of a rustic’s language.

Although Bialostosky provides valuable insight into Coleridge’s (mis)reading of the Preface, it seems unfair to say that his paraphrasing of the Preface was misleading to the point of “re-creating” the document. It appears true that there are some inconsiderate choices of words in his rephrasing, but this occasional carelessness is not so serious as to detract from his argument as a whole.

than that which Grose's readers would have gained from the *Classical Dictionary*. This may provide an explanation for why Wordsworth diverges from Grose in his attitude to "vulgar." As quoted above, he feels anxiety about a possibility that his work might be associated with "the vulgarity and meanness of ordinary life." This desire to place himself *above* vulgarity, a use of "vulgar" with exclusive reference to lower classes, contrasts starkly with Grose's sense of "vulgar" that is socially inclusive and so carries no pejorative connotation. As I emphasized, his radical reappraisal of the vulgar is best exemplified by his blurring of the traditional boundary between "classical" and "vulgar."

Wordsworth's editing of the vulgar language depends primarily upon his preconceived notion about linguistic propriety. His acts of selecting rustic diction or purifying its defects are potentially subject to his own caprices—i.e. *arbitrary*, a pejorative term he himself applied to the stylistic paradigm of neoclassicists. As Keach has noted in his book *Arbitrary Power: Romanticism, Language, Politics* (2004), these acts constitute the exercise of "an arbitrary compositional power" (15). They therefore differ little from the prescriptive tasks that involved *purging* English of colloquialisms and regionalisms, even though there were conflicting opinions regarding proper usage. In consequence, the stress Wordsworth places on the need for selection and modification severely reduces the polemical strength of his own argument for the real language of rustic men. His actual poetic practice undermines the foundations of his theory, rendering the existence of the real language virtually meaningless.[20] Susan Manly provides in her

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[20] For this reason, Coleridge saw "real" as an inappropriate term to be applied to a rural dialect, as something of a misnomer. Nearly at the end of Chapter 17 of the *Biographia*, he draws attention to Wordsworth's "equivocation in the use of the word 'real,'" and reaches the following conclusion: "For 'real' therefore, we must substitute ordinary, or *lingua communis* [common language]. And this, we have proved, is no more to be found in the phraseology of low and rustic life, than in that of any other class" (*CMW* 343-44). In Coleridge's view, Wordsworth fails to notice that local dialects have already gone through the process of linguistic standardization to a considerable degree, although they may still contain

Language, Custom and Nation in the 1790s (published in 2007) an illuminating insight into this disturbing aspect of the selection procedure outlined in the Preface. According to her, Wordsworth adopts “a code of exclusion . . . that imposes a limit on the kind of language which can properly be called ‘real’ in his view” (125). And this exclusionary principle, she goes on to comment, negates “the potential for a democratic linguistic and political inclusiveness” that he promotes elsewhere in the document (126). In this respect, Wordsworth’s setting up of the conversational speech of rural folk as an ideal that poetic diction should attain seems modest, especially when compared to Grose’s paean to provincial dialects in the *Classical Dictionary*. It is Grose who plainly shows the potential for linguistic and political inclusiveness of the non-standard idiom, considering it part of national linguistic inheritance deserving of study, as well as the embodiment of the English virtues of liberty.

Based on what I have discussed thus far, I maintain that Wordsworth exercises arbitrary power in the course of developing a new kind of poetic diction characterized by naturalness. This claim is also backed up in his letter of June 1802 to John Wilson, where he replies to Wilson’s questions about “The Idiot Boy.” In one of the key passages from the letter, Wordsworth explains “what is meant by the word Poet,” a subject he already touched on in the Preface (70):

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some odd-sounding expressions. Society has forcefully standardized the linguistic uses of all classes for the purpose of producing *lingua communis*, to use Coleridge’s words, “the general language of cultivated society” (344). This “common language” accommodates every form of language with its own peculiarities that is spoken in a particular area or by a particular group, e.g. tradesmen and manufacturers. Coleridge is fully aware that every village, and every group of professional workers, do not use exactly the same language; and further, that everyone’s language, whether a rustic’s or a gentleman’s, has its own “individualities” shaped by “the extent of his knowledge, the activity of his faculties, and the depth or quickness of feelings” (343). In conclusion, the “real language” of indefinite rustics has no unified, coherent entity; hence it is impossible for a writer to adopt it in his work. This explains why Grose’s recording of the vulgar language takes—actually, cannot avoid taking—the form of a dictionary. He does not attempt to record cant language *per se*, an impossible task, but rather compiles a collection of terms and expressions, the fragments of cant language.

> [F]ew descend lower among cottages and fields and among children. A man must have done this habitually before his judgment upon the Idiot Boy would be in any way decisive with me. . . . You have given me praise for having reflected faithfully in my poems the feelings of human nature I would fain hope that I have done so. But a great Poet ought to do more than this he ought to a certain degree to *rectify* men's feelings, to give them new compositions of feeling, to render their feelings more sane pure and permanent, in short, more consonant to nature, that is, to eternal nature, and the great moving spirit of things. He ought to travel before men occasionally as well as at their sides. (De Selincourt 355, emphasis added)

This passage makes it clear that access to "repeated experience and regular feelings" of rustics through an intimacy with their language does not guarantee poetic power. The poet's representation of "the feelings of human nature"—or "the primary laws of our nature"—is insufficient to qualify him as a great poet, however faithfully it is generated. "[B]eing possessed of *more than usual* organic sensibility" as described in the Preface, poets are those who have "descended lower among cottages and fields and among children" (in a condescending manner?), and who have "thought long and deeply" about the passions and expressions of the poor—hard thinking marked by its "repetition and continuance" (62). As Manly perceptively observes, the poet puts himself in this contemplative mood "voluntarily and consciously" (115); and on account of this voluntary quality of his thoughts, the poet is able, as noted above, to "travel before" rustic men whose thoughts are "simply the passively received counterparts of 'the best objects' in nature" (120). Wordsworth replaces his initial insistence on the acquaintance with the ` of ordinary people, in Manly's phrase, with "the poetic reappropriation of their intellectual and emotional processes" (115).

I find this discussion by Manly intriguing in relation to Locke's conception of the linguistic arbitrary, which sees utterance as the voluntary, or arbitrary, act of the individual’s will. As Wordsworth’s use of the word “rectify” in the letter suggests, a word that has special resonance for linguistic prescriptivism as expounded earlier, the rectification of men’s feelings cannot be kept separate from the rectification of their “naked” language, which may be “indelicate, or gross, or [vu]lgar” as he puts it in the letter (354). (Note another use of “vulgar” in a pejorative sense.) The above-quoted passage therefore carries important implications for his linguistic project as it was designed in the Preface. The passage indicates, we might argue, that the greatness of the naturalistic poet lies not so much in his accurate representation of “repeated experience” of those in low and rural life, as in his appropriation of their language, the voluntary act of projecting his own *unusual* sensibility onto that language, which empowers him “to rectify men’s feelings” and even “to give them new compositions of feeling.”

This line of reasoning leads to the conclusion that the naturalism of poetic diction Wordsworth upholds is achieved by the poet’s active privatization of the language used in a rural village, a language distinguished by its naturalness yet already consisting of arbitrary signs of ideas. Wordsworth envisages rural language as originally derived from the permanent forms of nature; it allegedly demonstrates the essential, motivated links between words and things in disapproval of the Lockean theory of signification. His intention to rectify the feelings of lowly speakers—i.e. “render their feelings more sane[,] pure[,] and permanent”—nevertheless harbors a deep desire to bring their language under his voluntary control, that is, to appropriate the fundamental arbitrariness of its signs for his poetic purposes. In this way, he subscribes, though not openly, to the central doctrine of Locke’s linguistic philosophy.

Linguistic Repetition and Wordsworth's (un-)Lockean Stance

This contradictory nature of Wordsworth's relationship to Locke is also shown in the explanatory Note he appended to "The Thorn" in *Lyrical Ballads*. Written for the purpose of explaining the principle of linguistic repetition underlying "The Thorn" and many other poems in the book, the commentary contains his most un-Lockean pronouncement on language:

> There are also various other reasons why repetition and apparent tautology are frequently beauties of the highest kind. Among the chief of these reasons is the interest which the mind attaches to words, not only as symbols of the passion, but as *things*, active and efficient, which are of themselves part of the passion. And further, from a spirit of fondness, exultation, and gratitute, the mind luxuriates in the repetition of words which appear successfully to communicate its feelings. (38-39, emphasis in the original)

This appreciation of the beauty of repeating words springs from an intense awareness of language's limitations. As Wordsworth himself emphasizes, "an attempt is rarely made to communicate impassioned feelings without something of an accompanying consciousness of the inadequateness of our powers, or the deficiencies of language" (38). The last part of this statement identifies two sources of his frustration at language: first, our own inability to adequately convey our feelings; and secondly, the failings of language itself, though he does not explain how these failings have emerged. In a nutshell, Wordsworth affirms that our efforts to express ourselves in language are doomed to failure. This pessimistic assessment of the adequacy of language reflects much of that of Locke, who pointed out the human incapacity for successful communication, and the intrinsic defects of language as well, its words being "doubtful and uncertain in their significations" due to their arbitrary nature (*Essay* 476). As we saw in the first chapter, Locke thought that the only possible way language can become an effective means of conveying ideas from one person to another is to clarify the meaning of every word: "To make Words serviceable to the end of Communication, it is necessary, (as has been said) that they excite, in the Hearer, exactly the same *Idea*, they stand for in the Mind of the Speaker" (478). Locke's emphasis on definition met with a favorable reaction from eighteenth-century lexicographers, Johnson being the most prominent figure among them. Yet their exclusionary practices, omitting from their dictionaries whatever expression they judged non-standard, left writers frustrated at linguistic deficiency, specially, at the limited stock of words given in the current language, i.e. standardized English. We might say, in this regard, that Grose's collecting of dialect from common people ("classical authorities" as he calls them) was motivated by a desire to make up this deficiency.

Wordsworth shares with Grose and other writers frustration over the limitations on language imposed by prescriptivists. However, his way of addressing these limitations is drastically different from Grose's. Wordsworth makes no attempt to remedy the deficiencies in the standard language; on the contrary, he highlights them by repeating words and derives pleasure, or "luxury" in his terminology, from that repetition. To briefly elaborate on this, we are compelled, to quote his own phrases, to "cling to the same words, or words of the same character" (though we try to use a diverse vocabulary) in a desperate effort to satisfy "a craving in the mind" for the successful capturing of our emotions, even as we are painfully aware that this craving shall be far from satisfied owing to the failing of language (38). As Alexander Regier states in his 2009 essay on "The Thorn" and its accompanying commentary, "[r]epetition is a symptom of an unsuccessful communication" (65). At the same time, however, Wordsworth insists that our unfulfilled craving has its merits, leading the mind to take pleasure, or "luxuriate," in the repeated words themselves and consequently to believe that they successfully articulate our innermost feelings. Put differently, words become successful in "communicat[ing] impassioned feelings" by nothing but repetition, which he forcefully distinguishes from mere tautologies. Regier underscores this "seeming incompatibility between the two aspects of repetition," saying that: "repetition can be both craving and luxury, failure and success, lack and fulfillment" (67). One of the ways to account for this incompatibility is to postulate that Wordsworth transformed linguistic deficiency, a source of anxiety for other authors of his time, into a source of pleasure that he could exploit. In Wordsworth's thinking on linguistic matters, the figure of repetition helps us deal with the frustrations we feel about language—not simply about the confines of standard vocabulary, but also about the inevitable failure of verbal communication on which he generally agreed with Locke.

Nevertheless, the goal Wordsworth sets himself in creating repetitive structures in his own poetry appears very un-Lockean. The act of repeating the same words that represent the passion of a poetic character, according to him, brings about the transformation of them into "*things*, active and efficient, which are of themselves part of the passion." That is to say, the poetic words that stand for a passion acquire the qualities of that passion itself through the power of repetition; as such, these words become things deprived of their typical physicality.[21] Wordsworth advances this view of words-as-things in an effort to close the gap between words and things: a gap that had been widening since the seventeenth century, and that became unbridgeable by Locke’s semantic theory which attributed the abuse of words to the ingrained habit of taking them to directly refer to things.[22] In this sense, Wordsworth embarks on much the same project as Priestley, for his connecting of words with things as abstract entities parallels Priestley’s connecting of words with “things of considerable consequence,” another seemingly un-Lockean project on which my second chapter focused. It is also notable here that these things, in both Priestley and Wordsworth, are not limited to the material sphere.

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[21] As Keach has pointed out, "Wordsworth's sense of words-as-things seems to recede from any obvious emphasis on the materiality of language. And 'things' do recurrently lose their materiality in Wordsworth," as in the case of Lucy Gray who was "The sweetest *thing* that ever grew / Beside a human door" (*Arbitrary Power* 28-29, emphasis added). In a similar vein, Regier emphasizes the dual nature of Wordsworth's things: they are both material and immaterial. According to Regier, the words, as things, "lie in the space between the spheres of the material and the immaterial" (73). This space has crucial importance for Wordsworth's poetics.

As was the case in Priestley’s universal language project, however, Wordsworth’s consciousness of words-as-things foregrounds Locke’s concept of signification. In Priestley’s linguistic thought, the signifying relation of words to things is determined by his subjective interpretation of the consequential effects that those things produce. Likewise, it is the Wordsworthian poet’s refined sensibility and serious thoughts about the passion of a rustic character in his poem that elevate his vocal signs to the status of things (which in turn form an integral part of that passion) through the repetition of those signs. As mentioned in my earlier discussion of Wordsworth’s 1802 letter to Wilson, interestingly, this contemplation of the feelings and utterances of rustics is distinguishable by its “repetition and continuance,” evocative of his account in the Note that gives prominence to repetition as a rhetorical device. This means, I contend, that the voluntariness intrinsic to the poet’s “repetition and continuance” in contemplation of the rustic mind characterizes the process of signification occurring in the repetition of his “symbols of the passion.” As noted earlier, repeating a word or group of words over and over again involves a sense of frustration at linguistic limitations, particularly at the limited range of vocabulary supplied by authoritative lexicographers in the context of the rise of standard English. Yet in another account of repetition given by Wordsworth, on the other hand, we are led to *luxuriate* in the repetition of words, feeling “fondness, exultation, and gratitude” in the belief that we have somehow overcome the insufficiency of the given language, albeit temporarily, and, in so doing, succeeded in conveying our intense feelings.

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[22] In understanding the linguistic sensibility of Wordsworth and Coleridge, Michel Foucault’s diachronic study of language in *The Order of Things* proves useful, although it never mentions them. Foucault’s work offers clues as to what the Romantics would have noticed in the ways that words were imposed on things in their age. From the seventeenth century, according to him, “[t]he profound kinship of language with the world was thus dissolved. . . . Things and words were to be separated from one another”; and in the eighteenth century, “the peculiar existence and ancient solidity of language as a thing inscribed in the fabric of the world were dissolved in the functioning of representation” (43). As these remarks suggest, the writers towards the close of the eighteenth century saw the establishment of arbitrary ties between words and things, a degenerate form of signification from the perspective of those who admired what Foucault terms “the Classical order of language” (295). In this system of signs, he explains, “language occupied a fundamental situation in relation to all knowledge: it was only by the medium of language that the things of the world could be known” (296). The writers in the late eighteenth century, however, found themselves being constantly misled by language in their pursuit of an in-depth knowledge of the world due to a great divorce of words from things that had progressed since the previous century. This divorce completed the demise of the Classical linguistic schemes as Foucault understands them.

Wordsworth intends to exploit this potential for luxury that linguistic repetition offers. While common people may unconsciously resort to repetition, their verbal abilities being severely impaired after experiencing extreme emotions, the poet voluntarily and purposefully repeats the same words, thereby setting himself apart from those people and “travel[ing] before” them. He selects the words to be repeated in his poem by the long, constant process of contemplation of rustics’ feelings. This meditative process—just like the ideas formed voluntarily in the individual speaker’s mind in Lockean semantics—is impenetrably private and invisible to others. And the absolute privacy of the poet’s meditations renders the signification of the words being repeated—words chosen carefully as a result of those meditations—necessarily arbitrary. Because of this arbitrariness of the signs, to repeat them in poetry creates a pleasurable experience and a means of coming to terms with what Wordsworth refers to as “the inadequateness of our powers, or the deficiencies of language.”

In my view, this pleasure, or luxury, is specifically derived from differences in meaning—differences arising from the arbitrary quality of the repeated sign. Regier, too, mentions that “repetition often highlights difference rather than equivalence” (65); but he fails to elucidate, it seems to me, how this is true of Wordsworth. Each time a poetic character repeats a specific word or phrase, his or her utterance can possibly take on a fresh layer of meaning and implication, even those beyond the boundaries of standard semantics. This is because the arbitrary connection between the word uttered and the idea it denotes is freshly, and voluntarily, effected in the character’s mind each time the verbal repetition occurs—connections not being bounded by the prescribed standards of lexicography. By taking advantage of the arbitrariness of the sign he repeats, the poet is uniquely able to intensify, and even create, the modes of his character’s passion. To conclude, Wordsworth’s concept of repetition as a strategy to have words merge with things, an apparently un-Lockean position, builds on the theoretical foundations set by Locke’s linguistic account of the arbitrary.

In sum, Wordsworth aligns himself with Grose in appreciating the value of vulgar English, but for different reasons. For Grose, the value of non-standard terms lies in their mutable nature; the mutability of those terms makes them suited to the exercise of freedom of expression. Wordsworth, however, claims that the language of rustics is “more permanent” than the formal language of the elite class. This is an astonishing claim, given that the permanency, or durability, was a defining trait of the standardizers’ English. But the durability of rustic language does not come from the imposition of linguistic norms as in the case of the standardization project, but rather from the homogeneity of a rural community, whose members continually rectify their language on the basis of their “repeated experience and regular feelings.” I am arguing that Wordsworth’s account of how the language spoken in a country village becomes durable betrays his deep awareness of all linguistic signs being arbitrary—that is, his acquiescence of Locke’s principle of arbitrariness. The pure language characterized by its vital links with the forms of nature consists of arbitrary signs. Furthermore, the naturalness that Wordsworth ascribes to his poetic diction turns out to be a product of his rectification of the rustic’s thoughts and words. Put differently, the law of arbitrariness governing rustic language allows the poet to project his own subjectivity into the rustic’s mental processes and hence his or her utterances as well. For Wordsworth, natural poetic language arises from the poet’s voluntary privatization of the language of rustic life; and this notion is bound up with Locke’s proposition that language is inescapably subjective or private. Finally, I maintain that the use of tautology in poetry, which Wordsworth proposes as a strategy to create the essential unity between words and things, is an attempt to appropriate the arbitrariness of the repeated sign and thus to transcend the limitations of the extant language.

CHAPTER FIVE:

"A VOLUNTARY APPROPRIATION" OF ARBITRARY SIGNS:

QUESTIONING COLERIDGE'S DISTINCTION OF NATURAL / ARBITRARY

"The Enamored Rustic" in Worship: Coleridge's Rejection of Wordsworth's Idea of Rustic Language

I briefly discussed in the preceding chapter how Coleridge refuted Wordsworth's conception of the *real* language of rustics. In Chapter 17 of his *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge criticizes his friend for "equivocation in the use of the word 'real.'"[1] From his standpoint, this term was misapplied, since the language native to a specific rural locale differs little from *lingua communis*, "the general language of cultivated society," once it has been "purified from all provincialism and grossness" (344, 341). The only noteworthy aspect of a rustic's language that distinguishes it from the learned languages is the scarcity of the notions conveyable in rustic diction—that is, the ideas that the rustic can express are "fewer and more indiscriminate" (341). Coleridge goes on to elaborate upon this claim, writing that: "the rustic, from the more imperfect development of his faculties, and from the lower state of their cultivation, aims almost solely to convey insulated facts, either those of his scanty experience or his traditional belief" (342).

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[1] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Major Works including* Biographia Literaria, ed. H. J. Jackson (New York: Oxford UP, 2000) 343. All quotations from Coleridge's poems and *Biographia Literaria* refer to this book, hereafter abbreviated as *CMW*. The *Biographia* grew from a short preface projected to be added to a book of collected poems, *Sibylline Leaves* (published in 1817 along with the *Biographia*). Initially the preface was supposed to be five or six pages, but before long Coleridge envisioned a "Preface of 30 pages, relative to the principles of Poetry." According to his letter of March 1815 to Lord Byron, this "general Preface will be pre-fixed [to *Sibylline Leaves*], on the principles of philosophic and genial criticism relatively to the Fine Arts in general; but especially to Poetry" (*CL* IV, 561). Yet, if Wordsworth had not published in 1815 the first collected edition of his poems, titled *Poems*, which included the Preface to the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads*, Coleridge would never have set out to develop the already expanded preface to a massive two-volume work. The re-printing of Wordsworth's Preface provoked Coleridge into thinking seriously about their fundamental disagreements over language and poetry, and into formulating his own critical theory at far greater length than had been initially planned. This enormous expansion resulted in the book encompassing autobiography, discussions about philosophy and religion, and an outstandingly sensitive, professionalized literary criticism.

With respect to this contemptuous view of the rustic's intellect, the following lines from Coleridge's "Constancy to an Ideal Object" (written sometime between 1804-07) make an interesting point. Addressing his own "yearning Thought" (4)—which is his longing for Sara Hutchinson, his wife-to-be, and which seems to him "[t]he only constant in the world of change" (3)—the poet says:

> Such thou art, as when
> The woodman winding westward up the glen
> At wintry dawn, where o'er the sheep-track's maze
> The viewless snow-mist weaves a glist'ning haze,
> Sees full before him, gliding without tread,
> An image with a glory round its head;
> The enamored rustic worships its fair hues,
> Nor knows he makes the shadow he pursues! (25-32)

I would suggest that this latter part of the poem was conceived in response to the Wordsworthian rustic who is said to have been in regular *communication* with "the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived." A woodman climbing up the glen at dawn in the poem happens to see what is known as a "Brocken specter": a ghostly figure that appears when the rising sun casts a magnified shadow of the observer on an early morning mist. Unaware that this mysterious "spectre" is his own shadow, a natural phenomenon that can be explained, the awed woodman worships the image as if it was a deity. In Coleridge's view, the idol worship of this kind cannot be considered equivalent to "communication," which for him means having "an acquaintance with [an object], as renders it capable of being discriminately reflected on" (*CMW* 342). To elaborate further, one becomes *acquainted* with an object of nature—i.e. becomes capable of demonstrating an in-depth knowledge of that object using a wide vocabulary—as a result of deep *reflection* on it, which apparently is an intellectual activity. The implication is clear: only those with a decent education can communicate with nature. Coleridge argues elsewhere in the *Biographia* that in order "for the human soul to prosper in rustic life," it should have both "education" and "original sensibility" as prerequisites for reacting positively to the external stimuli coming from "the changes, forms, and incidents of nature," so that the man has "healthy feelings" and "a reflecting mind" (336). Moreover, the educated people can logically deduce "the indwelling law" governing the "connections of things, or [the] relative bearings of fact to fact," thereby getting at "the true being of things" (342).

"The enamored rustic" in the above poem, by contrast, is unable to articulate clearly, though he may perceive vaguely, how the things surrounding him are inextricably interwoven in conformity with "the indwelling law" of nature. His knowledge of natural phenomena does not extend, as quoted above, beyond "insulated facts" gathered mostly from "his scanty experience or his traditional belief." And on account of this lack of education, the woodman's vocabulary is "very scanty," composed only of "a small number of confused, general terms," which are bound to fail to express all the wonder he feels about the eerie shadow of his own (*CMW* 342). Therefore, rustic diction hardly qualifies as the best language for poetry. According to Coleridge,

> The best part of human language . . . is derived from reflection on the acts of the mind itself. It is formed by a voluntary appropriation of fixed symbols to internal acts, to processes and results of imagination, the greater part of which have no place in the consciousness of uneducated man; though in civilized society, by imitation and passive remembrance of what they hear from their religious instructors and other superiors, the most uneducated share in the harvest which they neither sowed or reaped. (342)

This famous passage from Chapter 17 of the *Biographia* illustrates a sharp difference in the way Wordsworth and Coleridge conceive of "the best part of language."[2] To put it in the terms from this passage, an "uneducated man," e.g. the woodman in "Constancy to an Ideal Object," lacks the ability to reflect on his own feelings, and so to voluntarily fix vocal signs to the "processes and results of [his] imagination." In Coleridge's argument put forward here, this ability, which is not to be expected from most rustics, is an absolute prerequisite to producing the ideal language of poetry. Whereas Wordsworth imagines the rustic mind—on which the beautiful images of nature have been imprinted—producing an authentic, passionate language to be imitated by poets, Coleridge claims that a language best suited for poetic composition comes from reflecting upon the workings of the mind itself and describing them in specific and concrete terms, rather than in "confused, general terms" of rustic language.

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[2] Coleridge announced in 1800 that "The Preface contains our joint opinions on Poetry" (*CL* I, 627). Two years later, however, he became aware that he and his old collaborator's paths had somehow diverged: "altho' Wordsworth's Preface is *half a child of my own Brain* . . . yet I am far from going all lengths with Wordsworth . . . I rather suspect that some where or other there is a *radical Difference* in our theoretical opinions respecting Poetry – / this I shall endeavor to go to the Bottom of" (*CL* II, 830; emphasis added). It was not until 1815 that Coleridge did "go to the Bottom of" this difference. But the long-standing friendship between the two poets had foundered in 1810; and soon afterward Coleridge no longer viewed *Lyrical Ballads* as their collaborative work as it had been originally conceived. Accordingly, when Wordsworth re-published the 1800 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* in 1815, Coleridge felt obliged to clarify why he had come to deny his co-authorship of the book which actually contained only four poems by him, including "The Ancient Mariner." He was now ready to give a full account of his "radical Difference" from Wordsworth as to the principles behind poetic composition, the difference he began to notice as early as 1802. In consequence, Coleridge offers an extended, highly nuanced study of Wordsworth in the *Biographia Literaria* (Chapters 17-20 and 22), a critique that has proven to be unsurpassed in its profundity and scrupulous reading of Wordsworth's text. Chapter 17 particularly remains one of the most controversial and often referenced works in Romantic scholarship. It introduces to us Coleridge as a professional critic who engages directly with Wordsworth's critical theory in an attempt to disavow his alleged contribution to the Preface.

With regard to Coleridge's commentary on the Preface, the following passage from Chapter 14 deserves our attention: "[At] all events, considering [the Preface] as the source of a controversy, in which I have been honored more, than I deserve, by the frequent conjunction of my name with his, I think it expedient to declare once for all, in what points I coincide with his opinions, and in what points I altogether differ" (*CMW* 316). Coleridge's acknowledgement of having been "honored" by "the frequent conjunction" of his name with Wordsworth's in the Preface carries a sarcastic intent, since his primary focus in the subsequent chapters is on disjoining that conjunction by elaborating upon the points on which he "altogether" disagrees with Wordsworth. Judging from the arrangement of its concluding remark, the above extract gives the impression that Coleridge would affirm first the validity of some of the claims put forth in the Preface, and then criticize other claims of his co-author which he no longer supports—eventually, a balanced evaluation of the merits and demerits. Not only did Coleridge nonetheless reverse this anticipated, as well as conventional, pattern by identifying the defects first, but he also concentrated mainly on drawing a clear distinction between himself and Wordsworth, thereby drawing much less attention to the points on which he concurred with his ex-collaborator. In fact, Coleridge once revealed to Southey in a letter of 1813 his annoyance with critics who had unremittingly accused both of them of liaison with Wordsworth: "This Slang [of critics] has gone on for 14 or 15 years, against us - & really deserves to be exposed" (*CL* III, 433). This statement actually "exposes" Coleridge's desire to cut his affiliation with Wordsworth, a desire that was to be articulated in his treatment of the Preface in the *Biographia* a few years later.

Interestingly, as suggested by the phrase "a voluntary appropriation," Coleridge's counter-argument to Wordsworth's linguistic theories seems to draw upon Locke's doctrine of linguistic arbitrariness, which has generally been regarded as antithetical to Coleridge's thought on language. As William Keach has pointed out in *Arbitrary Power: Romanticism, Language, Politics* (2004), "a voluntary appropriation" distinctly recalls Locke's phrase "a voluntary Imposition" that appears in Book III, subtitled "Of Words," of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. In a chapter on the signification of language, Locke postulates that a word is made the sign of a given idea "not by any natural connexion . . . but by a voluntary Imposition" (405). According to Keach, Coleridge "*momentarily* draws him[self] *surprisingly* close to Locke" in the above extract from the *Biographia*, trying to "turn Locke's 'by a voluntary Imposition' in a more comfortable direction" (17, emphasis added). Why is this "surprising"? Keach quickly adds that it is because Coleridge was overly "cautious" and "critical of the Lockean principle," as is clearly indicated by "the tension between 'fixed symbols' and 'internal acts,' 'processes and results of imagination'" (17). But Keach does not explain why Coleridge aligns (or cannot avoid aligning) himself with Locke, howsoever momentarily, while voicing his sharp disagreement with Wordsworth's position, nor does Keach elucidate the nature of the "tension" he identifies. It is unclear in Keach's writing why the relation between "fixed symbols" and "internal acts"—a relation that he specifies as "tension"—should be taken as "the clearest indication" that Coleridge refuted Locke's propositions about language—although his antagonism to the Lockean system is an established fact (17).

The present chapter aims to prove conclusively that Coleridge drew himself close to Locke, contrary to Keach's observation, neither *momentarily* nor *surprisingly*. Keach's *Arbitrary Power* is by far the most exhaustive treatment of Romantic conceptions of "arbitrary," and indeed, I shall draw on his discussion in some parts of this chapter. This debt to Keach notwithstanding, however, I will discredit his comment on Coleridge's relationship to Locke, and then highlight the centrality of Locke's doctrine of linguistic signs to Coleridge's arguments concerning language. Coleridge's positing of an ideal language on the speaker's "voluntary appropriation" of signs in the passage from the *Biographia*—a passage to which I will recurrently come back throughout this chapter—may seem surprising, only insofar as we read his texts on their own terms. I believe that a careful reading of those texts informed by Locke scholarship as well as by deconstructive criticism will present a refreshing new perspective on them. My study of Coleridge's linguistic thought will demonstrate that he absorbed Locke's philosophy of language far more deeply than has been widely thought; and that it was his aspiration towards exploiting arbitrary qualities of language as they had been examined by Locke which proved essential for the development of his poetic theory. With this end in view, I will question the hierarchy implicit in the natural / arbitrary opposition that is found in a number of Coleridge's texts, i.e. the privileging of the natural with the correlative denigration of the arbitrary. Dismantling this oppositional hierarchy leads on to a deconstructive reading; and in this regard, Paul de Man's influential essay "The Rhetoric of Temporality" (1969), in which he interrogates Coleridge's distinction of symbol / allegory, furnishes me important clues as to how the distinction of natural / arbitrary can be deconstructed. I notice interesting points of similarity between the oppositions of symbol / allegory and natural / arbitrary. As was the case of the previous chapter on Wordsworth, the present chapter investigates Coleridge's complex and contradictory attitude towards arbitrariness that pervades his statements about language. Whereas the last chapter described how Wordsworth *implicitly* acquiesced with Locke's assumptions about language, however, this chapter explores how Coleridge's *explicit* rejection of Lockean principles is coterminous with his appropriation of them.

"Destroy[ing] the Old Antithesis of Words & Things":
Coleridge's Objections to Locke's View of Language

Coleridge's hostility towards the Lockean tradition was persistent throughout his literary career. His 1815 letter to Wordsworth expresses this hostility in a straightforward manner. In the letter he insists that Wordsworth's *The Recluse*—"the first and only true philosophical poem in existence" as he lauds it—should be free of "the sandy sophisms of Locke, and the mechanic dogmatists" (*CL* IV, 574).[3] As will be demonstrated, Coleridge discerns many of these "sandy sophisms" in the part of the *Essay* where Locke conceptualizes key issues relating to language. In a letter of 1801 to Josiah Wedgwood, for example, Coleridge lambasts Locke for his antagonistic attitude to figurative language, quoting a passage from the third book of the *Essay*: "[A]ll the artificial and figurative application of Words Eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong *Ideas*, move the Passions, and thereby mislead the Judgment; and so indeed are perfect cheat" (III.x.34, 508; see *CL* II, 695).[4] From Locke's point of view, figurative devices are likely to render the ideas to be conveyed less "clear and distinct"—a phrase that is frequently repeated throughout the *Essay*—thereby impeding the acquisition and improvement of knowledge. As illustrated by this insistence upon denotative clarity in the construction of philosophical discourses, the *Essay*, according to Hans Aarsleff, addressed the needs of "the new science of nature" that had been taking shape in the seventeenth century, especially those of the Royal Society of London founded in 1660 (24).[5] To borrow Aarsleff's wording again, the *Essay* was a standard work for "the epistemology of the new mechanical philosophy" (283), whose practitioners Coleridge derides as "the mechanic dogmatists."

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[3] All quotations from Coleridge's letters refer to *The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (=*CL*), ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956-71).

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[4] But Coleridge ignores the fact that Locke allowed the figurative use of language when its purpose was providing entertainment rather than "dry Truth and real Knowledge." Locke says: "I confess, in Discourses, where we seek rather Pleasure and Delight, than Information and Improvement, such Ornaments as are borrowed from them, can scarce pass for Faults" (508). I will discuss later the implications of this careless reading of Locke. Coleridge's four philosophical letters sent to Wedgwood in February 1801 are thought to be the most systematic and lengthy examination of Locke's *Essay* that he undertook. In this series of letters, Coleridge refutes the prevailing view of his time that Locke was a staunch opponent of Descartes, and insists repeatedly that Locke falsely claimed originality, since he was greatly indebted to Descartes for his philosophy. In the second letter to Wedgwood, Coleridge writes: "the whole System of Locke, as far [as] it was a System (i.e. made up of cohering Parts) was to be found in the writings of Des Cartes" (*CL* II, 686). And in the fourth letter, he again undervalues harshly Locke's contributions: "the famous Essay on the human Understanding is only a prolix Paraphrase on Des Cartes with foolish Interpolations of the Paraphrast's" (699). Modern commentators estimate that Coleridge was right in drawing attention to Locke's debt to Descartes but failed to note the essential distinction between the two philosophers (See 678).

[5] Thomas Sprat, one of the founding members of the Royal Society, also places great emphasis on denotative clarity in his *History of the Royal Society of London* (published in 1667). In a well-known passage from the book, Sprat states that the philosophical writing produced by the Royal Society aims "to reject all the Amplifications, Digressions, and Swellings of Style; to return back to the primitive Purity and Shortness, when Men deliver'd so many *Things*, almost in an equal Number of *Words*" (113). The academy, according to Sprat, is committed to the ideal of "a close, naked, natural way of Speaking," and "prefer[s] the Language of Artizans, Countrymen, and Merchants, before that of Wits, or Scholars" (113). As Hugh Kenner, the author of *The Mechanic Muse* (1988), points out, Sprat here aspires to scientific prose approximating "the lost tongue of Adam," which would have displayed the "one-to-one correspondence" between word and thing (118-19). Kenner also notices the resemblance between Sprat's call for the reform of prose style and Wordsworth's defense of the real language of countrymen (See 122-26). For Sprat, scientific language can achieve denotative clarity by recapturing the Adamic condition—"the primitive Purity and Shortness" with which Adam's mind was postulated to have perceived the world. Locke has it that, however, forming a "clear and distinct" idea to be represented by each word (hence no direct correspondence between words and things) is crucial to eliminating semantic ambiguity. Locke's *Essay*, published 23 years after Sprat's *History*, is entirely free from the influence of the Adamic language doctrine.

Coleridge's 1801 letter to Wedgwood indicates that he began to engage in a polemic against Lockean linguistics in his younger days. In his earlier letter of September 1800 to William Godwin, Coleridge came even closer to challenging the principles behind what he contemptuously called "the sandy sophisms" of Locke, such as his ban on rhetorical figures in serious language. An well-known passage from the letter—the passage I quoted at the beginning of Introduction—reads:

> I wish you to write a book on the power of words, and the processes by which human feelings form affinities with them . . . . Is *thinking* impossible without arbitrary signs? & — how far is the word 'arbitrary' a misnomer? Are not words &c parts & germinations of the Plant? And what is the law of their Growth? — In something of this order I would endeavor to destroy the old antithesis of *Words & Things*, elevating, as it were, words into Things, & living Things too. All the nonsense of vibrations etc you would of course dismiss. (*CL* I, 625-26; emphasis in the original).

Coleridge holds Locke and his followers responsible for having definitively established "the old antithesis of Words & Things" that had been proceeding since the seventeenth century—or, as Michel Foucault puts it, the dissolution of the "profound kinship of language with the world" (43).[6] Foucault's 'archeological' inquiry into language in *The Order of Things* lends an illuminating insight into the antithesis mentioned above. Up to the close of the sixteenth century, to follow his line of reasoning, the *episteme* of Western culture—a term used by him to refer specifically to "the fundamental category of knowledge"—had been 'resemblance' (54). Taking as a given a natural affinity between signs and what they designated, sixteenth-century man entertained the belief that his language somehow resembled the objects in the world that it named, although the immediacy of this resemblance had been lost since the confusion of tongues at Babel. Foucault remarks: "In its raw, historical sixteenth-century being, language is not an arbitrary system; it has been set down in the world and forms a part of it, both because things themselves hide and manifest their own enigma like a language and because words offer themselves to men as things to be deciphered" (35). As the entire *episteme* in the Western world was shifted away from resemblance to identity and difference during the seventeenth century, however, a split between things and words occurred. Linguistic signs began to be perceived as being composed dually of "a significant and a signified," the similitude between them being no longer posited (42). The language study based on identity and difference now focused on the question of *how* a sign and what it signified could be linked together, a question that had never been asked before. With this problem of representation emerging as a major concern for the sciences of language, language interwoven with the world vanished from the domain of knowledge.[7] As Stillman explains, the concept of the word underwent dramatic change in the course of the seventeenth century: from a "signature" inscribed in the physical world to a "sign," which is "created, not found, and can be designed as an analytic tool" (43).

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[6] For further discussion of the growing gap between words and things in seventeenth-century thought, see Robert E. Stillman's *The New Philosophy and Universal Languages in Seventeenth-Century England: Bacon, Hobbes, and Wilkins* (1995). Stillman observes that Bacon, Hobbes and Wilkins conceived their philosophical projects to construct a perfect language in response to a "seventeenth-century crisis of representation" created by the breach between words and things (15). Their natural philosophies, irrespective of differences in aims and content, ultimately led to the widening of the gap between *res et verba*. Stillman notes that seventeenth-century projectors of a universal language, Wilkinson being the most influential figure among them, enacted "the semiotic turn from divinely ordained signatures to humanly instituted signs" (45).

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[7] Yet, controversy exists as to Foucault's notion of the epistemic break. Aarsleff explicitly states that he disagrees with *The Order of Things* "on most points" (22). The biggest problem of Foucault's archeology, from his viewpoint, is that it allows "no room for overlap," i.e. "all or nothing in the period of each episteme" (23).

Published in the last decade of the seventeenth century (1690), Locke’s *Essay* marked the completion of this gradual transition from natural signatures to artificial signs, causing the gap between *res et verba* to be apparently unbridgeable. The main tenet of his philosophy of language articulated in the third book of the *Essay* is that: “[*Words*] *signify* only Men’s peculiar *Ideas* . . . *by a perfectly arbitrary imposition*” (III.ii.8, 408). To put it another way, words are no better than arbitrary signs of thoughts, with no natural affinity to the things they denote. This assertion, according to Nicholas Hudson, was made in reaction to seventeenth-century theorists of language who had fallen into the habit of “using the terms ‘idea’ and ‘thing’ almost interchangeably” (336). Indeed, “the attentive reading of philosophical Writers would abundantly discover,” writes Locke in Chapter 10 (titled “Of the Abuse of Words”), that “*names taken for Things*,” not for ideas, “are apt to *mislead the Understanding*” (III.x.15, 498). By taking words to refer to things, one is misled into expecting that the words in use are “so suited to the Nature of Things, that they perfectly correspond with their real Existence” (497). In order to prevent our being subjected to this abuse of words, we should be aware that “*Words . . . stand for nothing, but the* Ideas *in the Mind of him that uses them*, how imperfectly soever or carelessly those *Ideas* are collected from the Things, which they are supposed to represent” (III.ii.2, 405). To paraphrase this thesis: words signify ideas that are invisible to all but the speaker who utters them; and, even worse, it is often the case that these ideas are derived imperfectly or carelessly from things in the external world. This line of argument implies that even though we form our idea of a particular thing in a thoroughly rational manner, our word bears only indirect relationship to the thing we have in mind, since, as Keach has noticed, “the primary signifying relation between word-form and idea”—i.e. the arbitrary relation—“carr[ies] no guarantee of transparency and stability” (26). This theory of signification severs the bonds of natural resemblance between words and things.

It is generally agreed that Locke’s discourse of the arbitrary in Book III of the *Essay* was groundbreaking in the history of linguistic thought. It left little room for the linguistic essentialism (or innatism) inherited from the Renaissance humanists who had worked towards “finding the right *verba* for the right *res*” as Stillman puts it (92). From Locke’s perspective, this belief in the essential connection between words and things or perceptions became a quaint anachronism in the age of the Scientific Revolution. In particular, he categorically rejected a mystical linguistic doctrine that the prelapsarian language of Adam must, so it was believed, have exhibited a divinely wrought kinship between names and the objects they denoted. In Locke’s theory, the names of natural substances refer merely to “nominal essences” (which consist of observable properties of the things named), and not to “innate notions” as those with a belief in the Adamic tongue hypothesize. And with regard to the names of “mixed modes” (simple ideas combined together), they signify ideas that are “not only *made* by the Mind, but made *very arbitrarily*, made without Patterns, or reference to any real Existence” (III.v.3, 429). When forming these abstract complex ideas, “the Mind takes a liberty not to follow the Existence of Things exactly. It unites and retains certain Collections” (429). Later in the chapter, Locke again emphasizes that the ideas of mixed modes are “the Workmanship of the Mind” (436). Words for him are tied arbitrarily to ideas or perceptions; accordingly, linguistic meaning is an act of the individual’s will. As a consequence, Locke widens the already existing gap between words and the world to the point of being unbridgeable, a gap that has opened up owing to the development of a concept of the arbitrary sign.

Though this concept itself did not originate with Locke, his formulation of it in the *Essay* extended its influence over all succeeding theorists of language. The arbitrariness of the linguistic sign as he theorizes it had become established as a primary focus of eighteenth-century debates on language.

Now let us turn back to the passage from Coleridge's 1800 letter to Godwin. Strongly disapproving of Locke's account of language given in terms of an "antithesis of Words & Things," Coleridge seeks to elevate words into "living Things," organic entities like plants that grow with their own "law."[8] As described in one of his notebooks, when a word becomes a natural thing and therefore transcends its arbitrary status, this "focal word" as he calls it is held to have "acquired a *feeling* of *reality*—it heats and burns, makes itself be felt." He goes on to write, "If we do not grasp it, it seems to grasp us, as with a hand of flesh and blood."[9] This organicist outlook on language has no problem seeing "parts & germinations of the Plant" as an analogy for words, and as such, stands in strong opposition to the central doctrine of Locke's theory of language, that words are arbitrary signs of already-formed ideas. Coleridge emphatically rejects this doctrine, writing to Wedgwood: "Both Words & Ideas derive their whole significancy from their coherence" (698). For this reason, the word "arbitrary" proves to be a "misnomer" for the relation between words and ideas. Coleridge's concept of words-as-living-things finds its clearest utterance in his *Philosophical Lectures* of 1818-19: "Words are things. They are the great mighty instruments by which thoughts are excited and by which alone they can be <*expressed*> in a rememberable form" (201). Words intimately welded to things, according to this account, play a vital part in the formation and communication of thoughts, being far more than external—and in many cases, delusive—containers of them as understood in the Lockean tradition. As Coleridge implies in the form of a rhetorical question in the letter to Godwin, creative thinking is impossible *with* arbitrary signs.

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[8] Coleridge later expatiates upon this law governing the growth of words. He sees language as the product of an evolutionary growth of the infinite "I am," God's self-revelation in the Bible. As he writes in a notebook entry, "[we] may take ["I am"] to mean *an act*—so it has the power of a Verb—or of a *Thing, Substance, or State*—and then it has the power of a Noun or Substantive." See *Shorter Works and Fragments,* eds. H. J. Jackson and J. R. de J. Jackson, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995) 797. For him, "I am" represents the seamless hybrid of an action and its resultant state, and of a verb and its substantive. From this primal word "I am," in Coleridge's system, does derive all words through what he terms "desynonymization." This evolution of language signifies, as Michael K. Havens explicates, the ever-dividing of "the infinite I AM," the verb-substantive, into "polar forces of verb and noun and then into all the other parts of speech" (171-72). Additionally, Coleridge remarks in Chapter 4 of *Biographia Literaria* that "an instinct of growth" shared by all societies "work[s] progressively to desynonymize those words originally of the same meaning, which the conflux of dialects had supplied to the more homogeneous languages" (203). A long footnote to the quoted passage contains examples of *desynonymized* words: "property" and "propriety," "mister" and "master," and "mistress" and "miss."

[9] From a notebook entry in MS. Egerton 2801, f.145.

In addition, words-as-things are essentially instrumental in arousing deep feelings and conveying them powerfully. Those words, to put it in Coleridge's wording, "form affinities with" human feelings. Locke cautions against using language for the purpose of igniting and expressing the passions, as evidenced by his denunciation of figurative speeches as "perfect cheat." According to Coleridge's linguistic scheme, on the other hand, "Words act upon us immediately, exciting a mild current of Passion & Feeling without the regular intermediation of Images" (a 1801 letter to Wedgwood, 698). This understanding of "the power of words"—a phrase appearing in the letter to Godwin—is also shown in his other writings: "words are no passive Tools, but organized Instruments, reacting on the Power which inspirits them"[10]; and "[words] are *Spirits* and *living Agents* that are seldom misused without avenging themselves" (*CL* V, 228; emphasis in the original). One of his 1809 notebook entries, too, envisions words as "living agents": "Words have a tendency to confound themselves & co-adunate with the things" (*CN* III,

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[10] *Inquiring Spirit: A New Presentation of Coleridge from His Published and Unpublished Prose Writings*, ed. Kathleen Coburn (London: Routledge, 1951) 101-2.

3542).[11] It appears that these statements are directed specifically against Locke, who conceived of the human mind, in Keach's phrase, as "an essentially passive receiver and arranger of sense data"—at least he did so in Coleridge's view ("Romanticism and Language" 97). In the following remark from *Aids to Reflection*, Coleridge seems to retreat from the bold claim that words are things, but demonstrates the same understanding of linguistic power: "For if words are not THINGS, they are LIVING POWERS, by which the things of most importance to mankind are actuated, combined, and humanized" (10). Words empower their referents to take on the force of life, elevating them to the status of animate beings. The things represented by words are thus distinguished from the external physical objects that we perceive merely through our sensory organs.[12]

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[11] All quotations from Coleridge's notebooks refer to *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (=*CN*), ed. Kathleen Coburn, 4 vols. (London: Routledge, 1957-90).

[12] Coleridge's speculation about the status of the things signified by signs links him to Heidegger. In his essay "The Thing," Heidegger discusses what makes a jug a *thing* instead of an *object* that simply "stands before, over against, opposite us" (166). According to him, the jug does not reveal its thingness until we begin to see it as a made vessel designed for containing something (e.g. wine) within it, in his words, as "something self-sustained, something that stands on its own" (164). Our contemplation of this "self-supporting independence" of the jug leads us to confront its hitherto concealed thingness (164). Now "the jug presences as a thing," and not as an object, before us (171). The things that Coleridge conceptualizes in his scheme are not objects that simply *stand before* us but the things *unconcealing* their thingness, like Heidegger's jug. Although Heidegger does not consider the role of language with regard to the jug, the mental activity exploring its thingness presupposes an active engagement with language on the part of a perceiver. Indeed, Heidegger's jug presences as a thing only when we come up with words, such as "vessel" or "container," that reflect its essential nature and hence can replace "jug" as its sign. Heidegger addresses this point in his other essay "Language," stating that: "In the naming, the things named are called into their thinging" (197). Moreover, Heidegger's review of the etymology of the word "thing" across European languages in the later part of the essay "The Thing"—*thing* or *dinc* in the Old German, *res* in the Roman, *la chose* in the French, etc.—illustrates his deep interest in language (though it is confined to etymology in this essay) as a primary—perhaps the sole—means to discover the thingness concealed in a given object. Another remark by Coleridge that bears on Heidegger comes from the *Biographia Literaria*: "I include in the meaning of a word not only its correspondent object, but likewise all the associations which it recalls. For language is framed to convey not the object alone but likewise the character, mood and intentions of the person who is representing it" (*CMW* 402). Coleridge here explores the relation of an object to the human subject who assigns a name to it, a name hinting at the "mood and intentions" of the subject. In Heidegger's theory, the thingness of a jug resides in the empty space in it, the void created by the potter for the purpose of containing a liquid substance. On the other hand, Locke's things exist as nothing but objects whose names represent them only secondarily and arbitrarily.

“A Voluntary Appropriation” as Opposed to “a Voluntary Imposition”: Creating the Naturalness of Language

Notwithstanding these seemingly essential differences in the way Locke and Coleridge depicted language, however, I will show in this section that Coleridge’s theory of poetic language was consistent in crucial respects with Locke’s view of the nature of language. With this aim in view, I want to go back to the passage from the *Biographia* where Coleridge repudiates the Wordsworthian rustic. He insists here that “the best part of human language,” attributed to the rustic in the Preface, “is formed by a *voluntary appropriation* of fixed symbols to internal acts, to processes and results of imagination” (342, emphasis added). Using this remark as a starting point for the discussion in this section, I will be contending that Coleridge’s concept of natural signification actually adhered to Locke’s principles.

Now let us draw out the implications of Coleridge’s phrase “voluntary appropriation,” which, in Keach’s account, brings the poet close to Locke momentarily and surprisingly. As we saw in the preceding section, Coleridge had a fundamental antipathy to the Lockean theory of language, which holds that words signify ideas by “a *voluntary imposition*.” Why, then, did he use the phrase “voluntary appropriation” in a manner which recalls Locke’s doctrine? I would like to suggest that Coleridge did so *intentionally*, for the purpose of highlighting his sharp disagreement with Locke, the most dominant presence in eighteenth-century discussions of language—just as he adopted Wordsworth’s wording (“the best part of language is originally derived”) in order to highlight his refutation of the idealized view of rustic speech as expressed in the Preface.

Another way to say this is that Coleridge intended “a voluntary appropriation” to be understood in a completely different context from “a voluntary imposition” in Locke’s argument, though on the surface the two phrases seem to indicate the same activity. Coleridge thought, I suggest, that he was using the term “voluntary” in an opposite context to the one assumed by Locke. This brings up the following question: What difference would Coleridge have perceived between his own sense of “voluntary” and Locke’s? To provide an answer to this question, we need to define first what is meant by “voluntary” in Coleridge’s passage. It is clear enough that he conceives of “a voluntary appropriation of fixed symbols to internal acts” as a creative act of an individual speaker. In his scheme, a language suitable for poetic purposes is an intentional creation of an individual who *voluntarily* appropriates vocal symbols for the processes and results of his inward reflection. Coleridge again puts a heavy emphasis on the individuality of a poet when he exalts in the *Biographia* the languages of Shakespeare and Milton as “the most individualized and characteristic” (*CMW* 372). Their poetic genius, he implies, lie in their voluntary appropriation.

This picture of Shakespeare as “the most individualized” poet is the key to comprehending the following excerpt from Coleridge’s *Shakespearian Criticism*:

> The sound *sun*, or the figures S, U, N, are pure arbitrary modes of recalling the object, and for visual mere objects not only sufficient, but have infinite advantages from their very nothingness *per se*. But the language of nature is a subordinate *Logos*, that was in the beginning and was with the thing it represented, and it was the thing represented. Now the language of Shakespeare (in his *Lear*, for instance), is a something intermediate, or rather it is the former blended with the latter, the arbitrary not merely recalling the cold notion of the thing, but expressing the reality of it and, as arbitrary language is an heirloom of the human race, being itself a part of that which it manifests. (I:209)

Here Coleridge concedes that *lingua communis*, i.e. a broadly standardized language of ordinary people, is arbitrary as Locke argued. He can see the “infinite advantages” of using arbitrary signs that have been passed down for generations as “an heirloom of the human race,” as is particularly the case with the signs for visual objects like the sun. As his choice of the word “heirloom” implies, Coleridge views arbitrary language as being formed through a historical process that is regulated by social convention.[13] For him, therefore, “a voluntary imposition” conceived by Locke means linking arbitrary signs to certain ideas by the voluntary consent of speakers. This understanding of Locke was by no means peculiar to Coleridge. Jon Mee indicates that as with Locke’s political discourse, his linguistic discourse was seen to be based on the notion of *consent* in the eighteenth century (371). Keach also remarks that Romantic writers often took it for granted that “Locke’s phrase ‘by a voluntary Imposition’ refers to linguistic convention or compact” (“Romanticism and Language” 98).

In addition, Keach’s analysis in *Arbitrary Power* of the Romantic reflection on the arbitrary gives us an illuminating insight as to how Coleridge would have grasped Locke’s concept of the arbitrary sign. As I repeatedly observed in preceding chapters, the idea of the arbitrary assumes great significance in both Locke’s political and linguistic writings. In Keach’s words, Locke condemns the arbitrary power of the monarchy as “unnatural, irrational, and unrepresentative” because it hardly bothers with “the represented will of citizens who make up the polity” (5). These negative overtones carried by “arbitrary” in Locke’s political discourse inevitably influenced the way that his doctrine of linguistic arbitrariness was received later in the eighteenth century—although he was careful with “arbitrary” in the *Essay* so as to present it as a neutral term. As a result, “arbitrary” in a linguistic sense, as Keach succinctly puts it, emerges as “the epithet of a power that is socially, but not naturally or rationally, constitutive” in Romantic thought about language: on the one hand, *unnatural* or *irrational* much like arbitrary political power, but *socially constitutive* on the other—unlike a monarchical power that fails to represent the will of citizens—in that the arbitrariness of language is rooted in human convention (6). Consequently, we might say that Coleridge sees the arbitrary system of signs as being founded upon general agreement among citizens on language usage. It is society itself that voluntarily imposes words on thoughts and things on an arbitrary basis. According to Coleridge’s understanding of the *Essay*, the arbitrary relation of signs to their meanings is established in accordance with the voluntary will of society, which drives its members to arrive at joint decisions on common usage for the sake of language standardization.[14]

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[13] A. C. Goodson makes the same point in his “Romantic Theory and the Critique of Language” (1995), stating that Coleridge conceptualized *lingua communis* as “an agent of the general will and understanding” (26).

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[14] In the above-quoted passage from the *Biographia*, the second reason Coleridge dismisses Wordsworth’s idea of rustic language is because of the irresistible forces of standardization. Coleridge writes: “though in civilized society, by imitation and passive remembrance of what they hear from their religious instructors and other superiors, the most uneducated share in the harvest which they neither sowed or reaped.” This may seem an arrogant and condescending attitude towards rustics. But it is worth paying special attention to the fact that rustics (“the most uneducated”) are said to have incorporated into their language by imitation the usage of “their religious instructors and other superiors.” To put it differently, as the language of the educated elite is arbitrary, so too is rustic language, contrary to Wordsworth’s belief. Even if we assume that the idiom native to a specific rural region was *pure* at first, not exposed to outside influences, the development of “civilized society” irreparably damaged that purity as urban society civilized the surrounding rural communities and rectified their languages. Civilization and the arbitrariness of language go hand in hand, because the formation of a unified society is dependent upon the arbitrary unification of the lexicon used by its members. Further, the rise of a nation-state in the eighteenth century facilitated a process of standardization within its boundaries. And the emergence of the early mass media, and hence an increase in the literacy rate, gradually deprived provincial dialects of their own peculiar features. Lastly, the growth of market economy based on the unitary political system of the nation-state also contributed to this weakening of linguistic localism by boosting the transaction of goods between cities and rural towns.

Hence, Coleridge opposes Locke’s “voluntary imposition,” which he deems collective acts, to his “voluntary appropriation” put forward as the creation of individual forms of expression. Whereas “voluntary” and “arbitrary” are closely interwoven to the point of being interchangeable in Locke’s linguistic theory, these two words pull in opposite directions for Coleridge. A writer’s voluntary will to appropriate signs defies the arbitrary power of his linguistic community; he searches for other ways to represent the world in his language than the ones arbitrarily prescribed by convention. In Coleridge’s view, Shakespeare represents the best of such writers. As with all extant languages, the language of Shakespeare is arbitrary, made up of humanly instituted signs. Still, it does not recall the “cold notion” of the thing signified as argued in Locke’s theory but rather represents the “reality” of that thing. Accordingly, Shakespearean language is “intermediate” between arbitrary human language and “the language of nature” that supposedly shows the primordial bonds between words and things. In his analysis of the above excerpt, McKusick points out that Shakespeare *naturalized* his language, endowing its signs with “secondary naturalness” that is distinguishable from the “primary naturalness” of the language of God (i.e. Logos) underpinning all forms of nature (110). This eternal language of nature is “manifested in the perception of external objects” as McKusick puts it (110). Considering that Coleridge praised Shakespeare as “the most individualized” poet, the linguistic naturalness of Shakespeare’s opus resides in his individual creativity, his voluntary act of appropriating already-arbitrary signs. And given the fact that the last decades of the eighteenth century saw the completion of linguistic standardization (which had been instigated by Locke’s warnings against the ambiguity and instability of language), we might argue that the Coleridgean poet does not passively conform to the rules of language imposed by grammarians and lexicographers who exercised the regulatory authority to monitor and improve the linguistic condition of the nation. Instead, he pursues a natural language that directly reveals the vital elements of human feeling and experience, and in so doing, helps to realize the unnaturalness of the established norms of usage.

Yet I would like to stress that Coleridge overlooks the fact that the *voluntary* has different meanings in Locke's political and linguistic discussions. In the *Second Treatise of Government*, Locke argues that the legitimate authority of government is based not upon the ruler's "own *arbitrary* will" but upon the "*voluntary* consent" of the governed (114, 38; emphasis added). The word "voluntary" in his political writings always appears with reference to the general will: for example, "voluntary agreement" (94), "voluntary compacts" (102) and "a free and voluntary society" (132). I suggest that these political uses of "voluntary" informed Coleridge's understanding of the linguistic sense of "voluntary": that is, words are, according to his reading of the *Essay*, voluntarily imposed by common consent. Furthermore, the political meanings of "arbitrary," which are uniformly negative in Locke's *Treatise*, affected Coleridge's interpretation of linguistic arbitrariness as expounded in Book III of the *Essay*. As the above passage from his Shakespeare criticism suggests, Coleridge contrasts the arbitrary nature of a standard and common language to the individual creativity of a poet's natural language, a language arising from his "voluntary appropriation" of arbitrary signs. He takes the arbitrariness of signification, I would say, as something like a necessary evil, and yearns for linguistic naturalness at least as far as poetic diction is concerned.

In the original context of the *Essay*, however, the words "voluntary" and "arbitrary" are both associated with an act of the individual will as I emphasized in previous chapters. Coleridge's identification of "voluntary imposition" with an act of the collective will was perhaps derived from the following remarks in the *Essay*: "Speech [is] the great Bond that holds Society together, and the common Conduit, whereby the Improvements of Knowledge are conveyed from one Man, and one Generation to another" (III.xi.1, 509); and again, in the same chapter: "Words, especially of Languages already framed, [are] no Man's private possession, but the common measure of Commerce and Communication" (514). It is worthy of note here that these words have been "already framed" for social purposes—that is, the promotion of economic and political integration, as well as the transmission and enhancement of knowledge. Before being framed (or, rectified) for these purposes, language was originally "Man's private possession," which is the central claim of Book III, Chapter 2.[15] According to Roy Harris and Talbot J. Taylor, the authors of *Landmarks in Linguistic Thought* (1989), the conveyance of ideas as Locke conceives it is "an act of the individual speaker's will," and "[t]his is what is meant by saying that words are *voluntary* signs of ideas" (113, emphasis in the original). Harris and Taylor stress that a word is linked to the idea it stands for not by "communities of speakers" but by "an individual in mental privacy" (113-14). Keach illustrates this point in his *Arbitrary Power*, too:

> Locke's idea of the arbitrary has little explicitly to do with notions of "convention," "compact," or "custom," though it has often been assumed that these are the notions he intends by "arbitrary," and though later in the eighteenth century some of Locke's followers slide loosely back and forth between *arbitrary* and terms for referring to socially instituted signs. (5)

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[15] In my first chapter, I discussed Locke's concept of private language in relation to his defense of the individual right to private property.

Based on this observation, I consider Coleridge to be one of “Locke’s followers” (not an opposer as he perceives himself) who misunderstood the original meaning of “a voluntary imposition” of signs within the context of Locke’s philosophy of language. Correctly understood, Locke’s reference to “a voluntary imposition” as a process involved in *arbitrary* signification reveals a close similarity to Coleridge’s insistence on “a voluntary appropriation” as a means of producing *natural* language. Put another way, I argue that “a voluntary appropriation” is essentially identical to “a voluntary imposition,” though the former was conceived as the opposite to the latter, in that they are both private acts performed in the individual mind. When proposing “a voluntary appropriation” as the best way to deliver poetic language from the absolute arbitrariness of its signs, Coleridge concurs unaware with the central proposition of Locke’s semantics.

My main contention is that the arbitrary (or, voluntary) quality of linguistic signification as described in Book III of the *Essay* provided the basis for Coleridge’s concept of natural language. Then, why did he fail to realize this? It might be possible for Coleridge to have misinterpreted Locke’s idea of the arbitrary sign because he read Book III carelessly. According to R. I. Aaron who inspected Coleridge’s four philosophical letters to Wedgwood, which contain the poet’s extensive survey of the *Essay*, “while Coleridge gives evidence of having studied Book I and the opening chapters of Book II of the *Essay*, he does not seem to have read the rest of the work with much care” (*CL* II, 678). Still, Locke himself has to be held more accountable for the widespread confusion regarding the political and linguistic meanings of “arbitrary” in the late eighteenth century. In political treatises, he consistently attaches derogatory connotations to “arbitrary” in relation to a despotic regime, as opposed to “voluntary” as a term for characterizing the people's free and collective will. But "arbitrary" becomes almost synonymous with "voluntary" in the *Essay*, both of words referring to the private nature of the signifying relation between word and idea. As confirmed by Coleridge's case, Locke's using of "arbitrary" for vastly different purposes in his writings caused his linguistic discourse of the arbitrary to be infiltrated by his political discourse of the arbitrary as the eighteenth century progressed.

To turn back to Keach's remark in *Arbitrary Power* that served as a starting point for the overall argument of this chapter, it was neither *momentary* nor *surprising* that Coleridge drew upon Locke's linguistic account of the arbitrary while formulating his own theory of poetic language in defiance of Wordsworth's. As I said earlier, Coleridge's doctrine of natural language, which was to be set in contradistinction to Locke's theory of signification, turns out to be solidly grounded in that very theory. Now, I would like to take this argument one step further with an examination of Coleridge's theorization of the symbol. He conceives of the literary symbol being unaffected by arbitrary factors, but what forms an underlying basis for this conception is—I will be arguing—the arbitrary quality of the sign.

Let me give clearer signposts to the major claims that shall be made for the rest of this chapter. Coleridge believes that, as critics have pointed out, the symbol enables us to "redeem words from their arbitrariness" (Keach, *Arbitrary Power* 28), or to "overcome the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign" (McKusick, "Symbol" 217). In other words, Coleridge assumes a symbol to be the paradigmatic case of natural signification, and so to be a legitimate means for destroying what he diagnosed in his 1800 letter to Godwin as the "old antithesis of Words & Things," a dualistic and mechanistic philosophy which he ascribed to the Lockean school. From my perspective, this implies that Coleridge promotes the symbol as the means to forge the natural link between words and things—a means by which writers confirm their privileged status as the producers of natural language in resistance to the standardizers, or “English experts” as Elfenbein calls them, who had risen to a position of authority in linguistic matters during the second half of the eighteenth century. Although Coleridge sees the arbitrary property of the standard language used by common people—a language generally rid of what he calls “provincialism and grossness”—as ineluctable and even beneficial, he harbors the desire that poetic diction, as distinct from *lingua communis*, be natural. The signifying relation in the symbol is therefore not subject to the restrictions of semantic standards. Instead, symbolic utterances often transcend the limitations of the prescribed form of language, thereby securing the writer a special place in the literary realm, a place not to be usurped by prescriptivists. In this regard, we might view Coleridge’s symbolist theory as an effort to fight off prescriptivists’ challenge to the traditional role of writers.[16] The symbolic process denies arbitrariness and postulates the natural connection between the sign and the thing signified. My ultimate aim is, however, to demonstrate that Coleridge actually based his doctrine of the symbol upon the arbitrary imposition of the image on its referent. In the next section, I will be examining how Coleridge articulated his concept of symbol with particular emphasis on the natural signifying process that produces it. And then in the final section, I will use de Man’s deconstructive analysis of the Romantic symbol as a basis for my own deconstruction of the natural / arbitrary opposition in Coleridge’s thinking on language. My emphasis throughout the section is on proving that Locke’s conception of the arbitrariness of the sign played a central role in the development of Coleridge's symbolist theory.

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[16] For a discussion of this challenge from prescriptivists, see my first chapter.

Coleridge's Concept of the Symbol:
the Priority of the Natural over the Arbitrary

One of Coleridge's notebook entries of April 1805 captures an enlightening moment that unexpectedly occurred to him during his travel to the island of Malta. In this entry, his intense gaze at the shape of the moon reflected in the windowpane of his room gives rise to speculation over "a symbolical language":

> In looking at objects of Nature while I am thinking, as at yonder moon dim-glimmering thro' the dewy window-pane, I seem rather to be seeking, as it were *asking*, a symbolical language for something within me that already and forever exists, than observing any thing new. Even when that latter is the case, yet still I have always an obscure feeling as if that new phaenomenon were the dim Awaking of a forgotten or hidden Truth of my inner Nature / It is still interesting as a Word, a Symbol! It is Logos, the Creator! and the Evolver! (*CN* II, 2546)

Coleridge here proposes the equivalence of nature and "a symbolical language"; in McKusick's words, he "regards natural phenomena as possessing an inherently linguistic structure" ("Symbol" 220). This symbolic language of nature manifests itself in response to the seeking, or *asking*, of the human mind that always already keeps within itself "something" connatural with that language. This "something" is identified with "Truth of my inner Nature," which has been "forgotten or hidden" so far but comes awake, though dimly, by the language of nature. As suggested by the words "dim-glimmering," "dewy," "obscure," "dim," however, the revelation of symbolic language at work behind natural appearances lacks immediacy and directness. The overall import of the quoted entry is that we perceive the objects of nature as the signs of symbolic language in much the same way that we catch a dim glimpse of the moon through the dewy window. As McKusick has observed, “the moon offers itself as an *oblique* fulfilment of desire” (221, emphasis added). Desperately lonely in a strange land, Coleridge takes consolation from the moon seen through the window, the only familiar object around him. Nevertheless, it was only in an oblique fashion that this faint image of the moon satisfies the aspirations of his lonely soul. The relationship between the image and the poet’s “inner Nature” remains “obscure,” to use his own word; but it is this obscure—or, mysterious—link between the inner and outer reality that allows an object of the external world to emerge as “a Word, a Symbol” in his meditation. This explanation of the symbol suggests that the principal concern of Coleridge’s theory of the literary symbol was not in promoting representational transparency as it was postulated in the Adamic doctrine, a mystical belief that the recovery of the original human language would lay bare the full knowledge of the world thanks to its divinely decreed correspondence between words and things.[17]

In my reading, the figure of “the dewy window-pane” described in the above notebook entry—the semi-transparent medium through which nature’s own verbal fabric is *obliquely* perceived—offers the most distinctive feature of the Coleridgean symbol: *translucence*. In a widely-cited passage from *The Statesman’s Manual; or the Bible the Best Guide to Political Skill and Foresight* (1816), a work that (as its subtitle implies) presents the Bible as a *manual* on how to resolve mundane issues, Coleridge elucidates the translucent nature of the symbol:

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[17] Although deeply influenced by linguistic naturalism of the Adamic doctrine, Coleridge found this doctrine hardly credible. As in the case of his argument concerning rustic language, Coleridge, to quote from McKusick, held that “[p]rimitive man did not speak an ideal, heavenly inspired language but was limited to a few simple words” (*Coleridge’s Philosophy of Language* 127).

> It is among the miseries of the present age that it recognizes no medium between *Literal* and *Metaphorical*. Faith is either to be buried in the dead letters, or its name and honors usurped by a counterfeit product of the mechanical understanding, which in the blindness of self-complacency confounds SYMBOLS with ALLEGORIES. Now an allegory is but a translation of abstract notions into a picture-language which is itself nothing but an abstraction from objects of the senses; the principal being more worthless even than its phantom proxy, both alike unsubstantial, and the former shapeless to boot. On the other hand a Symbol (Greek. *which is always tautegorical*) is characterized by a translucence of the Special in the Individual or of the General in the Especial or of the Universal in the General. Above all by the translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal. It always partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that Unity, of which it is the representative. The other are but empty echoes which the fancy arbitrarily associates with apparitions of matter . . . (30-31, emphasis in the original)

The poet here differentiates between symbol and allegory, two fundamental modes of articulating human perception of reality, and then highlights the translucence of symbol as the grounds for his valuation of it over allegory—the valuation against which, as we shall see, de Man vigorously protests. According to Nicholas Halmi, the author of *The Genealogy of the Romantic Symbol* (2007), the signifying relation between the two aspects of translucent symbol, i.e. the image and its referent, can be described in terms of "partialness" (16). That is, "being a *part* of what it represents," Halmi says, "makes the symbol *identical* to that whole" (17, emphasis in the original). Indeed, when Coleridge states above that the symbol not only "enunciates the whole" but also "abides itself as a living part in that Unity," the emphasis is on an organic unity of part and whole. In *Lay Sermons* (1816-17), the symbol is likewise defined as "an actual and essential part of that, the whole of which it represents" (79). And Coleridge's own definition of "tautegorical" (a Greek neologism he invented) given in *Aids to Reflection* further clarifies the translucent relation of part and whole in the symbol: “the nature of [symbols] is always *tau*tegorical (i.e. expressing the *same* subject but with a *difference*) in contra-distinction from metaphors and similitudes, that are always *alle*gorical (i.e. expressing a *different* subject but with a resemblance)” (206, emphasis in the original). To put it another way, the symbol is contingent upon its difference from the larger reality of which it is a part, hence the difference between essentially same subjects, whereas allegory mechanically juxtaposes two disparate entities or experiences on the basis of the similarity of them. His exaltation of the symbol in preference to allegorical tropes rests on the assumption that symbolic imagery generates, on account of the translucence of its signifying function, a high level of demand for imaginative engagement with the external world on the part of the poet and of the reader as well.

Coleridge’s valorization of a symbolic mode of signification is exemplified in his objection to Wordsworth’s reading of Thomas Gray’s sonnet in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. Wordsworth quotes the poem as an example illustrating that “the language of [poetry] does in no respect differ from that of Prose” (68). Among Gray’s lines that Wordsworth dismisses as having no value, Coleridge pays particular attention to the second line, which reads: “And reddening Phoebus lifts his golden fire.” This line is bad, in his view, not because its language is far removed from that of prose as Wordsworth contends, but because Gray replaces “the real thing with the personified representative of the thing,” that is, with the allegorical sign. For example, “Phoebus,” a hackneyed personification of the sun, is “not deduced from the nature of the thing” (*CMW* 356). This antipathy towards what Coleridge derides as “fabulous personages” (357) arises from his belief that allegory is “a picture-language,” an instance of “unsubstantial” form based on the arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified (See the extract from *The Statesman's Manual*). In McKusick's wording, allegory "lacks concreteness, drowning the living image in a welter of abstract notions" ("Symbol" 223). Coleridge reproaches Gray for having favored personifications over "symbols of the great objects of nature" (357), a symbol that "always partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible." This means that symbolic language is composed of words-as-things, its material substantiality (as distinct from allegory's *un*substantiality, or what de Man calls "the essential thinness of allegory") deriving from its participation in the actual world. And as the word "intelligible" implies, less-educated people are barely able to make literary symbols largely due to their restricted vocabulary and rudimentary knowledge of natural phenomena, as in the case of a woodman who ignorantly worships the magnified shadow of his own (Brocken specter) in "Constancy to an Ideal Object."

Coleridge uses this vital distinction of symbol and allegory as a base for his other general distinction of *imitation* and *copy*, privileging the former as the primary task that the literary symbol performs and disparaging the latter as the main concern of allegorical discourse. In Chapter 18 of the *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge maintains that poetic composition is one of "the imitative arts . . . consist[ing] either in the interfusion of the same throughout the radically different, or of the different throughout a base radically the same" (*CMW* 355). According to a notebook entry of 1804, the imitation of natural phenomena in symbolic discourse pursues the goal of embodying a "Proteus Essence that could assume the very form, but yet known & felt not to be the Thing by that difference of the Substance which made every atom of the Form another thing / - that likeness not identity" (*CN* II, 2274).[18] To put it briefly, the art of imitation aims to be *protean*, the adjective derived from the name of the Greek sea-god, Proteus, who could easily change his shape. Owing to this remarkable flexibility and adaptability, imitation (as opposed to copy) achieves a radical unity of identity and difference, allowing complex—and often seemingly contradictory—facets of reality to be apprehended together in the same symbolic utterance.

With this sense of the literary symbol's being translucent, tautegorical, and protean, Coleridge's insistence upon "negative faith" consists in considering how the symbolic language of poetry obtains its own peculiarity through its difference from what it represents.[19] (It is worth noting that the lengthy passage from *The Statesman's Manual* mentions "faith" as a cognitive faculty to distinguish the symbol from allegory, as opposed to "the mechanical understanding" which blinds us to the distinction between the two modes.) An act of negative faith enables the reader to recognize how the peculiar language of poetry establishes a somewhat *unfamiliar* relation of signifier to signified[20], and in so doing, resists the drive for the lexical and grammatical clarity pursued in the standard literary language. In Coleridge's theory, this translucent figuration that is characteristic of symbolic expression has great importance in providing a space for poetry—a *mystified* space in which "consubstantiality" of the symbol is assured. "[A] system of symbols," he claims in *Lay Sermons* (1816-17), is "consubstantial with the truths, of which they are the *conductors*" (29). What de Man later calls, derisively, "the spiritualization of the symbol" becomes especially evident in this appropriation of the theological term "consubstantial," a term used to describe the unity of three persons in the Godhead (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit)—in other words, three different forms of the same substance (191). As J. Robert Barth repeatedly emphasizes, the making or

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[18] This reference to a Proteus Essence reminds us of Coleridge's differentiation of *essence* from *existence* in Chapter 18 of the *Biographia*. In disputing Wordsworth's contention that there is no "essential difference between the language of Prose and metrical composition," Coleridge holds that Wordsworth leapt to such a wrong conclusion because he was incapable of perceiving the difference between essence and existence (68-69). Coleridge writes:

> Essence, in its primary signification, means the principle of individuation, the inmost principle of the possibility of any thing, *as* that particular thing. It is equivalent to the idea of a thing, whenever we use the word *idea*, with philosophic precision. Existence, on the other hand, is distinguished from essence, by the superinduction of reality. (*CMW* 348)

This distinction between essence and existence bears a marked resemblance to the one between thing and object drawn by Heidegger (See footnote 9). Essence—like thingness making a thing a self-sustained, individual entity—refers to "the inmost principle of the possibility" of a given thing, a principle underlying the particularity (or "individuation") of each thing and hence the precise idea of it. On the other hand, existence, a reality induced as an addition over essence, corresponds closely to Heidegger's concept of an object that merely "stands before, over against, opposite us" by its "act of representation." To further clarify the meaning of essence, Coleridge compares Westminster Abbey to Saint Paul's. Although both churches were constructed of the "blocks cut into the same form, and from the same quarry," they are distinctly different from each other in light of "the style of architecture" (*CMW* 348). Whether this loaded example perfectly fits his own description of essence versus existence remains open to question, even more because the description itself is not so lucid; but Coleridge's point is clear in regard to language. The language of poetry differs *essentially* from that of prose, although they both consist of the same arbitrary signs as the stone blocks used for building two different churches. We may infer that the symbolic language of poetry not simply brings a thing into existence but captures the *protean* essence of that thing.

[19] My understanding of negative faith was drawn from McKusick's explanation of it. See his *Coleridge's Philosophy of Language* 99. I find it difficult to form a clear idea of negative faith from Coleridge's own statements about the doctrine. According to the *Biographia*, negative faith "simply permits the images presented to work by their own force, without either denial or affirmation of their real

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existence by the judgment" (*CMW* 396). Coleridge states elsewhere in the book that "willing suspension of disbelief for the moment . . . constitutes poetic faith" (314). He mentions again negative faith with regard to the character of Don Juan, but in this case, it is hard to understand what he means by the term (457).

[20] In this sense, we might say that Coleridge anticipated a technique of *defamiliarization*, a central concept of Russian formalism first coined by Viktor Shklovsky who laid out the basic doctrines underlying the formalist approach to literature. According to Boris Eichenbaum who introduces Shklovsky as a leading figure of formalism in his 1926 essay "The Theory of the 'Formal Method,'" Shklovsky and other formalists channeled their considerations of the formal system of language into an investigation of *literariness*—that is, into what makes literary (or poetic) language, apart from practical (or ordinary) one, a special form of language revealing "the artfulness of an object" (12). Differentiating artistic from everyday language, Shklovsky argues in a seminal essay "Art as Technique": "The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult to increase the difficulty and length of perception" (12). Defamiliarization thus functions as "the artistic trademark" of poetic language, redeeming us from "automatism of perception" (22). In light of Coleridge's articulation of the symbol as being "established in the truth of things," it is notable that Shklovsky characterizes poetic language as aiming at illuminating "the sensation of things" that has remained obscure in practical language. And in the other way around, Shklovsky's distinction between poetic and ordinary language on the basis of defamiliarization gives valuable insight into the same distinction of Coleridge in the *Biographia*. Coleridge strongly disapproves of Wordsworth's claim in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* that "there neither is, nor can be, any essential difference between the language of Prose and metrical composition" (68-69). See the previous footnote.

perceiving symbols is for Coleridge “essentially a religious act, a finite participation in the infinite creative act of the supreme symbol-maker, the supreme symbol-perceiver” (38). McKusick also points out that Coleridge’s concept of symbol emerges mostly formed from his biblical criticism, as supported by the fact that he offers the lengthiest explanation of this concept, quoted above, in *The Statesman’s Manual*, a work that centers its discussion on biblical hermeneutics (“Symbol” 222). There actually is scant mention of the concept of the symbol in Coleridge’s literary criticism, although the former is now closely associated with—and even representative of—the latter. It is therefore hardly surprising that Coleridge refers to sacrament as an illustrative example of the symbol, the sacramental bread and wine being consubstantial with the spiritual reality of God. He proposes the concept of the Eucharist as “a part, or particular instance selected as representative of the whole, of which whole however it is itself an actual, or real part,” thereby establishing the equivalence of sacrament with the symbol (*Marginalia* I, 862). This is why Coleridge speculates that the human cognitive faculty of symbol-perceiving is acquired by the practice of a certain kind of faith. The symbol evokes as much an act of (negative) faith on the part of the reader as a mystical Christian doctrine of consubstantiality that postulates oneness of Christ and God the Father.

As I said, Coleridge formulates the notion of symbol in an effort to rescue words from their arbitrariness as it was set forth in Locke’s *Essay*, though the idea of the arbitrary itself in linguistic philosophy predates the book by far. Indeed, Coleridge’s boast of the symbol as a *natural* sign is dependent upon a correlative disparagement of the arbitrariness of the sign. The following excerpt from *Lay Sermons* illustrates this point by differentiating “the natural symbol” from “an arbitrary illustration”:

> Let it not weary you if I digress for a few moments to another book, likewise a revelation of God—the great book of his servant Nature. . . . I seem to myself to behold in the quiet objects on which I am gazing, more than an arbitrary illustration, more than a mere *simile*, the work of my own Fancy! I feel an awe, as if there were before my eyes the same Power, as that of the REASON—the same Power in a lower dignity, and therefore a symbol established in the truth of things . . . the natural symbol of that higher life of reason. (70-72)

All appearances of nature are intuitively recognized as being verbally textured and revealing the full truth of God.[21] Compared to the natural world, Scripture is for Coleridge a weaker form of revelation since it is composed of purely arbitrary signs. While Scripture arbitrarily illustrates spiritual truth as "mere simile[s]," however, the forms of nature directly participate in the creative power of God. They serve a symbolic function—as did the dim-glimmering moon for Coleridge in Malta—and consequently lead us to penetrate the profound mysteries of the divine Word, i.e. the Logos, which acts as the greatest symbol. Likewise, the words of poetic language, Coleridge speculates, transcend their arbitrary status—as did the language of Shakespeare—and become naturalized, though "in a lower dignity," by participating in, and hence "render[ing] intelligible" to us, the transcendental truths of the Logos. Such words are not mere arbitrary signs of *lingua communis* any longer but natural symbols that bear an essential, and consubstantial, relationship to the "higher life of reason." In the same context, Coleridge says that "mysterious as the symbol may be, the sacramental Wine is no mere or arbitrary memento" (*Lay Sermons* 88). The symbol takes on a mystificatory aspect in rejecting a role for arbitrariness in its structure.

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[21] Coleridge elsewhere calls nature "the other great Bible of God" which "become[s] transparent to us, when we regard the forms of matter as words, as symbols, valuable only as being the expression, an unrolled but yet a glorious fragment, of the wisdom of the Supreme Being" (*Philosophical Lectures* 366).

In fact, Coleridge’s quest for natural language as the opposite of arbitrary language persisted throughout his literary career as shown by remarkable consistency in his scattered statements about language, whether early or late. This fundamental distinction of the *natural* versus the *arbitrary* dates from as early as 1792 when he came to admire the poetry of William Bowles. Coleridge writes retrospectively in the *Biographia* that the natural language of Bowles greatly influenced “the formation and establishment of [his] taste and critical opinions” (*CMW* 167). This self-fashioning as a critic catalyzed by Bowles enabled him to see through “the most fantastic and arbitrary” language of the elder poets (especially, Pope and his imitators) who had wrongly “sacrificed the passion, and passionate flow of poetry, to the subtleties of intellect, and to the starts of wit” (168). From Coleridge’s viewpoint, the true originality of Bowles lies in the fact that he first “combined natural thoughts with natural diction” and first “reconciled the heart with the head” as well (169). His enthusiasm for Bowles’s language is shown in a letter of 1796, too: “Bowles [is] the most tender, and . . . the only *always-natural* poet in our Language” (*CL* I, 278; emphasis in the original). These highly favorable remarks on Bowles suggest that the young Coleridge regarded the coalescing of words and thoughts as the most distinctive feature of natural language, a language that he aspired to master in the near future by following in the footsteps of Bowles. As McKusick has commented in *Coleridge’s Philosophy of Language* (1986), a work that is unsurpassed to date in its extensive and systematic study of Coleridge’s linguistic theory, “All of Coleridge’s subsequent career . . . was conditioned by his initial preference for the ‘natural’ language of Bowles over the ‘arbitrary’ language of Pope” (14). Even after his youthful admiration for Bowles's poetry cooled down, Coleridge never veered away from his initial opposition between the natural and the arbitrary.

I want to stress that this binary opposition, natural / arbitrary, lays the foundations for Coleridge's other oppositional formulations which I have introduced so far: most importantly, "symbol" versus "allegory," and "imitation" versus "copy" as well as "essence" versus "existence." In the passages cited earlier, while "the *natural* symbol" gets "established in the truth of things," the truth with which the symbol is consubstantial, allegory produces "empty echoes which the fancy *arbitrarily* associates with apparitions of matter" (emphasis added). And the act of imitating reality, i.e. the act of making symbols, is described as "in very nature *shakespearianized*" (*CN* II, 2274; emphasis in the original). Given Coleridge's praise of Shakespeare as "the most individualized" poet who *naturalized* his language, imitation gives the writer much scope for individual creativity, "a voluntary appropriation," from which the naturalness of his symbolic language derives. So strong is the symbol's link with individuality in Coleridge's system, that he flatly denies the possibility for allegory to invent truly individual characters, saying in a lecture of 1818: "If the allegoric personage be strongly individualized so as to interest us, we cease to think of it as allegory; and if it does not interest us, it had better be away."[22] Coleridge speculates that the symbol (as a natural sign) embodies by imitation the essence of the thing being represented—the essence illustrating "the principle of individuation" and identical to the "philosophic[ally] precis[e]" idea of the thing (*CMW* 348). A similar claim is made in the *Biographia*: "An idea, in the highest sense of that word, cannot be conveyed but by a symbol" (233). Allegory, on the other hand, presents itself as "an arbitrary illustration" of an idea, and as a translation of "abstract notions" into simply another "abstraction." Whereas the tautegorical symbol is defined as different from that of which it is an essential part, allegory depends on its "resemblance" to what it points to, hence not imitation but copy. What allegory conveys is not essence but rather existence, that is, "the superinduction of reality" as Coleridge understands it; the allegorical sign does not partake in that reality.

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[22] *Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism*, ed. Thomas Middleton Raysor (Cambridge, MA: Constable & Co., 1936) 30. Concerning Coleridge's distaste for allegory, Jonathan Culler in his essay "Literary History, Allegory, and Semiology" (1976) comments that for Coleridge, "the achievements of an allegorical mode, as in Dante, Spenser, and Bunyan, are rapaciously assimilated to the symbolic" (263).

A "Pure Decision of the Mind":
De Man and Deconstructing the Natural / Arbitrary Opposition

My purpose for the rest of this chapter is to throw into question this privileging of the *natural* and exclusion of the *arbitrary*. To this end, I shall draw on de Man's deconstructive reading of the lengthy passage quoted from *The Statesman's Manual* in which the symbol is viewed as superior and allegory as inferior. In "Rhetoric of Temporality" de Man dismantles the priority that the symbol takes over allegory in Coleridge's rhetoric. Taking this line of argument further, I shall challenge the priority that the natural takes over the arbitrary, and in so doing, demonstrate that symbols are submitted to arbitrary signifying processes. Coleridge's valuative hierarchies of symbol / allegory and natural / arbitrary, I suggest, resemble each other. As the symbol is valorized as "a motivated sign" that is *naturally* fused with the thing it designates[23], so does allegory fall out of favor due to its *arbitrary* juxtaposition of an animate image and a purely abstract concept. If we judge Coleridge's idea of literary symbolism to be undone (or demystified) by de Man's deconstructionist critique, we might also undo his system of opposition natural / arbitrary that accords the symbol a privileged status.

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[23] Culler and McKusick call a symbol "a motivated sign," because it is "a synecdoche, in which the signifier is naturally connected to the signified" (Culler 263); and because "[its] form is determined by its referent" (McKusick, "Symbol" 218). Both critics term the essential connection between reference and referent in the symbol as "motivated."

For the sake of my discussion, it would be helpful to lay out some details of de Man's article. De Man points out that critics of Romanticism have understood Coleridge's preference for the symbolic trope in terms of a dialectic between subject and object. For instance, M. H. Abrams and Earl R. Wasserman both regard Coleridge as "the great synthesizer" who conflated the relations of mind and nature and of subject and object in his symbolic imagination—a synthesis that they, along with other critics, considered to be "the authentic pattern of romantic imagery" (197). From this perspective, the symbol is associated with "a total, single, and universal meaning" (188), and has its foundation in "an intimate unity" between the image and its referent (189). Especially in the excerpt from *The Statesman's Manual*, shows de Man, the structure of the symbol is described as *synecdochic*: the signifying relation in the symbolic is one between a part and the whole (191). By contrast, allegory is consistently regarded in negative terms. It is "anachronis[tic]" and "non-poetic" (190), "purely mechanical" (191), and for Coleridge, "an immaterial shape that represents a sheer phantom devoid of shape and substance" (192). De Man, however, remarks that the symbol appears to be privileged over allegory in Coleridge's theory only "at first sight" (191). The unsubstantial "thinness" of allegory having been described, it would be reasonable to expect Coleridge, in de Man's reading, to state that the appeal of the symbol lies in its "organic or material richness"; yet Coleridge "suddenly" introduces the term "translucence" for the distinguishing characteristic of the symbol—a term that is quickly, and strangely, taken as synonymous with “reflection” in de Man’s phrasing (192). He writes:

> The material substantiality [of the symbol] dissolves and becomes a mere reflection of a more original unity that does not exist in the material world. It is all the more surprising to see Coleridge, in the final part of the passage, characterize allegory negatively as being merely a reflection. In truth, the spiritualization of the symbol has been carried so far that the moment of material existence by which it was originally defined has now become altogether unimportant; symbol and allegory alike now have a common origin beyond the world of matter. The reference, in both cases, to a transcendental source, is now more important than the kind of relationship that exists between the reflection and its source. . . . Starting out from the assumed superiority of the symbol in terms of organic substantiality, we end up with a description of figural language as translucence, a description in which the distinction between allegory and symbol has become of secondary importance. (192-93)

In a nutshell, the text of Coleridge deconstructs itself. De Man undermines the logic behind the symbol / allegory opposition by indicating that Coleridge unwittingly allowed his notion of allegory as a non-material abstraction to permeate his notion of symbol originally conceived as expressing “organic or material richness.” To follow de Man’s line of thought, Coleridge *suddenly* replaces the organic substantiality of the symbol with translucence (which de Man equates with “a mere reflection of a more original unity”), and goes on to present allegory, *surprisingly*, as “empty echoes” arbitrarily made by the fancy (which, once again, de Man simply equates with “a reflection”). Since it turns out that both symbol and allegory are little more than a pale reflection of “the transcendental source,” the Coleridgean conception of the symbol is demystified and the initial boundary between the two tropes is blurred.

But de Man’s analysis of *The Statesman’s Manual* passage suffers from some weaknesses. Most obviously, his use of the term “reflection” for the signifying functions of both symbol and allegory is highly problematic. In a thorough critique of de Man, David Dawson points out that "Coleridge himself, in choosing the term 'translucence,' seems quite determined not to say 'reflection' (indeed, the two terms seem nearly opposite in meaning)."[24] Though I concur with this view, the term "translucence" is not so opposite to "reflection" in Coleridge's mind. Given a 1805 notebook entry in which a reflection of the weak glimmering moon on the window prompts speculation about symbolic language, de Man has some (though not sufficient) grounds for phrasing "translucence" as "a mere reflection." But even so he does great violence to Coleridge's text by changing the highly loaded term "translucence" to "reflection," for translucent symbol does not simply refer to the transcendental source but also, as Coleridge puts it, "abides itself as *a living part*" in that source. The implication is clear: the symbol never loses its material concreteness while signifying something that, in de Man's wording, "does not exist in the material world." The figure of translucence, to quote the words of Dawson, designates "a paradoxical state of affairs in which the material manifests the non-material," both entities co-existing (300). Furthermore, I would like to stress that de Man's substitution of "reflection" for the "empty echoes" of allegory is too tendentious. Having already attributed "reflection" to the symbol, he deliberately applies the term to allegory for the sole purpose of making it seem that the difference between symbol and allegory has been eliminated, hence the conclusion that "symbol and allegory alike now have a common origin beyond the world of matter." The due process of drawing a conclusion is being reversed here; the conclusion is not derived from the prior reasoning but forms the basis of it.

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[24] David Dawson, "Against the Divine Ventriloquist: Coleridge and de Man on Symbol, Allegory, and Scripture," *Journal of Literature & Theology* 4 (1990): 300. Jerome C. Christensen makes the same point in his exposition of de Man's reading. See his "The Symbol's Errant Allegory: Coleridge and His Critics," *ELH* 45 (1978): 640-59. According to Christensen, de Man's analysis "is terminologically imprecise in its conflation of Coleridge's concept of translucence with the quite distinct phenomenon of reflection" (642). The footnote to this comment adds that "[a]lthough Coleridge nowhere mentions 'reflection' in the critical passage from *The Statesman's Manual*, de Man, without explanation, employs the term as a synonym for 'translucence'" (658).

Nevertheless, the main focus of my attention is not on identifying deficiencies of de Man's argument. Other critics have done so enough.[25] Instead I intend to use de Man's deconstructionist mode of analysis to challenge Coleridge's prioritizing of the natural over the arbitrary upon which, I contend, the priority of the symbolic over the allegorical trope is premised. I believe that the real crux of de Man's critique of the symbol / allegory distinction does not lie in the passage cited above—which has been a target of critical attack among his detractors because of its flawed logic—but rather in the following passage that appears in the same paragraph as the above one:

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[25] Besides the essays of Dawson and Christensen mentioned above, the following studies discuss de Man's treatment of Coleridge's contrast of symbol and allegory: Jean-Pierre Mileur, "Allegory and Irony: 'The Rhetoric of Temporality' Re-Examined," *Comparative Literature* 38 (1986): 329-36; Christopher Norris, *Paul de Man: Deconstruction and the Critique of Aesthetic Ideology* (New York: Routledge, 1988); Clifford Siskin, *The Historicity of Romantic Discourse* (New York: Oxford UP, 1988); Mary Anne Perkins, *Coleridge's Philosophy: The Logos as Unifying Principle* (New York: Oxford UP, 1994); James C. McKusick, "Symbol," *The Cambridge Companion to Coleridge*, ed. Lucy Newlyn (New York: Cambridge UP, 2002) 217-30; Nicholas Halmi, *The Genealogy of the Romantic Symbol* (New York: Oxford UP, 2007); Gregory Castle, "Deconstruction," *The Blackwell Guide to Literary Theory* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007) 79-85; Theresa M. Kelley, "Romanticism's Errant Allegory," *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, eds. Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck (New York: Cambridge UP, 2010) 211-28; and Steven Mailloux, "Hermeneutics, Deconstruction, Allegory," *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory* 254-65.

Among these critics, McKusick levels the fiercest criticism at de Man, writing that:

> Paul de Man brings the sceptical, corrosive Old-World perspective of deconstruction to bear upon Coleridge's doctrine of symbol and its metaphysical postulates. . . . [I]t would be *ludicrous* to assert that Coleridge was somehow unaware of the metaphysical premises of his own outlook. Despite the protestations of Paul de Man, Coleridge's doctrine of the symbol was not 'mystified'; it was merely different from that which the twentieth century regarded as 'common-sense'. A more truly *disinterested* historical perspective—an authentic 'rhetoric of temporality'—would seek to comprehend the philosophical tradition of transcendental Idealism that gave shape to Coleridge's ideas. (227, emphasis added).

I find this spirited defense of Coleridge's symbol theory relatively solid but on the other hand extremely harsh. This harshness seems not to be properly explained unless in relation to McKusick's own hostility toward deconstructionist criticism, a "corrosive Old-World perspective" as he derisively calls it. McKusick goes on to condemn de Man's argument as "ludicrous" (a very harsh word to say for a renowned scholar), biased and methodologically flawed.

> It becomes of secondary importance whether this relationship [between the reflection and its source] is based, as in the case of the symbol, on the organic coherence of the synecdoche, or whether, as in the case of allegory, it is a pure decision of the mind. Both figures designate, in fact, the transcendental source, albeit in an oblique and ambiguous way. Coleridge stresses the ambiguity in a definition of allegory in which it is said allegory ". . . convey[s], while in disguise, either moral qualities or conceptions of the mind that are not in themselves objects of the senses . . . ," but then goes on to state that, on the level of language, allegory can "combine the parts to form a consistent whole." (192)

De Man asserts here that the difference between "the organic coherence" of symbolic synecdoche and allegory's "pure decision of mind" has become insignificant by his deconstructive reading of *The Statesman's Manual* passage. I argue that this is the very moment, in de Man's terminology, at which his own critical "blindness" to the implications of his "insight" occurs. In the belief that he has succeeded in deconstructing the conceptual opposition of symbol and allegory in *The Statesman's Manual*, de Man writes the above passage as a supplement to the preceding analysis. Yet I find this follow-up discussion to be more insightful and enlightening than the preceding one. I shall use the above passage as a springboard for my deconstruction of the symbol / allegory, and the natural / arbitrary, opposition in Coleridge's poetics.

Let me deploy my argument in detail. De Man shows above perceptive critical insight in describing the connection between the form as signifier and the signified meaning in allegory as built by "a pure decision of the mind." That is to say, a decision on the relation of allegorical image to its concept is purely *arbitrary* (a term to be understood in the context of Lockean linguistics), made in the individual's subjectivity. It is this attempt to ground allegorical figuration on mental privacy which truly dissolves Coleridge’s distinction between symbol and allegory. As we already saw, what guarantees linguistic *naturalness*, in his view, is individual creativity in the use of common, standard language. The writer’s “voluntary appropriation of *fixed* symbols” for the imaginative workings of his mind effectuates the naturalness of his diction. And Coleridge celebrates the literary symbol as giving forth a *natural* meaning thanks to the participatory relationship of signifier to signified, a relationship that he characterizes as translucent, consubstantial, and synecdochical. To repeat what I affirmed in an earlier section, the symbol is purported to be the paradigm case of natural signification. The conclusion to be drawn from these claims is that natural signs of the symbolic mode are produced by the poet’s voluntary act of appropriating signs—in other words, by his *arbitrary* decision as to how a specific sign is to be translucently (or, as de Man puts it, “in an oblique and ambiguous way”) connected with what it signifies, even outside the range of standard semantics.[26] If so, how can the symbol contrast with allegory, the outcome of “a pure decision of the mind” in de Man’s account? It proves to be the case that symbol and allegory alike arise not from “the transcendental source” as de Man maintains, but rather from “a pure decision of the mind,” the voluntary imposition of meanings on objects or forms as Locke has it in his linguistic discourse. To put this in de Man’s words, we see no crucial distinction between symbol as “the product of the organic growth of form” and allegory as a “purely mechanical” abstraction, since they share “a common origin,” i.e. the individual writer’s arbitrary will (191). As a consequence, the priority of organic (i.e. natural) as opposed to mechanic (i.e. arbitrary) form is dismantled.

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[26] I claim that this is illustrated in the penultimate stanza of “Frost at Midnight.” The child in the stanza recognizes some natural objects from a variety of shapes of the clouds; those real objects are seen to be “image[d]” in the clouds, which operate as symbols, only in the eyes of the child. Others may see a few similarities between a real crag and a certain shape of the cloud, but it is the child alone who has perceived as identical the crag and its translucent image in the cloud. Coleridge’s symbolic language therefore turns out to be a private language constructed out of his arbitrary acts of juxtaposing words and things.

In addition, the above passage is of value to my project in that de Man insightfully detects the ambiguity surrounding Coleridge’s notion of allegory as it was formulated in his lecture of 1818. Nonetheless de Man does not attempt to draw out (or, is blind to) the implications of this ambiguity, nor have (to my best knowledge) his critics done so. I interpret this ambiguity in Coleridge’s statement of allegory as key to questioning his contrast of symbol with allegory. In the lecture manuscript from which de Man quotes, Coleridge dismisses allegory as turning “agents and images” into “moral qualities or conceptions of the mind that are not in themselves objects of the senses,” that is, abstractions and personifications (*Miscellaneous Criticism* 30). This is in accord with his other disparaging remarks on the unsubstantial quality of allegory. He goes on to say, however, that in the work of allegory, “the difference is everywhere presented to the eye or imagination while the likeness is suggested to the mind; and this connectedly so that the parts combine to form a consistent whole” (30). According to this explanation, the similarity between signifier and signified in allegory exists only in the perceiver’s mind, while these two parts appear to be vastly different entities to everyone else. In other words, the “likeness” that Coleridge mentions is created by “a pure decision of the mind,” as is the case of symbolic translucence (or synecdoche). In particular, I read the final part of the statement, quoted by de Man, as a moment of Coleridge’s insight to which the poet is himself blind. He unknowingly draws his description of allegory close to his typical description of symbol as the part-for-whole figure. There seems to be no stiff opposition between symbol representing the whole of which it is a part and allegory combining different parts to form the whole. Here, Coleridge's concept of the symbol infiltrates his concept of allegory, thereby blurring the boundary between them.

Further, de Man's rehabilitation of allegory in the latter part of his essay can be redirected towards my own effort to challenge the logic underlying Coleridge's opposition natural / arbitrary. In undermining the New Critics' obsession with "an organic totality" in which they saw the symbolic synthesis of mind / nature and subject / object taking place, de Man claims that such synthetic unity does not draw on our actual (or "authentic") relationship with time (223). Rather, it is in allegorical discourse that "an authentically temporal destiny" is unveiled (206). De Man sets out to reverse Coleridge's hierarchy of symbol and allegory, indicating the dominant presence of "allegorizing tendencies" in Romantic European Literature (205). In a key passage, he explains the rationale for his ascribing of priority to allegory:

> In the world of the symbol it would be possible for the image to coincide with the substance . . . . Their relationship is one of simultaneity, which, in truth, is spatial in kind, and in which the intervention of time is merely a matter of contingency, whereas, in the world of allegory, time is the originary constitutive category. The relationship between the allegorical sign and its meaning (*signifié*) is not decreed by dogma; . . . [T]his relationship between signs necessarily contains a constitutive temporal element; it remains necessary, if there is to be allegory, that the allegorical sign refer to another sign that precedes it. The meaning constituted by the allegorical sign can then consist only in the repetition . . . of a previous sign with which it can never coincide, since it is of the essence of this previous sign to be pure anteriority. (207)

In de Man's view, allegories are fully aware of and capitalize on the temporal destiny which no man can escape. Their basic structure—in which the sign always represents another, previous sign, hence the temporal difference between them—is fit to embody the temporality of human existence. By keeping “a distance in relation to its own origin”—a distance between the sign and its preceding sign that exists as “pure anteriority”—allegory accentuates the unbridgeable gap between subject and object (207).[27] As de Man notes, “we found allegory always implying an unreachable anteriority” (222). In contrast, symbols profess to construct the natural identity between self and non-self; but this identity turns out to be “illusory” because the sign will never be allowed to coincide with its object (207). De Man insists that the symbol is a self-mystification to blame for the illusion that human understanding can somehow transcend its temporal nature. In his assessment of Romanticism, accordingly, “early romantic literature finds its true voice” when its writers *painfully* admit the falseness of this illusion, the impossibility of achieving “the analogical unity of nature and consciousness” (207, 199). As an allegorical mode of writing emerges as the most authentic expression of the Romantic spirit, organic symbolism falls into disgrace, dismissed as “a defensive strategy that tries to hide from this negative self-knowledge”—knowledge that man’s efforts to form an identification with nature are to be always thwarted by the intervention of time (208).

I hold that a temporal discontinuity, or noncoincidence of time, between sign and meaning in allegory inevitably brings up the question of linguistic arbitrariness. To elaborate further, the temporal structure of the allegorical sign leaves room for “a pure decision of the mind” about the conjunction of the sign and its antecedent. That is, allegory’s engaging with temporality makes its attribution of meaning the arbitrary act of the individual mind: hence a vital link between the temporal character of allegory and its arbitrariness. The "diachronic allegory," as de Man sees it, calls attention to its meaning being arbitrary and artificial (226). By contrast, the relation of signifier to signified in the symbol is, as noted in the passage above, one of simultaneity. The language of symbol attempts to overcome arbitrariness and so to guarantee its naturalness by eliminating temporality from the process of signification. For this reason, from de Man's viewpoint, symbols fail to unveil our temporal destiny; they are inauthentic, not true to a basic condition of human existence. De Man's consideration of Romantic literature, therefore, considers allegory superior owing to its wholehearted acceptance of temporality. The inferior doctrine of symbol ignores the timebound character of our perception, and thus (in my view) the arbitrariness of language as well. Yet I argued earlier that the naturalness of a symbolic diction resides in the poet's arbitrary imposition of signs. The act of making symbols proves to be an entirely intentional act. Would it be, then, possible to say that the symbol's arbitrariness (which passes itself off as naturalness) derives from temporality, too? Does time intervene in the symbolic, synecdochic mode which claims to involve no temporal element?

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[27] McKusick comments: “In de Man’s view, ‘distance’ is a correlative of authenticity, although it remains unclear in his analysis why *distance* should be any more authentic than *identity* as a mode of relation” (“Symbol” 227). But I disagree with McKusick on this point. The distance de Man refers to is temporal. For him, this temporal distance from the origin determines the meaning of an allegorical sign, and is authentic in the sense of its being in accord with our experiences of time. De Man is clear about the authenticity of distance.

We might provide an affirmative answer to these questions on the basis of Jonathan Culler's argument in "Literary History, Allegory, and Semiology" (1976), an essay that re-evaluates allegory in a way strongly reminiscent of de Man's reading, though it makes no mention of his name[28]. In this study, interestingly, Culler also associates temporality with the arbitrariness of literary figures. According to him, the attempt to preserve the naturalness of signs by means of a strategic "retreat to subjectivity”—which means *internalizing* the signifying relation—inevitably leads to a confrontation with “the implacable enemy of the symbolic mode, time” (265). To put this in more concrete terms,

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[28] Actually, Culler mentions de Man's "Rhetoric of Temporality" in an endnote, adding a brief comment that "[t]his article is essential to any serious study of allegory" (269).

> The attempt to ground the sign relation on a particular empirical experience forces one to locate that experience in the past, and this raises the question of how that experience is affected by the passage of time. The possibility of change, the possibility of experience at other moments being other, reintroduces the problem of arbitrariness that the posture was designed to avoid. (265)

The protecting of the natural connection between the object and its meaning via the internalization of that connection brings about the paradoxical effect of making the signifying process engage with time and hence arbitrariness. It appears that Culler’s idea of the internalization echoes (or even comes from) de Man’s claim that the Romantics replaced the “relationship with nature” with “an intersubjective, interpersonal relationship that, in the last analysis, is a relationship of the subject toward itself” (196). Therefore, as Christensen remarks on this observation, “[t]he symbolic synthesis between subject and object is not achieved, because no true antithesis was ever actually recognized” (641). In other words, the project of the symbol to build the natural relationship between subject and object is doomed to failure, because this relationship was one of “the subject toward itself” from the beginning. Having demonstrated how Coleridge’s text deconstructs its own claim for the superiority of the symbol over allegory, de Man attaches a high value to the latter in that its temporal nature highlights (rather than conceals) the fact that the subject / object synthesis is foreign to the nature of all perception. As a follow-up on this, Culler’s study shows that the symbol succumbs to the demystifying power of temporality and reveals its innate tendency towards allegory. Consequently, given that the symbolic and allegorical alike acknowledge temporality, whether willingly or reluctantly, the validity of the dichotomy between the two modes becomes doubtful.

Culler makes only a brief remark on arbitrariness with no discussion of its implications. Building on his remark, I suggest that the pursuit of natural significance in the symbolic operation (which Culler sees as subjectivism) permits time to intrude on the signifying relation and renders it a matter of arbitrary decision in the Lockean sense, i.e. “a pure decision of the mind.” To put it simply, the symbol becomes a voluntary sign as it was conceived in Locke’s semantics. In both the concepts of symbol and allegory, arbitrariness intervenes as a crucial factor in determining the relationship between signifier and signified, a relationship that has become temporally discontinuous. De Man’s discussion of the role of temporality in an allegorical mode—along with Culler’s analysis of allegorical elements of the symbolic mode—confirm my conclusion that both symbols and allegories present themselves as the voluntary creations of the individual’s will, and that arbitrariness as Locke viewed it is an essential property of both figures. As a result, the privileged use of *natural* at the expense of *arbitrary* in Coleridge’s pronouncements on language—a fundamental distinction that lays the groundwork for the symbol / allegory as well as other distinctions—is called into question.

In my understanding of Coleridge’s notion of symbol, to sum up, the poet creates the naturalness of poetic meaning guaranteed in that notion by seizing upon Locke’s proposition that words are arbitrary signs of ideas. Resistance to linguistic consolidation implied in the symbolic signifying processes—which are not confined to the linguistic limits set by prescriptivists—draws strength from room for semantic expansion that the arbitrariness (or voluntariness) of the sign makes. Though denying flatly the role of arbitrariness in his organicist view of language, Coleridge actually capitalizes on the freedom permitted in that arbitrariness. With this in mind, let us take a look, for the last time, at his contention that “[t]he best part of human language . . . is formed by a voluntary appropriation of fixed symbols to internal acts, to processes and results of imagination.” Here, the speaker’s own subjectivity causing the arbitrariness of language in Locke’s discourse has been superseded by “imagination,” which is thus expected to wield a greater arbitrary power uniting thoughts and words than would have been assumed by Locke. By deriving benefit from the arbitrary link between words and ideas, the poet can broaden the semantic range of the given language, far beyond its limits imposed by prescriptivists. Naturalness that is characteristic of the best language as Coleridge describes it, I contend, follows as a result of recognizing the potential for authorial freedom that Locke’s concept of private language appears to promise.

CONCLUSION

In the past five chapters, I have done much to demonstrate that Romantic authors grasped the implications of Locke’s description of language as arbitrary while dealing with an embarrassing situation in which they had become subordinate to the standardizers of English in a literary realm. The writers examined in my chapters articulated a desire to exert arbitrary power over the ways in which words stand for ideas—the power that had been granted exclusively to prescriptivists. By releasing the potential of the arbitrary relation between words and thoughts, the Romantics tried to give renewed vitality to their literary language and thus to establish themselves as innovative writers of English. Their absorption of Locke’s ideas led them to frame the doctrine of arbitrariness as the driving force behind the continued evolution of the English language, which appeared to have been successfully fixed through the standardizers’ efforts. Locke’s principle of the arbitrary sign gave the writers enough room for experimenting with the language that, as Priestley observed, had attained perfection and therefore would change very little.

While delving into the key concepts of Locke’s theory of language, my first chapter argued that the great appeal of Locke for British Romantics lay in his attention to the privacy of mental activities that arbitrarily assign words to ideas. In the two chapters that followed, I examined less familiar texts by Priestly and Pigott. I maintained that Priestley’s political and linguistic writings both bear the marks of engagement with the notion of arbitrariness developed by Locke. Priestley condemns arbitrary, tyrannical power and anticipates the arrival of a free, just society in the millennial period. At the same time, however, the perfectly universal language that Priestley imagines shall be used in that society depends on the arbitrary process of signification. In *A Political Dictionary* Pigott carries out a Lockean political project by applying Lockean linguistic principles to his lexicography. His dictionary entries advancing republican agenda—a radical version of Locke's political thought—represent a fundamental revision of Johnson's standard lexicography, a revision making full use of the arbitrary relationship Locke posited between words and their referents.

In the fourth and fifth chapters, I examined a number of familiar passages from Wordsworth and Coleridge in terms of their reaction to prescriptivism and the Lockean tradition of linguistic thought. Wordsworth's postulation of rustics speaking a durable language—actually, even more durable than refined English—undermines the logic of his argument that rustic language foregrounds an essential correspondence between words and the natural world. Contrary to Wordsworth's belief, the language of peasantry is composed of arbitrary signs; and the naturalism of his poetic diction, a "purified" form of rustic diction as he claims, derives from his appropriating of the principle of arbitrariness at work in rustic language. Coleridge's hostility towards Locke should not blind us, I argued, to the former's acquiescence of the latter's assumptions about language. I showed that the natural / arbitrary dichotomy (i.e. privileging the natural to the exclusion of the arbitrary) in Coleridge's critical discourse, especially in his symbolist theory, turns its own premises against itself. The claim of the symbol to overcome arbitrariness is open to questioning, for the symbolic process—which presumes not to be regulated by the law of arbitrariness—operates in a manner that exploits the voluntary (or arbitrary) quality of the sign to the fullest.

In a broad sense, my dissertation significantly contributes to the revaluation of Locke’s influence on a Romantic view of language. It is common knowledge that Locke was the most dominating presence in eighteenth-century thinking about language. Scholars have discussed the legacy of Locke’s linguistic ideas in eighteenth-century speculation on etymology, figurative usage, linguistic meaning, the origin of language, and the role of language in the formation of ideas. I observe, however, that few of these commentators consider the implications that Locke’s theory of language would have had for literary writers. A considerable amount of work seems necessary to fully incorporate Locke scholarship to studies into eighteenth-century literature and Romanticism. In this respect, William Keach’s *Arbitrary Power: Romanticism, Language, Politics* (2004) is pioneering; it investigates how the linguistic and political accounts of the arbitrary from the Enlightenment period made their presence felt in Romantic texts. I found this book highly useful, and built some of my arguments on Keach’s insights. Yet Keach is not much interested in how Locke formulated the idea of the arbitrary in his political and linguistic writings. Moreover, his remarks concerning Romantic responses to Locke’s conception of language are for the most part brief. My study focuses more intensely on Locke’s own formulation of the concept of “arbitrary” and explores how Romantic writers came to terms with this concept.

Another significant contribution of this dissertation lies in its exploration of the effects that eighteenth-century prescriptivism exerted on Romantic authors, a neglected topic in Romanticism studies. Research on English’s standardization has shown little, if any, interest in Romantic literary works—with the exception of Andrew Elfenbein’s *Romanticism and the Rise of English* (2009). I follow in Elfenbein’s footsteps and investigate what ramifications the emergence of standard English was having for the production of literature. However, whereas Elfenbein explores the complicated relationship between prescriptivists and specific writers' language usage, I am most interested in how prescriptivism as a whole made an impact on writers. In particular, I draw attention to the psychological aspect of this impact—that is, writers' anxiety at the limited significance of writing literature—and look at how their attempt to dispel this anxiety led to them returning to Locke. As a result, my dissertation exhibits a close reading of Romantic texts from the perspective of Locke's philosophy of language. My study does not concern grammatical and rhetorical structures of a given text, as does Elfenbein's, but rather how that text as a whole can be interpreted as a response to the standardization of English. By taking Elfenbein's interest in the effects of prescriptivism in a new direction, my doctoral work contributes to a richer understanding of the relation between Romantic literature and language standardization.

I hope that my investigation into Locke's influence on Romantic speculation about language will encourage scholars to couple their readings of Romantic texts with an attention to the philological concerns of the second half of the eighteenth century. This further study might deal with not only the writers whom I have discussed in this dissertation, but also other writers like Shelley and Hazlitt who actively involved themselves in debates about language—debates that mostly arose, as we have seen, in relation to the linguistic theories of Locke and Johnson, two dominant figures in the linguistic thought of the century. However, other influential figures such as Condillac and Horne Tooke should not be overlooked. Their linguistic ideas, too, were profoundly indebted to Locke's philosophy. Much of Condillac's explanation of the origin of language and etymology can be attributed to the influence of Locke; and Tooke based his radical reduction of all words to names for sensation upon Locke's empiricist discourse. Hans Aarsleff successfully secured Condillac and Tooke rightful places in the history of language study in his important books *From Locke to Saussure* (1982) and *The Study of Language in England, 1780 - 1860* (1967). Nevertheless, it seems to me that Romantic scholars have not yet sufficiently incorporated Aarsleff's findings into their interpretation of literary works from the period.[1] Much work remains to understand how Romantic writers tackled linguistic issues conceptualized by Condillac and Tooke, both of whom expanded upon Locke's propositions about language.

While writing this dissertation, I have developed a deep interest in how conceptions of language in a given historical period influence the literary production of that period. I hope that my study prompts critical considerations of how theoretical approaches to language affect writers' notions of authorship and their development of forms of literariness. I suggest considering theories of language as an important topic for literary discussions. Literary criticism can still benefit substantially from discussions that link a close reading of literature to the arguments concerning the nature and use of language. In particular, I believe that issues surrounding the arbitrariness of language—which has been the subject of intense speculation since Locke in the history of linguistic philosophy—will continue to grab the attention of literary critics who are pondering questions about linguistic representation in a given text.

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[1] According to my research, only two studies to date have analyzed the relationship between a Romantic author and Condillac or Tooke. See James C. McKusick's *Coleridge's Philosophy of Language* (1986), Chapter 2. "Coleridge and Horne Tooke"; and Richard Marggraf Turley's *The Politics of Language in Romantic Literature*, Chapter 4. "Keats, Condillac and Nathaniel Bailey."

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