

Representative Words

*Politics, Literature, and the American Language,
1776–1865*

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Introduction

Representative – misrepresentative

Nathaniel Hawthorne, *American Notebooks*

In 1845 Edwin Whipple, an eminent New England literary critic, published in the *American Review* a remarkable essay on the power and duplicity of words in which he declares at the outset, “Words . . . exercise such an untrammelled influence [in the concerns of the world], that it is unjust to degrade them from sovereigns into representatives.” He adds, “The true ruler of this big, bouncing world is the Lexicon. Every new word added to its accumulated thousands is a new element of servitude to mankind.”¹ For Americans today Whipple’s words should sound a familiar note of alarm, for in the past two decades, and especially as we approached 1984, we were frequently reminded of George Orwell’s vision of the tyranny of Newspeak. It appeared to many citizens that in the era of Vietnam, Watergate, and Nukespeak we were enduring in our own state a long reign of linguistic and political misrepresentation that threatened the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness. The words of our political leaders not only cloaked indefensible actions with the semblance of virtue but seemingly led us to commit them: in Southeast Asia, we made a wasteland of villages and called it pacification; in Nixon’s White House, the term “national security” sanctioned criminal break-ins; and at Reagan’s urging, MX missiles were funded as Peacekeepers, a term applied in nineteenth-century America to the Colt .45 pistol.²

Alarmed by the deployment of doublespeak in the political discourse of the United States and foreign countries, English teachers and political commentators have often turned in defense to Orwell’s classic essay “Politics and the English Language.” Frequently assigned as reading in high school and college, this essay has become a primer for

introducing students to the politics of language and educating them about the way words and politicians misrepresent reality – or govern our perceptions of it.³ But if we use Orwell's essay to ward off the advance of Newspeak that seemed to threaten us with the "double-think" of Big Brother several decades before 1984, we should also note that it belongs to a long tradition of writing connecting political disorders and the corruption of language that stretches back in Western culture at least to Thucydides' observations in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*.⁴ My work, which provides an account of the tradition, is primarily a study of how and why Americans renewed and developed it between the ages of the Revolutionary and Civil wars. It thus seeks to examine and explain a quest that has often been at the heart of American politics and literature – a quest to end the corruption and tyranny of words or to establish a more representative language – and it places that quest in the wider context of classical, Enlightenment, and modern concerns about political and linguistic misrepresentation.⁵

"For if the word has the potency to revive and make us free, it has also the power to blind, imprison and destroy," declares Ralph Ellison, and in the United States the quest for representative words has been in large part an attempt to constitute or reconstitute the words of the English language and the words of America's governing texts – the Declaration and the Constitution – so that those words would free and unite rather than blind, imprison, and destroy.⁶ But the essence of that quest is captured by John Dos Passos as the attempt to keep ourselves and our nation from being beaten by those "who have turned our language inside out who have taken the clean words our fathers spoke and made them slimy and foul."⁷ Between the Revolution and the Civil War, this quest took a variety of forms and was engaged in by a host of figures from poets and politicians to ministers, schoolmasters, and philosophers. It includes projects to guard or renovate the language that range from John Adams's proposal for an "American Academy for refining, improving, and ascertaining the English Language" and Noah Webster's labors on his spellers and dictionary to Ralph Waldo Emerson's condemnation of "rotten diction" in *Nature* and the efforts of James Fenimore Cooper in *The American Democrat* and of Abraham Lincoln to rectify the meaning of such key political words as "liberty" and "equality." For John Quincy Adams, the pursuit of liberty demanded the recognition that the "words our fathers spoke" and wrote down in the Constitutional Convention were themselves "slimy and foul." During his defense of the slaves who had revolted on the *Amistad*, Adams noted that the framers had hid the sin of slavery under the fig leaf of a circumlocution – "person held to service" – and

he sought, as did Frederick Douglass and William Lloyd Garrison, to rip off the veil of words covering the country's original sin and to perform the Adamic task of calling things – and people who had been reduced to things – by their right names.⁸ Compelled not only by a sense of “wonder” before the “fresh, green breast of the new world” but as witnesses to corruption hidden by “rotten diction” in the American city of words, writers and political activists working in the American grain have labored to name things correctly.⁹

The American quest for representative words can also be considered to include not just attempts to guard or renovate the words of the English language and the governing texts of America, but to change Americans themselves – to convert, reform, or inspire them – so that their actions would be guided by the Word of God or by the words of the Declaration and the Constitution. Americans have conceived of themselves as the “people of the Word,” and whether that word is understood as the Word of God or the words of the founding fathers, it has been their calling to rise up and live out the meaning of those words. And typically in political discourse as well as in literature, Americans have affirmed that vocation, the country's calling by the Word, while criticizing the errant flesh: the failure to be faithful in acts to those words. It is a failure that seemingly bankrupts those hallowed words, leaving them specious, hollow, counterfeit – not “apples of gold in pictures of silver” but mere sounding brass. But while this form of criticism – the lament of American Jeremiahs – denounces the differences between word and deed, saying and doing, letter and spirit in America, it upholds the promise of their future correspondence and calls upon the people to suit their actions to their words so that the country can be held up truly to the world as a “city on a hill” or as a shining reflection of “laws of nature and nature's God.”¹⁰ To renew the words, to make them representative, to redeem their value, from this perspective people must perform anew the acts of liberty, revolution, sacrifice, brotherhood, charity underwritten by the rhetoric of America's first revolution. Only then when the words of the Declaration and the Constitution are backed by the bullion of deeds will people enjoy the full cash value of those promissory notes: “the riches of freedom and the security of justice.”¹¹ Only then when those words become flesh will America cease being a land of false prophets and appear instead as the “political Messiah.”¹² This call for words redeemed by action in an America that has substituted rhetoric for action is the call that Thoreau makes in his essays, that Fuller addresses in her letters from Italy, that Lincoln embodies in his Gettysburg Address, and that Dos Passos summons up in his tribute to Sacco and Vanzetti in *The Big Money*: “hear the old words of the haters

of oppression made new in sweat and agony tonight.”¹³ But as we have been reminded by Sacvan Bercovitch and others, this call is deeply problematic given what the words of the Revolution and Constitution underwrote and sanctioned, and given how that call transforms dissent into a ritual of consensus and how the language of the Revolution has been exploited by merchandisers of the word to sell middle-class goods.¹⁴ Ever since the first settlement in Massachusetts, when the Puritans, in William Carlos Williams’s words, used the “jargon of God” as the “dialect by which they kept themselves surrounded as with a palisade,” Americans have continued to fortify and expand their construction of a city on a hill within a circle of moral rhetoric that has been, since the beginning, in varying parts, a mixture of utopian vision, pragmatic action, “soul butter,” and “hogwash.”¹⁵

There has been another dialect, however, in which Americans have built (or remodeled) the words representing and sustaining visions of the country in which they live; and though this language has also worked to fortify the moral rhetoric or ideology of American political discourse, it has often done so by questioning that rhetoric or the uses to which it has been put by confidence men, demagogues, Indian haters, slave masters, lawyers, presidents, ministers, and other members of the word-slinging class. This discourse, this counterjargon, is the dialect of Huck Finn and the “polyphonic oratory of reality” of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and *Moby-Dick*.¹⁶ Representing or inspired by an American vernacular – the commonsense speech of the people or the “bold, nervous, lofty language” of their representatives in the forum and pulpit – these forms of dialectal speech are the styles that Americans developed in the nineteenth century to become revolutionary artists. Indeed, just as the Sons of Liberty in the Revolutionary era opposed a sovereign or corrupt discourse – the artifices of the king’s ministers and the misrepresentations of Parliament – with the counterdiscourse of common sense and impassioned oratory in their quest for better representation, so too did artists of the American Renaissance seek to challenge sovereign lexicons or “rotten diction” with idiomatic expression and rhetorical argument grounded in the vox populi or the voice of nature in a quest for “new potentialities of speech” and representation; and in their triumph they created a place for themselves as founding fathers (or mothers) of what Ann Douglas calls “‘the great American tradition’ of the novel as rhetoric, talk, voice, language,” a tradition that has its poetic equivalent in the language experiments of Lowell’s *Biglow Papers* and Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*.¹⁷

At the forefront of this tradition are those works whose narratives are driven by a dialogical conflict between high and low voices, be-

tween, more specifically, grammatical characters and oral, ungrammatical ones – between, for instance, Captain Farrago and Teague O'Regan, Judge Temple and Natty Bumppo, Captain Vere and Billy Budd, Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn.¹⁸ This tradition also includes such later works as Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Norman Mailer's *Why Are We in Vietnam?*, sustained largely by the boundless vitality of a single voice as well as by works underwritten by a dialogue, in Douglas's words, "between the apparent and the actual, between one imaginary voice and another possibly more authentic one," such as occurs in Melville's *Benito Cereno* and *The Confidence-Man* and in the works of many of "his most interesting literary successors, from Twain to Mailer and Pynchon."¹⁹ This dialogue or contest between voices demands from the reader, as does a legal trial, a checking and balancing of representations, a testing of one construction of language against another. The dialogue can work to emancipate us from any one circle of words, or, as in the conversations on board the *Fidèle* in *The Confidence-Man*, it can invite us to repose confidence in none of the voices nor in representation itself. Indeed, if the visionary end of the early American quest for representative words is a community of people faithful to words and of words faithful to nature, in *The Confidence-Man* the quest comes to an abrupt halt in a revelation about the apocryphal nature of words and the people of the Word. The novel does not guide us through a city of words into scenes of nature but instead leaves us lost in a cul-de-sac wherein we can only turn around and recognize that the place where we live is a city (or country) where words and things, words and deeds, words and people stand in no reliable connection or fidelity to one another. The moral rhetoric that was to sustain construction of a city on a hill – the invocation to charity – appears in this novel on the lips of the confidence man as the ideal mask of self-interest. Something further of the masquerade will always follow, because here we see not face to face or nature through a "transparent eye-ball"; here we see darkly through what James Madison called the "cloudy medium" of language; and here in this new world, as in the fallen old world, we are destined to meet Carwins, Claggarts, confidence men out to deceive us through the duplicitous possibilities of representation.²⁰

In America, then, the quest to end the corruption and tyranny of words has followed three broad routes: the reform of language, the reform of people, and the reform of people's understanding of the potentials and liabilities of language. The tutelary spirit of the first route is the Schoolmaster; of the second, the Minister; and of the third, the Artist. These routes have, of course, run parallel, criss-crossed, and converged throughout American history, and each figure who has

undertaken the quest has been guided or motivated by some combination of each mentor. But whatever form the quest took between the Revolutionary era and the Civil War, and whoever guided it, the underlying motivation was often the same: Americans fondly hoped – or fervently believed – that the advance of liberty and a more perfect union could be achieved through a reformed state of language. “Now is the time, and *this* the country,” Noah Webster declares, “in which we may expect success, in attempting changes favorable to language, science and government.”²¹ Here in this new world, it was envisioned, a purified and uniform language could overcome the babel of tongues that had plagued the old world; here people could free themselves from the artifices and false entitlements of aristocracy by naming things according to their nature; here in this new republic, it was assumed, eloquence would sustain liberty and liberty would sustain eloquence as it did in classical republics; and here a sovereign political language could be constituted whose words would represent not the dictates of a monarch but the common sense of the people and would act as a chart for guiding the ship of state safely between the Scylla and Charybdis of tyranny and anarchy. But perhaps more important, here too in this new world it was strongly believed – or deeply feared – that the misuse and misunderstanding of words could be, in Noah Webster’s phrase, “*the efficient causes of our political disorders.*”²² Here too the corruption of language could precipitate a fall into the strife and tyranny that marked the end of classical republics and England in the seventeenth century. Here too, that is, words could become not representative signs but a sovereign power or the instrument of the demagogue who would make people “First slave to words, then vassal to a name. / Then dupe to party.”²³ Here too, in phrases drawn from Emerson and Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*, old words could be “perverted to stand for things which are not” (ELA, 25), and ugly things could be given fine names (REW, XI, 259), so that “force should be right; or rather right and wrong . . . should lose their names, and so should justice too” (I.iii, 116, 118); and here especially, in this “LOGOCRACY,” this “*government of words,*” as Washington Irving labeled the American political system (ILA, 144), the ship of state could be wrecked by the indefiniteness of the Lexicon or be driven dangerously off course by those who would misconstrue or nominally follow the chart drafted by the founding fathers. For all of these reasons, fear of the word and its corruption was the beginning of political wisdom.

“We have only words against Power Superpower,” Dos Passos declares in *The Big Money*, and in America the battle people have waged against the oppression and misrepresentation of Power Superpower – and against linguistic corruption itself – has been a persistent

one fought with sporadic intensity and varying success.²⁴ The Puritan migration that first settled New England with Europeans had its roots in a protest against the “corruptions” of God’s Word and the persecutions undertaken in His name – a protest that was repeated when Roger Williams proclaimed his dissent in *The Bloody Tenet of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience, in a Conference Between Peace and Truth* against those who had “under the name of Christ, etc.” conducted “bloody, irreligious, and inhumane oppressions and destructions.”²⁵ My account of the battle begins, however, when a vocal minority of colonists turned to sermons, speeches, and pamphlets primed with the language of evangelical religion and republican ideology to protest against (and later free themselves from) what they viewed as a long train of artifices and prevarications perpetrated by King George III and the British government to defend indefensible acts of tyranny and make them pay obeisance (and taxes) to a representative institution that did not represent them. And my account continues through the attempts of reformers in antebellum America to end what were in their view the misinterpretations of the Declaration of Independence and the contradictions of the Constitution that had turned the words representing the ideals of the Revolution into a misrepresentative Newspeak sanctioning slavery and other forms of inequality. “In the beginning of America,” as Ralph Ellison declares, “was not only the word but the contradiction of the word.”²⁶ The Declaration and the Constitution, the verbal fiats that spoke a country and wrote a government into existence, said the thing which was not. The words securing life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness and establishing justice for We, the People, were not made flesh for blacks, women, and other people in the country whose labor helped provide the freedom the founders needed to pen those words. Thus, while American history can be read, in Ellison’s words, as a history of the “idealistic action of the American Word as it goads its users toward a perfection of our revolutionary ideals,” it can also be read as a history of the promulgation and citation of the American Word to secure not the blessings of liberty but the perpetuation of slavery, not the equal rights of We, the People, but the interests of a ruling class.²⁷ This study examines the history of American politics, literature, and language from both perspectives: as a history of Americans fighting, struggling, and conniving to make the dominant languages and shared texts of their culture – in particular the English language, the Declaration, and the Constitution – serve their ideals and their interests, and as a history of Americans reflecting upon their own use and abuse of the word.

In the early 1850s Nathaniel Hawthorne jotted down in a notebook two words connected by a dash that might have been such a reflection

about language or politics in his age. The words were simply “Representative – misrepresentative.”²⁸ Like the scarlet letter Hawthorne finds among the papers of Surveyor Pue, these words are “most worthy of interpretation.” And like Hawthorne’s own approach to the scarlet letter, my interpretation of these two words requires a reconstruction of the past, a telling of a story authorized and authenticated in part by documents from the custom house of European as well as American literature and political discourse. Only by telling that story can we appreciate more fully how Americans from the age of the Revolution through the Civil War confronted in their politics and explored in their literature all the hopes and fears that their Western forebears had expressed for language as an instrument of representation and misrepresentation, and why they so often conducted politics and literature in this period as a battle against the bewitchment of the understanding by language.

Part I of this four-part study develops two frameworks for approaching the nexus of word and act in America, or the ways in which the Actual and the Imaginary – the politics and the literature of the early republic – were each imbued with the nature of the other. In America, I argue, political and linguistic concerns have often merged in questions about the amount of confidence that can be placed in forms of representation and in the degree to which change can be permitted in the English language and the language of the law. Part II places this American nexus of word and act in a larger historical context that reaches back to the roots of democracy and rhetoric in Western culture. It briefly examines the classical and Christian origins of the tradition connecting political and linguistic corruption and then traces its development through the Enlightenment in order to show more fully, in Part III, how and why Noah Webster, Thomas Jefferson, and other early Americans welcomed revolutionary changes that would renovate not only their form of government but the constitution of the English language. In America, the pursuit of liberty and a more perfect union was inseparable from the quest for proper representation in both a political and a linguistic sense, or for a language as well as a government that would correspond to common sense or to the natural constitution of things. This part also describes how John Locke’s contractual theory of language, and especially his ideas about remedying the imperfections and abuses of words, influenced early American linguistic speculation and helped Revolutionary Americans combat the “misrepresentations” of the British and construct a new political language: the Constitution. The Constitution itself is viewed here as the culmination of a transformation in political and linguistic theory which began in the seventeenth century whereby the people

replace the monarch as the source of authority in both law and language. In America, that is, the divine right to name and give meaning becomes the right of humanity. In the beginning is the word of We, the People.

Part IV then examines how the early hopes Americans had for the reform of the English language in America – the prospect, for instance, that America could repair the curse of Babel – gave way in the mid nineteenth century to increasing fears of its corruption and to the conviction of many statesmen and writers that the political disorders of the period – including the Civil War – were caused in large part by the misuse and misunderstanding of words or by their omnipotence. It was a time when, it seemed, “political double-dealings naturally grew out of verbal double meanings,” words quoted by Oliver Wendell Holmes, and when language appeared to be the source of a new tyranny, a power exercising “‘a sovereign sway and masterdom’ over the whole domain of thought and emotion,” in Edwin Whipple’s words.²⁹ The great political questions of the day, from the debate over the tariff and the charter of the national bank to the extension of slavery into the territories, resolved themselves, as Tocqueville observed, into judicial questions, and those judicial questions further resolved themselves into rancorous quarrels and grandiloquent debates about the definition and interpretation of words in the Constitution.³⁰ Like the Bible in seventeenth-century England, America’s fundamental law became the battleground for a war of words, and the fighting among political parties, branches of government, and outspoken individuals over its proper construction helped shape the age’s understanding of the way words govern people and people govern the meanings of words. The legal controversies and political debates of this period, which often centered on acts of interpretation and turned on acts of oratory, not only provoked violent confrontations but spurred concern about the power and duplicity of words and the values and dangers of linguistic change which manifested itself in the literature and language theory of the American Renaissance.

In the last part of this study I argue, in fact, that the unease many American writers expressed about the unsettled state of the American language and their consequent attempts to preserve its purity and uniformity, their protests over the corruption of words and their corresponding desire for a language grounded in nature, and their warning about the dangers of mistaking words for things and representations for reality must be seen in a political context. More specifically, that unease and those fears and warnings must be seen in conjunction with the unease Americans felt about the unsettled state of words in American law and political discourse, their protests over

the corrupt interpretations of the Constitution and its lack of grounding in the laws of nature, and their fears that the people were being deluded by false politicians and fake philanthropists – what Margaret Fuller termed “word-Catos” and “word-Christis” – invoking such terms as “liberty” and “union” and party names like “Republican” and “Democrat” for purposes that contradicted the ideals of the Revolution.³¹ The heightened skepticism about language and the pervasive concern about its ambiguity in this period, which stemmed at least in part from the constitutional controversies, are developments reflected in the experiments of American Renaissance writers with the “possibilities of symbolism” and their ventures into a “rhetoric of ambiguity” such as we find in those two great novels written at the height of the constitutional crisis: *The Scarlet Letter* and *Moby-Dick*.³² The “obliquity of signs,” the contrasting planes of discourse, and the multiple interpretations of symbols aboard the *Pequod* and in Hester Prynne’s Boston mirror a political world, like the United States in the 1850s, that is united by a text but divided over its interpretation.³³ It is a world of contradictory voices deaf to its own contradictions, a world where people insist passionately, vehemently – indeed, monomania-cally – on the truth of their own interpretation of a symbol or of the letter of the law and can see or admit of no other interpretation because of ideological blindness or ideological fervor – or because they possess a theory of language that assumes that words have a “natural” or “proper” or “determinate” meaning.

Perhaps in an effort to transcend (or challenge) the ideology of party politics and reform movements wherein each party claimed to possess the natural and proper meanings of words and made “truth-claims” for their own diction or perhaps were just sickened by what Fuller termed the pomp and strife of words, some writers in the period questioned the concept of a proper meaning and an objective interpretation, contending instead that the difference between true representation and misrepresentation, plain sense and corrupt sense, false interpretation and correct interpretation was fundamentally one of perspective or political party.³⁴ From this vantage point, the “poetics of indeterminacy” that scholars have commented on in works by Emerson, Hawthorne, and Melville can be seen as less the product of an escape from history into aesthetics and more as an aesthetic response – or symbolic challenge – to a politics of determinacy or to the efforts of politicians and reformers to affix a determinate meaning to the letter of the law and to claim for their interpretation the validity of logic or a faithful interpretation of the will of the founding fathers. But by the end of the 1850s, the ambiguities of the Constitution and of a nation half free and half slave could no longer be tolerated (much

less appreciated) in a liberal spirit of compromise and pluralistic truth: one interpretation, one side of the house divided had to dominate by force of law or law of force. "A general massacre of all who have not thought in a certain way has proved a very effective means of settling opinion in a country," observed Charles Sanders Peirce, who spent the decades following the Civil War seeking philosophic or semiotic methods of a different caliber to fix beliefs and make our ideas clear.³⁵

This book, then, is a study of the language of politics and the politics of language in Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary America. Its method draws upon the work of J. G. A. Pocock in the history of political discourse in the republican tradition and on his theoretical statements about the practice of studying the history of political thought as a history of the interactions of *langue* and *parole*, of confining discourses and innovative speech acts, and of paradigms of discourse extended, modified, or challenged in the context of social and political change.³⁶ But my aim is not so much to study transformations in the language of politics in the context of social change as to examine transformations in attitudes toward language in the context of political change. To chart those changes, I draw upon many of the canonical texts of early American culture and upon a large body of writing about language theory and practice contained in journal articles, grammars, popular books, legal texts, and political essays of the period. I examine the relationship between political and linguistic concerns in these texts by focusing on the political metaphors Americans used to describe language and linguistic processes and on the linguistic metaphors they used to describe political processes. That focus leads me to investigate the parallels that Americans perceived (or that their writings suggest) between political and linguistic representation, between rules of grammar and the laws of the land, between definitions and contractual government, and between political revolution and linguistic change. These parallels in general have received much attention in modern literary criticism, and that criticism informs my discussion of early American investigations into – or confrontations with – the politics of language and interpretation. My main concern, however, is not to reveal how this speculation about language anticipates modern theories; it is rather to place that speculation in its political and cultural context.

Several recent studies of American language theory and practice undertaken from different perspectives by Philip F. Gura, Dennis E. Baron, David Simpson, Kenneth Cmiel, and Michael P. Kramer have made a significant contribution to such a contextual study.³⁷ But what needs to be investigated more closely is what Americans learned from and what they contributed to the dialogue about the relationship

between politics and language that began in classical antiquity and continued strong through the Enlightenment. That dialogue is an integral part of the classical rhetorical tradition and of the literature of eighteenth-century England that played such a crucial role in the formation of republican ideology. The dialogue treats such subjects of particular concern to early Americans as the relationship between liberty and eloquence, force and persuasion, political and linguistic reform, the corruption of words and a corrupt body politic, misrepresentation and tyranny, and freedom of speech (in its broadest sense) and democracy. Early Americans were keenly aware of these relationships from studying the political and historical works of classical and Enlightenment authors and from reading their poems, plays, philosophy, and fiction. Indeed, they would not have doubted what John Adams declared in 1780: "It is not to be disputed that the form of government has an influence upon language, and language in its turn influences not only the form of government, but the temper, the sentiments, and manners of the people."³⁸ This study could be considered an attempt to document Adams's assertion. It seeks to reveal in particular how political events and a republican form of government helped shape linguistic theories and practices in America; how theories of language and fears about the power and duplicity of words influenced political thought and the form of American government; and how language came to be seen by Americans as a political instrument that possessed many of the advantages and disadvantages of government itself: an instrument, that is, which could, on the one hand, help preserve order and liberty, but also an instrument which could, on the other hand, become a source of tyranny and corruption, a power that could mislead the people, confound their ideas of virtue and vice, and exercise a profound influence – indeed, a sovereign sway – over their hearts and minds.

The sovereign sway of words was what Edwin Whipple feared when he declared in 1845, "The true ruler of this big, bouncing world is the Lexicon."³⁹ This statement, remarkable in 1845, has now become a cliché. We are governed, ruled, constituted by discourse; we are caged in a prison house of language; the word is my master. I write not to honor this cliché or bury it but to historicize it, or to suggest when and why such early Americans as Whipple felt compelled to come to this conclusion and to challenge the Lexicon when opposing the sovereign power or ruling interest of the day (e.g., the king, the parliament, the "slave power," the people). It is a story of people fearing imprisonment in what Thomas Paine called the "Bastille of a word" and seeking their freedom by asserting what John Locke called "man's inviolable liberty" to make "words stand for whatever ideas