

# Wordsworth's Profession



*Form, Class, and  
the Logic of Early Romantic  
Cultural Production*

Thomas Pfau

Stanford University Press  
Stanford, California

1997

Stanford University Press  
Stanford, California  
© 1997 by the Board of Trustees of the  
Leland Stanford Junior University  
Printed in the United States of America  
CIP data are at the end of the book

## Acknowledgments

For their perceptive and supportive responses to earlier drafts of this book, or parts of it, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to a number of people. Jerrold Hogle's extraordinary support of this manuscript has provided me with an awesome example of considerate and enabling mentorship. Ian Balfóur, Tilottama Rajan, Carol Jacobs, Nicholas Roe, and Steven Goldsmith provided invaluable critical input. Here at Duke, I benefitted immensely from comments and suggestions offered by some colleagues whose friendship, collegiality, and intellectual integrity have truly distinguished them; among these are Robert F. Gleckner, Frank Lentricchia, David Aers, Thomas J. Ferraro, and Michael Valdez Moses. My appreciation also extends to the highly engaged and talented Duke undergraduate and graduate students who made my Romanticism seminars a spirited and rigorous testing-ground for this book's thesis and the local readings undertaken in its support. Among the many whose lucid questions, observations, and suggestions helped clarify and strengthen my argument, I especially wish to acknowledge John Waters, Ghislaine McDayter, Nigel Alderman, Damien Gilbert, and Helen Thompson.

Most of all, I have looked forward to expressing my profound gratitude to my wife, Olga L. Valbuena, and our daughters, Natalie and Elisa, from whose loving and creative sympathies I have drawn strength for many years. I dedicate this book to them, in full admiration of their expressive talents, which have always kept me mindful of the fine line separating intellectual passion from professional self-absorption.

Earlier versions of sections of "Instruction" and "Vocation" appeared in *Romanticism* (1996) and *South Atlantic Quarterly* (1996). A portion of "Instruction" was published in *New Literary History* 24 (1993) and is reprinted here by kind permission of the editor.

## Contents

Abbreviations xi

Introduction i

Description: Picturesque Aesthetics and the Production of the  
English Middle Class, 1730–1798 17

Professing Class: Aesthetic Form as Social Capital, 19. The Politics  
of Locodescriptive Form: Aesthetic Locale and National Interest, 37.  
Cultural Experience as Technique: On the Pragmatics of Picturesque  
Form, 61. Aesthetics and the Social Unconscious: Judgment and  
Disinterestedness in Kant, 82. Virtual Reality: Labor and  
Professionalization in Wordsworth's Early Poetry, 92. Lyric  
Transport: Beholding Affect and Intelligence in "Tintern Abbey," 114.

Instruction: Romantic Theories of Elemental and Cultural Literacy  
and the *Lyrical Ballads* 141

"Spreading the areas of allegiance": The Pragmatics of Romantic  
Writing, 143. Surveillance as Pleasure: Literacy and Ascendancy  
in Bell and Coleridge, 151. "Searching Their Hearts": Moral and  
Aesthetic Pedagogy in Wollstonecraft, 163. "Silent Monitors": The  
Hermeneutic Mobility of the Reader in *Lyrical Ballads*, 179. Genial  
Inquisition: Dialogue as Social Practice in Wordsworth and Godwin,  
193. Bringing About the Past: Recollection and Transmission in the  
Ballad Genre, 208. Moving the Subject: *Bildung* as Cultural Theory  
in Hegel and Wordsworth, 227. "Substitute Excellencies": Figuration  
and Authenticity in Wordsworth's Preface, 246.

Vocation: Automimesis and the Political Economy of Spirit and Body  
in *The Prelude* 261

Self-Interest Professed: Autobiography and the Simulation of Authority, 263. Self-Interest Contained: Figuring the Polity in Reynolds, Burke, and Hume, 275. Self-Interest Legitimated: The Composition of Affect in *The Prelude*, 302. "Emboss'd with terms of art": Imitation of Life in Book 5 of *The Prelude*, 321. "Disturbing the Feast": The Crisis of Political Economy in Malthus's *Essay*, 341. "Debasement of the Body or the Mind": Urban Inferno in *The Prelude*, 362. "Rosy Cheeks"/"False Lustres": Sexual and Aesthetic Heterodoxy in Book 7 of *The Prelude*, 370.

Notes 385

Bibliography 429

Index 449

## Figures

1. Claude Lorrain, *Landscape with a Rustic Dance* (1640–41) 45
2. Claude Lorrain, *Landscape with Apollo and the Muses* (1652) 46
3. Nicolas Poussin, *Landscape with the Gathering of the Ashes of Phocion* (1648) 52
4. Salvatore Rosa, *Landscape with Banditti* (1656) 53
5. Thomas Gainsborough, *Mr. and Mrs. John Gravenor and Their Daughters, Elizabeth and Ann* (1752) 59
6. Thomas Gainsborough, *The Watering Place* (1777) 60
7. Joseph Priestley, figures appended to his *Familiar Introduction to the Theory and Practice of Perspective* (1770) 68
8. William Gilpin, *Scene Without Picturesque Adornment* (c. 1792) 73
9. William Gilpin, *Scene with Picturesque Adornment* (c. 1792) 74
10. William Craig, exempla from his *Essay on the Study of Nature in Drawing Landscape* (1793) 80
11. Thomas Hearne, frontispiece to Richard P. Knight, *The Landscape* (1795) 85
12. Thomas Hearne, frontispiece to Richard P. Knight, *The Landscape* (1795) 86
13. Thomas Gainsborough, *Wooded Landscape with Cattle by a Pool* (1782) 95
14. Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Transept of Tintern Abbey* (c. 1794) 127
15. Caspar David Friedrich, *Two Men Contemplating the Moon* (1819–20) 133

16. Caspar David Friedrich, *Moonrise at Sea* (1821) 134  
 17. William Blake, frontispiece to Mary Wollstonecraft, *Original Stories*  
 (1791) 167  
 18. William Blake, "Nurse's Song," from his *Songs of Experience*  
 (1794) 168

## Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used throughout the text and notes. Full information on the sources below and other sources cited in the text and notes is provided in the bibliography. In quotations, italics are in the original unless specified as mine.

- B William Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose*, ed. David V. Erdman  
 BL Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. W. J. Bate and James Engell, 2 vols.  
 CrJ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J. H. Bernard  
 D Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, ed. Pat Rogers  
 E William Godwin, *The Enquirer: Reflections on Education, Manners, and Literature*  
 EPP 1798 Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, ed. Philip Appleman  
 EPP 1803 Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, ed. Donald Winch  
 EW William Wordsworth, *An Evening Walk*, ed. James Averill  
 LB William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems, 1797–1800*, ed. James Butler and Karen Green  
 LG Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Logic*, ed. J. R. de Jackson  
 LL Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lectures 1808–1819: On Literature*, ed. R. A. Foakes, 2 vols.  
 LS Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lay Sermons*, ed. R. J. White  
 LWEY *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Early Years, 1787–1805*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, rev. Chester Shaver  
 OS Mary Wollstonecraft, *Original Stories from Real Life*

- P 1799 William Wordsworth, *The Prelude, 1798-1799*, ed. Stephen Parrish
- P 1805 William Wordsworth, *The Thirteen-Book "Prelude,"* ed. Mark Reed, 2 vols.
- P 1850 William Wordsworth, *The Fourteen-Book "Prelude,"* ed. W. J. B. Owen
- PG G. F. W. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, ed. Johannes Hoffmeister
- PrW *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane W. Smyser, 3 vols.
- PS G. F. W. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller
- PW William Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, 5 vols.
- RC William Wordsworth, "The Ruined Cottage" and "The Pedlar," ed. James Butler
- RF Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. C. C. O'Brien
- RR Donald Reiman, ed., *The Romantics Reviewed, Part A*, 2 vols.

## Wordsworth's Profession

## *Introduction*

As I try to indicate the motivation for this book, I find an image persisting in my mind, compelling for both its formal concision and its historical force. The year is 1945, the scene is Berlin: there, before a backdrop of ruins rising skyward from the faltering twilight of an early summer evening, is the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Sergiu Celibidache, giving one of its first performances since the end of the war.<sup>1</sup> The scene seems almost without parallel: a city reduced to rubble, a nation soon to confront its gruesome history of this century, rising intuitions of an abysmal collective guilt, and the encroaching recognition that this time Germany has obliterated all its moral and historical capital. In short, this is an audience about to become conscious of a world irreversibly altered by the bloodshot fantasy of Germany's racial and geopolitical hegemony; and in this setting the symphony goes, synecdochic of the German populace, struggle to imagine a reality beyond the totalitarian, violently homogenized order of the Third Reich. With the bunker of the *Reich* beneath, the rubble of turn-of-the-century Wilhelminian architecture all around, and an "uncertain heaven" above, these listeners witnessing Celibidache and the philharmonic supremely embody a community desperately searching for untainted symbolic resources that will help it recover some measure of moral and affective integrity. In fact, the symbolic order indispensable for this project of ideological reconstruction already fills the air: free of the terror of historical memory, the strains of Beethoven's *Egmont* overture ascend into the dusk; tears descend from empty eyes, finding their way on the furrowed, gray, often catatonic faces. One might want to conclude that these tears signal an awakening *from* the nightmare of saturation bombings and street combat, and perhaps also a first awakening *to* the ghastly efficiency of Gestapo terror and Nazi propaganda conceived and implemented by the German people themselves. More likely (if less optimisti-

cally), however, these tears symptomize collective *relief* at having rediscovered (and at having begun to reappropriate) *Kultur* as a plausible strategy of “unknowing” a relentless and potentially insurmountable consciousness of historical guilt. The mediations of a more distant, settled, and notably Romantic tradition; the virtual, formal integrity of Germany’s aesthetic heritage; the dream of a noncontradictory, transhistorical, “pure” cultural capital: all of these are here mobilized to stave off Germany’s impending awakening to the full measure of its collective historical guilt.

Some twenty years later, Schumann’s and Brahms’s orchestrations of a cohesive, quasi-symphonic bourgeois affect—along with the corresponding literary dream of reading as *Einführung* so suggestively imaged in the smooth, Biedermeyer prose-textures of Eichendorff, Stifter, Fontane, and the early, “nonpolitical” Thomas Mann—once again established themselves as the dominant cultural dispensation. Gone by this time were most of the ruins of 1945, replaced by functional concert halls, well-stocked public libraries, and generously funded museums. To be raised on this diet of nineteenth-century cultural production, as I was, meant being initiated into the communal dream of a noncontradictory “cultural heritage” (*kulturelles Erbe*) of such formal coherence as to induce the forgetting (before one has ever fully known) the ideological tensions and historical guilt that have been the price of that national community. A classic instance of Nietzsche’s conception of the aesthetic as “redemption by illusion” (*Birth of Tragedy*, 25), the project of bourgeois cultivation (*Bildung*) entailed being “trained up” (as Bentham and Coleridge had put it long before) into a state of mind where a formal-aesthetic competence furnished a truly indispensable moral capital. For the post-World War II generation, that is, the work of culture helped maintain an “illusion that we, utterly caught up in it and consisting of it . . . are required to see as empirical reality” (*Birth of Tragedy*, 25). Such a passionate, if also (by Nietzsche’s own later admission) “impossibly Romantic,” critical analysis of the Apolline world of “rational” illusion provides the following readings with a provocative hypothesis. For I shall argue that it was at the turn from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century that the emergent urban and provincial middle-class communities in England began to display a cultural productivity unprecedented in its complexity, scope, and intensity. A unique psychological constellation emerges, an amalgam of metaphysical and formalist *esprit* that will enable its subjects to stave off the impending consciousness of their historicity and their historical guilt by pledging themselves to the open-ended pursuit and refinement of strictly aesthetic or “inward” experiences. As Nietzsche saw all too clearly, it was precisely by

means of their abiding commitment to “deep” and “scholarly” forms of productivity that the nineteenth-century European middle classes sought to defend themselves against the impinging consciousness of their complicity in that century’s checkered history of nationalism and imperialism. The same set of cultural practices also enabled this demographic community to compensate for its own irremediable economic and spiritual contingency, something succinctly captured by Georg Lukács’s now well-worn expression of the “transcendental homelessness” of the protagonist in the nineteenth-century novel.

This sketch from postwar Germany has suggestive connections with the modes of cultural production in early English Romanticism analyzed in the following chapters. There is, as Linda Colley has recently shown, the significant historical fact that the genesis of Romantic culture evolved in a country almost uninterruptedly at war and thus substantially uncertain of its cultural mission and spiritual identity save through continual projections of a hostile Other. To be sure, not even the darkest moments of Pittite repression can be said to resemble the diabolical legacy of material and spiritual terror in German politics between 1933 and 1945. Still, the vignette of the Berlin Philharmonic’s first postwar performances throw into relief the unconscious efficacy of cultural production in the Romantic and post-Romantic age of flourishing capitalism. After all, in its strenuous elaboration of affective experiences and collective patterns of judgment, as well as in the persistent formal-institutional policing and curricular transmission of aesthetic traditions, the demographic historical subject now so casually identified as the European “middle class” appears to have been born precisely of a desire to forestall the recognition of its historically conflicted, often deeply antagonistic historical situation in the inverse (aesthetic) order of highly refined symbolic and exegetical forms and practices. As a sphere of virtual expertise, that is, the aesthetic does not merely defend its practitioners against the “problem” of their historical genesis and present disposition; it effectively converts this problem into a solution by imaging or narrativizing it in rhetorical forms or genres that appear wholly separate from the history they now represent in condensed form. It is precisely this capacity of the aesthetic to encrypt its own contingent historical situation that this study intends to analyze. For only at a concrete rhetorical (and usually textual) level can we expect to gain insight into the aesthetic (and especially the “literary”) simulation of history as the understated (always “subtle”) drama of its subjects’ psychological mobility.

Unexpectedly, then, writing this book helped me clarify what it means

to have been raised and formally initiated into the cultural capital of a nation seeking to contain the spiritual and material debts of its history by reconstituting that history in the shrewdly decontextualized form of a cultural heritage. The typical 1960s middle-class literary curriculum thus extended from the polite conflicts of Lessing's Enlightenment through the psychological excess of Schiller's *Sturm und Drang* to the gritty eloquence of Hauptmann's and Brecht's realism. Its biographical lineage is paralleled by that of the great composers, extending from the effortlessly concise Mozart to the supremely self-sufficient Beethoven and on to Brahms, himself at times virtually incapacitated by the weight of a tradition to which he could not imagine any alternative. Analogously, the operatic canon took the dedicated listener from the Mozart's and Cimarosa's *opera buffa* through the bel-canto tales of nationalist struggle in Donizetti, Bellini, and Verdi to the alternately nostalgic or ironic last Romanticisms of Puccini and Richard Strauss.<sup>2</sup> To be inducted into the formal mysteries of 1960s middlebrow culture by being sat down (at age eight if I remember correctly) to a performance of *The Magic Flute* now strikes me as uncannily similar to Tamino's initiation into the enigmatic symbolism of eighteenth-century Freemasonry in that opera. Caught up in the Romantics' highly successful conception of middlebrow reading and listening as practices of complex identification, I made the sympathetic acquaintance of protagonists usually overwhelmed by their historical moment, ranging from Goethe's Werther to Mann's Hans Castorp and from Florestan to Tristan. Thus I came to experience first at an intuitive level that profound dialectic between the contingencies of historical experience and the simulated permanence of the aesthetic, a dialectic that this book now intends to analyze in more explicit form. Undeniably, many of my intellectual interests were thus sown long ago, in the simultaneously public and private spaces of the library, the concert hall, and the museum, where "leisure" was dedicated to the semiprofessional pursuit of cultivating and (to take the long view) redeeming oneself and one's community through the "mastery" of a complex cultural heritage.

Yet if this book rests on vestigial identifications and recollections, such biographical ephemera will ultimately prove meaningful only if they coalesce with the analysis of much larger and complex aesthetic, economic, and spiritual traditions and practices. Thus, in reflecting the personal "situatedness" of this project, I do not purport to tap some incontrovertible moral or professional capital, nor do I mean to stylize what Christopher Lasch has identified as the "pseudo-self-awareness" of the postmodern intellectual into some unassailable critical vantage point. On the contrary,

reflecting on the "personal" motivation of a given critical argument should deepen one's sense of responsibility to the discursive and methodological framework of a discipline; for it sharpens one's awareness of the affective depth and historical scope of the "reading as identification" paradigm. As remains to be seen in the context of Wordsworth's *Prelude*, any attempt to engage self-interest *rhetorically* begins (but should not end) with reconstructing the affective substance in a sequence of reflection that must subsequently be reinscribed within a public and discursive framework: self-interest always comes at the price of accountability; or, in Hegel's words, all self-expression (*Äusserung*) produces self-alienation (*Entäusserung*). In a similar vein, Hume, Wordsworth, and even Coleridge variously argued and exemplified in their writings how self-interest not only demands but indeed logically presupposes a significant measure of social (self-)discipline. Proceeding on that premise, this book remains quite firmly within its critical discipline, even though it conceives the curricular and critical agenda of that discipline to be a remote effect of Romanticism's invention of "literature" as the medium best suited for professionalizing and governing a largely uncolonized middle-class interiority. Hence, even as this study incubates and responds to an inescapable quantum of personal motivation, it primarily aims at configuring that affect with more complex historical and professional imperatives; for the purpose of critical self-awareness is to understand, not indulge, the motives underlying and shaping our interpretive practice.<sup>3</sup>

One way to achieve such understanding is to study the genesis of the Wordsworthian self—in its double sense as the author/producer and the actual or ideal reader—since either self is located precisely at the intersection of diverse and often interfering political, economic, and aesthetic languages. Analyzed as reflexes of a complex historical and cultural logic, the vagaries of personal biography—however spontaneous, unique, and "deep" they may seem to the critic writing—should gradually merge with larger, more anonymous patterns of historical experience and cultural productivity. To the extent that the Romantic aesthetic constructs (and authenticates) affect and intuition as "expressive" matter—thereby constructing the individual as the embodiment of ultimately communal values, purposes, and beliefs—we would obviously commit the imitative fallacy if we subsequently collapsed the historical analysis of that aesthetic into a confessional narrative of how it (supposedly) produced "us." Such a bargaining away of discursive accountability may reflect an increasingly widespread "emotional and rhetorical difficulty of remaining in a state of constant suspension, [which] is the discipline that much of the strictest

contemporary theory seems to demand"; it may also be the symptom of a more pervasive decline of theory throughout the humanities, with practitioners proving unable or unwilling to "offer the grand theory, the master narrative, the outline of the socio-historical totality" (Simpson, *Academic Postmodern*, 26, 28). Alternatively, however, the flagging commitment to sustained forms of critical analysis may simply reflect the *ennui* among midcareer suburban professionals now looking to ventriloquize such language in critical confessions as a legitimate "weariness with professionalism itself" (ibid., 76). The consequence, as David Simpson, Barbara Johnson, Alan Liu, and François Lyotard among others have argued, has been a barrage of "little narratives" that "produce dissensus rather than consensus" by predicating critical insight on the deceptive authenticity of the critic's "self-enthusiasm and self-projection."<sup>4</sup>

Either way, it should be stressed that in reconsidering the deceptively familiar story of the historical genesis of bourgeois Romanticism, this book for the most part does *not* take exception to the antiurban, antiprofessional, critical *cum* confessional spirit of contemporary critical writing. Rather, it traces it back to the aesthetic dispensation of the Wordsworthian "egotistical sublime," an aesthetic ideal that Keats shrewdly analyzed as "writ[ing] in one of the most comfortable Moods of his Life . . . a kind of sketchy intellectual Landscape—not a search after Truth." Arguably, Keats had a point when he remarked that Wordsworth, steeped in material security and an affluence of spirit, should "have thought a little deeper" before writing "Gypsies," in which case most likely he "would not have written the poem at all" (*Letters*, 1: 387, 174). At the same time, Keats's observation does not foreclose the possibility that the inscrutable self-involvement of Wordsworth's poetic personae may also deceive us (and perhaps is meant to do so) into searching no further for social and ideological motives potentially realized in these figurations of his "blessed" interiority. In fact, Romantic historicism has taught us much about how this period progressively fashioned imaginary subjects—ranging from the nucleus of the individual self to the demographic subjects of class, region, and nation—out of highly intricate (albeit deceptively "natural") forms of aesthetic production and interpretation. Rethinking this basic plot, I focus on the inherently problematic idea of "class" (specifically the idea of a "middle class") by analyzing how in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century cultural behavior shifts from a paradigm of leisure and consumption to an increasingly formalized, canonical, and "deep" interpretive investment in literature and the arts. Anticipating similar developments in post-Napoleonic France and Germany, England between 1750

and 1800 witnesses the ascent of what we now take to be the historical "fact" of an English middle class, a development characterized by the gradual production and refinement of the symbolic conditions that expedited the growing self-awareness of that class.

In his recent study of the transformation of political discourse during this period, Dror Wahrman offers a much-needed critique of the "persistent image haunting the historiography of modern Britain, that of an emergent 'middle class,' which like the rising sun . . . becomes inexorably ever more conspicuous and transforms our vision of the world." Focusing on cultural practices rather than political debate, my own study also seeks to examine what Wahrman calls "assumptions about the correspondence between social being and social consciousness" and about "the degree of freedom which in fact exists in the space between social reality and its representation."<sup>5</sup> Crucial for any analysis of the English middle class is the fact that, for an extraordinarily long time, it remained unhappily caught between the consciousness of its political and spiritual disenfranchisement (an issue only partially resolved by the 1832 Reform Bill) and the vivid experience of its economic and cultural ascendancy, already evident in Hume's economic writings of 1754 and fully confirmed by the 1776 publication of Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, the foundational text for the discipline of political economy.<sup>6</sup> Precisely the antagonistic structure of its evolution—the delayed and uneven development of the middle class into the moral and cultural exemplar of the national community—set in motion the demographic expansion and postclassicist democratization of cultural practices during the later eighteenth century. Thus this era appears significantly influenced by the emergence of "an essentially 'bourgeois' aesthetic and norm of conduct" that could negotiate between the dominant cosmopolitan and classicist models of European high culture and the envisioned national, regional, even local forms of aesthetic production and consumption serviceable for the emergent middling classes: "the solution was to adapt essentially neo-classical ideas in such a way as to permit the incorporation of fundamentally Protestant attitudes" (Campbell, *Romantic Ethic*, 150). Eager to distance themselves from the hedonistic and consumptive materialism of the landed gentry and the upper aristocracy, the middling classes devised new symbolic forms and inward experiences that would reinforce their social and spiritual legitimacy. While still destined for *consumption*, the aesthetic object had to be first experienced in an essentially *productive* manner, that is, as an intricate commodity demanding sustained interpretive care and thus generating a superior, because productive, form of subjectivity.

What distinguishes the bourgeois technique of deriving “pleasure from self-constructed, imaginative experience”—what Colin Campbell calls “modern hedonism”—is that a “process of day-dreaming intervenes between the formulation of a desire and its consummation” (ibid., 85). It is striking that Campbell’s thesis, which synthesizes discrete features of eighteenth-century economic behavior into an ethic of modern consumerism, should connect so readily with the operational structure of Romantic aesthetics. What follows is an attempt to trace the operation of “modern hedonism” in the self-constructed imaginative experiences facilitated by the poetic commodities of the period, with a special emphasis on how that poetry reconceives consumption as a form of unself-conscious productivity. To the extent that it continually stimulates “mind” to further, more ambitious displays of imaginative mobility, Wordsworth’s poetry in particular may be viewed as an encryption of its demographic unconscious: the cultural Romance of the middle-class psyche as the story of an unlimited development realized (and objectified for us) in Wordsworth’s approach to discrete aesthetic forms and genres and succinctly captured in his phrase of “something evermore about to be.” What follows loosely conforms to Clifford Siskin’s idea of a “generic history,” a mode of critical writing that “use[s] genre to construct history rather than the other way around” (*Historicity*, 10). Thus, in exploring the role of specific poetic genres and of Poetry as a professional venture, I seek to elucidate Wordsworth’s ongoing aesthetic class/ification of a plausible demographic community and worthy audience. Though by no means the only protagonist in this study, Wordsworth proved especially persistent in his experimentation with descriptive, didactic, narrative-autobiographical, and lyric forms and so allows us greater access than perhaps other writers do to the social pragmatics of Romantic literary production. In examining his sustained attempts to cultivate the inherited cultural practices and ideals of “description,” “instruction,” and “vocation,” we find Wordsworth gradually enfranchising himself and his audience as a novel, imagined community. It is a community distinguished not only by the intensity of its commitment to aesthetic and interpretive pursuits but also by the participation of its members in an unconscious pattern of reciprocal legitimation. Thus Wordsworth credits his “true” readers (the “people” as opposed to the “public”) as uniquely responsive to his poetry, and he credentials himself as the most genuine of writers by determining that he alone can satisfy their superior taste. Shaping his career in shrewdly intuitive ways, Wordsworth between 1793 and 1805 gradually refined both a capacious agenda for literature in general and the specific rhetorical techniques necessary

for its implementation. At the same time, he kept his audience in a delicate state of aesthetic receivership, always anxious to fall short of the imaginative expectations mapped out by a given poem. Over time, such an alternately censorious or approving relationship between the Wordsworthian poet and his prospective audience was to fashion a once amorphous and mostly random “public” into a cohesive middle-class community that believed it had distinguished itself through its seemingly unlimited imaginative mobility.

As I condense the standard macrohistorical narrative about the rise of the middle class into an argument about the professionalization of aesthetic production and consumption, the poetic texts themselves will constitute my evidence; for it is only at the local, textual level that we can materially account for “the patterning of pleasures and the processes of aesthetic discernment” (Campbell, *Romantic Ethic*, 94) that circumscribed Romanticism’s distinctive middle-class psychology. Its larger historical concerns notwithstanding, then, this book thus unfolds as a sequence of local interpretations. Indeed, its relationship to more familiar historicist accounts of Romanticism is quite cautious, for though I continue to “understand art as social,” I certainly do not hold that “the social . . . allows an unmediated access.” Nor, for that matter, does the following argument mean to indulge in the “utopian pieties” (Cole, “Evading Politics,” 34, 35) that have occasionally made Romantic historicism seem to pursue the implausible ideal of a retroactive liberation. Rather, by exploring Romanticism’s crucial investment in literature, writing, authorship, and genre and so incrementally mapping the period’s logic of cultural production, this study gathers its evidence from specific interpretive forays into Wordsworth’s poetry and into contiguous literary and theoretical writings by some of his contemporaries. To the extent that this book seeks to conceptualize Romanticism as a historically distinctive type of symbolic behavior, it will not suffice simply to reconstitute the historical contexts and material conditions presumed to have determined that behavior. For what ultimately precipitates and shapes poetry is less any subject’s (supposedly axiomatic) unconscious debt to his or her historical moment than the assimilation and subsequent conversion of that debt into functional (if also displaced) sociocultural representations. Such a symbolic practice, meanwhile, can unfold with “conviction” or “sincerity” only if it successfully construes its historical moment as open and indeterminate; as Wordsworth remarks about books in general, “These mighty workmen of our later age / . . . with a broad high-way ave overbridged / The forward chaos of futurity” (*P* 1805, bk. 5, ll. 370–72). As inevitably belated, critical

readers of Romanticism, we can reach only an encrypted form of that period's complex and often antagonistic ideological motivation—its political and cultural unconscious—namely, the form stylistically objectified by received languages, genres, and discursive traditions. The extraordinarily elusive and flexible cultural agency also known as Wordsworth thus appears driven more by a prospect than by a debt. It involves a professional poet continually developing new hermeneutic scenarios to help his envisioned audience reconfigure its political, economic, and cultural anxieties and hopes. Vis-à-vis such an irreducibly contingent future, Wordsworth's poetry offers itself as a figural solution by retelling the story of the poet's vocational commitment to the imaginative recovery of an otherwise unattainable, precapitalist past.

While arguing throughout how Wordsworth's poetry is connected with the (deceptively simple) narrative of a rising middle class, I emphasize that the coherence and eventual self-awareness of this demographic formation is the effect, not the cause, of Romanticism's cultural productivity. Growing aesthetically more self-conscious and demographically more coherent, Wordsworth's intended audience is constituted by the cultural work of writing, reading, printing, publishing, and reviewing—very much in the spirit of his well-known 1815 remark about the poet creating the taste by which his poetry is to be appreciated. Social reflexivity—the construction and self-representation of individuals as members of an imagined middle-class community—is thus understood as a result gradually wrought by displays of authorial productivity and a corresponding interpretive proficiency. Throughout this study, I advocate reading the multiple aesthetic practices and symbolic forms of Wordsworth's and his contemporaries' Romanticism as the simultaneous realization and encryption of collective desires rather than as simple “expressions” of an autonomous, self-conscious individuality. As John Guillory notes, any attention to the “social order” of this period will only further underscore “the immense social significance of polite letters as a transformative cultural force” (*Cultural Capital*, 118).

The first part of the book explores the middle-class “professionalization of leisure” by analyzing a number of formal practices frequently conjoined under the category of the “Picturesque.” Conceiving form as the effect of a recurrent practice, rather than as a transhistorical and autonomous aesthetic object, I approach the Picturesque as a representative case of the macrohistorical role of aesthetic production in late-eighteenth-century England. Almost by definition anticlassicist in its commitments, the Picturesque elaborates a visual grammar that appears paradoxically ca-

sual *and* generic, intricate *and* inconspicuous at the same time. Such elaboration, we find, typically subordinates the material and topical specifics of a given landscape to the aesthetic rewards of its “composition.” After an opening discussion of the relation between class-consciousness and class-representation in eighteenth-century Britain, I explore the practical implementation and subsequent, theoretical justifications of the Picturesque in poems by John Denham, John Dyer, and James Thomson, as well as in the Picturesque's discursive regulation of “proper” aesthetic experience in the areas of tourism, sketching, and casual writing during the 1770s and 1780s. Emerging from this configuration of vernacular aesthetic practices, Wordsworth began his slow and increasingly methodical process of poetic professionalization in his *An Evening Walk* (1793), *The Ruined Cottage* (1797/1799), and poems like “Tintern Abbey” (1798). On the basis of poems like these, I argue, Wordsworth and his still-indistinct audience engage in a process of mutual projection and transference that furnishes them, almost imperceptibly, with more distinctive cultural and political identities, albeit identities as provisional and malleable as the poetic forms and hermeneutic process that gave rise to them. What in Romanticism's idealist aesthetic is ordinarily referred to as “spirit” can thus be understood as a modular subjectivity distinguished by its specific aesthetic idioms, interpretive proficiency, and quest to stabilize itself in an aesthetic community that, it now appears, rests on a type of representative *affect* or “sensibility” rather than on a set of explicit propositions. This sustained dialectical process of ideological positioning and reciprocal identification not only stabilizes the social personae of the author/producer and reader but also accumulates the “interest” (on the basis of aesthetic practices that are consciously experienced as “disinterested”) of Literature as a comprehensive system, a canon, or (in the recent phrase) “cultural capital.”

The book's next part traces the evolution of middle-class pedagogy from the late 1790s into the first decade of the new century, and it explores how the languages of pedagogical theory, didactic fiction, and the Wordsworthian ballad seek to inculcate elemental, moral, and aesthetic literacy in their respective constituencies by relying on a deep-structural logic of self-surveillance. As formulated in the “monitorial” systems of elemental instruction (developed by Andrew Bell and popularized and elaborated by Joseph Lancaster, Thomas Bernard, and Jeremy Bentham), Romantic pedagogy seeks to convert the individual's self-consciousness into its own disciplinary authority. By devising an intricate calculus of rewards, incentives, and prospects for promotion that comparatively outweighs the threat of punishment and demotion, it furthermore virtually ensures that

the individual will internalize and cultivate the paradigm of a “self-watching, subtilizing mind” (Coleridge, *Poetical Works*, 241) “spontaneously” and even come to experience his or her own cultivation of this monitorial logic with “pleasure” rather than anxiety. The ultimate goal is to overcome the eighteenth-century opposition between public and private education not merely by reproducing a highly efficient and ceaselessly attentive monitorial system *within* the mind of its disciples but also by conceiving of such a system as a blueprint encompassing all conscious existence. What prompts the individual to emulate at an affective and “private” level the state’s pedagogical dispensation is precisely the fact that in the monitorial system cognitive mobility is inevitably experienced as a form of social ascendancy.

As defined by both Anglican and Dissenting middle-class professionals, the educational systems of early Romanticism conceived of learning and cultivation (*Bildung*) as means of shaping highly adaptive forms of intelligence rather than as expedients for communicating a finite body of knowledge. This formation of highly mobile and adaptive intelligences, also analyzed by Coleridge in his *Logic* under the Latin concept of *educare*, ultimately construes intelligence as a social commodity and thus identifies sociocultural ascendancy as the now axiomatic, historical form of desire. Readings in Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Original Stories from Real Life* (1791) and of Wordsworth’s *Lyrical Ballads* (1798/1800) further explore how the interiority of the middle-class subject pivots on the ability to represent that interiority as spiritual capital and identify a mobile intelligence as an emergent middle-class paradigm of power. In an ongoing effort to strengthen his or her tenuous sociocultural status, the individual must assimilate a wide-ranging aesthetic curriculum comprising countless formal discriminations and symbolic nuances, a cultural project supremely exemplified in the *Bildungsroman* of German Romanticism. Discussing the protagonist’s theatrical self-creation in Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister*, Jürgen Habermas comments on Wilhelm’s ambition to “become a public person”: “Since he is no nobleman and as a bourgeois also does not want to make the vain effort merely to appear to be one, he seeks out the stage as a substitute, so to speak, for publicity . . . It may well be that it was the secret equivocation of the cultured personality (‘the necessity I feel to cultivate my mental faculty and tastes’) . . . that permitted the equation of the theatrical performance with public representation” (*Structural Transformation*, 14). Meanwhile, in England the idioms charged with the cultivation and display of such aesthetic connoisseurship and poetic competence largely coincided with the field of middlebrow “literature,” which during

this period was largely defined by the genre of poetry, with prose fiction deemed to have been corrupted by Gothic spectacles and sentimental romance. My readings of Wordsworth’s ballads thus place particular emphasis on the self-privileging and sharply discriminating logic of middle-class “taste” as it informs both the writing and reading of poetry.

The book’s final part explores Wordsworth’s most ambitious poetic effort, *The Prelude*, by focusing on the conversion of a self-interested reflexive subject into a distinctive narrative idiom that, in turn, is to demonstrate the poet’s ethos of vocational sincerity and his exemplary social function. To demonstrate this vocational fiction and ensure the poem’s overall success, Wordsworth must continually renegotiate the fundamental antagonism between his grounding hypothesis of a unique yet representative self and the inherited aesthetic and political languages required for confirming that hypothesis. To that end, *The Prelude* occasionally draws on residues of a civic humanist discourse that, in writers like Reynolds and Burke, has mutated into a mostly antitheoretical aesthetic advocacy of social custom and durable affect. Wordsworth’s autobiography also displays features of the more recent and pragmatic Humean style, an idiom unfailingly intelligent and inconclusive as it ponders the potential, though never actually demonstrable, social and cultural value of reflexive self-interest. Yet what in Hume’s later writings involves the uneasy truce between a permissive political and a more cautious moral economy is being reconceived by *The Prelude* as a conflict between two radically different models of literary practice. Lest his ideal of an authentic, original self should be traced back to inherited poetic techniques and his own authorial ambition, Wordsworth draws a sharp line between genuine spiritual procreation in true poetry and a derivative, illicit model of aesthetic reproduction. In focusing on these fears, I argue that the structural antagonism between the autobiography’s aesthetic and thematic levels essentially reproduces the political and economic anxieties and contradictions against which Wordsworth works to establish his vocational ethos and poetic beliefs, a dilemma structurally reflected in the poem’s virtually unending history of textual revision. The same antagonism is also reflected thematically in the ongoing attempt of *The Prelude* to homogenize the incompatible identifications and interests of its envisioned reading audiences. It is by means of the revisionary, which is to say self-legitimizing, form of autobiography—itsself the genre that most directly embodies the potential scandal of self-interest—that Wordsworth seeks to fashion his unique professional identity. To that end, the narrative is itself conceived as the objective transcript of sustained self-interest *and* as the evidence of a greater

social good realized by such self-representations. The project's overall success, meanwhile, hinges on the poem's ability to condense (and temporarily obfuscate) the contradiction between its own inward particularity and the complex political, economic, and psychosexual anxieties of an amorphous, dis/concerted reading public. Like Hume's *Enquiries*, Wordsworth's *Prelude* thus legitimates its vocational fictions (i.e., durable poetry, sincere poets, and capable readers) by means of a language that is deliberately provisional and vague, though never abstract. Such autobiographical eloquence, we are led to expect, will yet vindicate its own constitutive self-interest as the incubator of more capacious, if never fully realized, social values.

Against the background of Reynolds's and Burke's reconceptualization of custom into the interior, psychologizing rhetoric of "habits" and affect, I explore Wordsworth's representations of metropolitan London, of populousness, and of the social, gendered, and sexual determinants that tend to nullify the mimetic contract of his poetic autobiography. My readings in book 7 of *The Prelude* thus connect the antagonisms of mimetic structure, vocational ethos, and social anxiety that undergird Wordsworth's autobiography with the spirited debates about populousness and public morality in late-eighteenth-century England. Seen in this context, Wordsworth's autobiography appears less a confession than an attempt to simulate poetic answers to questions lingering in the national unconscious, questions ultimately too vast and threatening in their scope to bear conscious asking. Like Donne's "jolly statesmen," Wordsworth's imaginary twins of a "blessed" youth and an authoritative poet approach London's spiritual and semiotic inferno with a complex redemptive agenda. Eager "to tie / The sinews of a city's mystic body" (Donne, "Satire I"), Wordsworth's autobiography unfolds as the poet's first down-payment on *The Recluse*, a project repeatedly envisioned as a quasi-sacramental offering of the writer's *life and work* to the nation's imperiled body politic. Premised on this formal conceit of the self-as-poem and the poem as providential confession, the project of *The Recluse* can be understood as the development of a new form of secular, blank-verse scripture designed to perform aesthetic therapy on a social unconscious beleaguered by profound transformations and antagonisms within England's political and cultural economy.

What Wordsworth pursued, then, was a model of representation that would imply rather than argue a general consensus among its readers concerning the proper nature, purpose, and thematic range of aesthetic representation. Ideally, it seemed, his readers would endorse his claims for the profession of letters *a priori* rather than be reasoned into accepting them.

This opposition between an analytic and an apodictic model of poetic authority is particularly evident in the more sharply circumscribed, formal varieties of the lyric. In contrast with the philological and thematic meanderings of *The Prelude*, his volumes of lyric poetry (1807, 1815, 1817) set forth an all but axiomatic, unified sensibility in the form of a comprehensive and internally differentiated lyric *curriculum*, a conception reflected in the idiosyncratic division of these volumes (i.e., "Poems of the Imagination," "Poems of Sentiment and Reflection," "Poems on the Naming of Places," etc.). This study can only occasionally point to the many ways in which Wordsworth's lyrics after *Lyrical Ballads* attempt to complete his edifice of an authoritative career and an exemplary aesthetic community. Even more than *The Prelude*, lyrics like the great "Ode" are distinguished by their "presentation" as official transcripts of an idealized middle-class sensibility, and it is precisely the confessional and testimonial "aura" undergirding Wordsworth's "high Romantic" mode that cautions us against simply embracing these lyrics as authentic "expressions" of such a sensibility. In other words, the central Wordsworthian hypothesis of an unimpeachably authentic and durable interiority is secured by the social efficacy (or *semiosis*) of the lyric's distinctive formal-symbolic aura, that is, by the ability of its specific forms (hymn, ode, elegy, and epitaph) to present themselves as the private supplement to Scripture itself.

Wordsworth's careful presentation of the lyric as the ultimate aesthetic "anticommodity" may also help explain why, particularly during the Regency and after Waterloo, middle-class patterns of dignified poetic reading tend to blur into an unself-conscious lyric consumerism. Both *The Prelude* and the lyric volumes of 1807 and 1815 can thus be understood as an ambitious update on the ideal of an interpretive *cum* spiritual bathos so authoritatively established in Robert Lowth's *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* (1753, English translation 1787) and complemented by the philological recovery and curricular stabilization of a distinctly English national literature in the scholarship of John Newbery, Richard Hurd, Thomas Percy, Thomas Warton, and Joseph Ritson, among others.<sup>7</sup> In urging his audiences to devote their imaginative potential to the open-ended pursuit of their own cultural literacy, Wordsworth's poetry ensured the "return" of an increased affective coherence among its readership, something quite consistent with Benedict Anderson's idea of the nation as an "imagined community" that rests on "the deep horizontal comradeship" of otherwise anonymous individuals. This symbolic and spiritual "aura" of Wordsworth's confessional narrative and lyric testimonials also distracts from the rhetorical skill and professional interests that remained

integral aspects of a poetry whose commodity status became a consuming issue for Wordsworth, the only major writer of his generation to petition Parliament to rewrite English copyright law.<sup>8</sup> Yet even in that context, Wordsworth consistently represented his poetry as an inalienable spiritual progeny and would insist at all times on its categorical immunity from all laws of commerce. In fact, he maintained, genuine poetry could only be properly appreciated as the supreme anticommodity. Whatever its content or motifs, poetry had to be, in Wordsworth's effective and often persuasive conception, a strategy of defense against professionalization, specialization, and the psychological vacuum resulting from a seemingly interminable ascendancy, all of which had emerged both as the historical foundation of his middle-class audiences and as the structural threat to their psychological integrity.