palpable shapes and sounds which represent an airy something, yet nothing distinct enough to call an image or a name. Shapeless forms, wordless converse: "a voice / Is wanting, the deep truth is imageless."[63] It is as though power plays on its definite signs, its visual and verbal representations whose renunciation rather than denunciation—by a steely indifference rather than a sharp retort—calls forth finally the visible alternative to the political language of the curse, which in Act 4 emerges as the collective, untrammeled language of *song*. Such singing hardly brings down the empire: that act takes place off the stage of language, by an implied act of force that, in terms of the poem's problematic of language and ideological enslavement, seems literally neither here nor there. But Jupiter does not sink into Demogorgon's darkness without recognizing he is no longer being answered, neither faithfully by his minions nor angrily by his victims (3.1). The spell of signs broken, his power becomes, as it were, only physical, a sceptre without magic.

What no radical writer of the Regency period produces, but Shelley at least prefigures in these poems, is an unanswerable demand, a response to power that is not a "response" because it cannot be answered in the semiotic terms power uses to define itself. Cobbett's sneering term "feelosophers" parodies the pretensions of those who use abstractions to mask relations of exploitation. But it turns over the philosopher's stone rather than burying it. Shelley veers to the right and the left of the radical journals, now cautious, now utopian, at once careful and extravagant. This is less a contradiction than a constant maneuvering to deflect the entrapment of the social sign, which middle-class writers and ministerial rulers used to absorb English radicalism, turn it inside out as unbearable "excess," or, at last resort, make it the very index of their own force.

CHAPTER

Five

Romantic Theory and English Reading Audiences

WORDSWORTH and Coleridge came to believe—as Shelley did not—that reading redeems us. Wordsworth struggled to save this faith against institutions, the journals and reviewers who identified his 1800 poems with political Jacobinism and his theory of poetic language with a "metaphysical system." Out of his prefaces, supplements, and letters emerged a whole vocabulary with which literary history and the sociology of culture came to distinguish the transmission of cultural works: their "reception" by some readers, their "consumption" by many others, and the abyss between serious and mass culture that has only recently begun to be critically explored. For what Wordsworth called the task of "*creating*" taste was not a matter of poetic practice alone. It required theory, a reflective space in which Wordsworth, never comfortable with abstruse speculations, groped toward a systematic conception of his cultural aims, while Coleridge, addicted to metaphysics, constructed the most complex notion of an "audience" in the nineteenth century. Perhaps only in theory—resisted stubbornly by the reviewing institutions that safeguarded English cultural power at the end of the eighteenth century—could the complex relations between textuality, social structure, and cultural institutions themselves come strikingly into view.

The great social audiences of the early nineteenth century thrived within institutional bounds. The middle-class audience "dieted," in Coleridge's terms, at the "two public *ordinaries* of Literature, the circulating libraries and the periodical press."[1] The new mass audience combined these institutions with the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, while

the radical artisan audience formed within alternative institutions of the radical clubs and corresponding societies. Coleridge turned to greater institutions: the class-ordered state and the purely individual, morally ordered church. The clerisy, Carlyle's "Writing and Teaching Heroes," were to compose a great body of readers, virtuosos of symbolic texts. At the same time they were, as Coleridge urged his readers of the *Friend*, "to *influence* the multitude," make them its audience, train their capacities to read for themselves. Coleridge's theoretical clerisy never fully found a home among the practical clerics of modern academies. Yet the model has underwritten a politics of interpretation that maintains great power, particularly among those who tax themselves with deciding the clerical function at the present time. Even where his organicism is discredited, his notions of art consigned to metaphysical dustbins, or his social commitments discarded as threadbare ideologies, Coleridge's ethos of reading reappears in unusual and apparently innovative forms of contemporary clerical work. The aim of that ethos remains largely unchanged: to rule in and rule out the possible readings of social and cultural discourses contested throughout the social realm.

Writers between 1790 and 1830 could not organize their readers as audiences without mediating them through other collective forms: the crowd, the radical meeting, the chain of ranks, or the social text itself. Wordsworth's alien culture of English peasants, Coleridge's clergymen who move fluidly among the rich and poor, or Shelley's bands of patient rebels form similar social mediators who gave Romantic theorists tangible collective forms to help imagine and write to another, more difficult form, the audience they wished to construct. The most often-represented collective form in the early nineteenth century was doubtless that of social class itself. Yet only the radical writer attempted to make an audience that would coincide with a class; middle-class and mass writers ceaselessly represented figures of class order, only to define their readers as an audience apart from it. Coleridge's clerisy corresponds to no social class, yet it would be inconceivable without a firmly structured class order against which the clerisy finds its spiritually classless form. Nor does Wordsworth's project to transcend all languages of class make sense without the conviction that cultural and social languages of the 1790s were severely, almost grotesquely constrained by the material effects of class society. Thus the intensity of the great illusion about reading that informs the discourse of the Romantic Imagination: it frees us from a materially intolerable social world.

I. "Fit Audience Find": Reception and Consumption in Wordsworth

Wordsworth's 1800 Preface attempts to explain how the cultural condition of the 1790s came to pass. The terms of his famous diagnosis deserve close attention:

> For a multitude of causes, unknown to former times, are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and, unfitting it for all voluntary exertion, to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor. The most effective of these causes are the great national events which are daily taking place, and the increasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident, which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies. To this tendency of life and manners the literature and theatrical exhibitions of the country have conformed themselves.[2]

Wordsworth imagines a popular public that "craves" but cannot truly "prefer" what it reads; its unconscious desires parade as its conscious cultural choices. This is perhaps the first functionalist view of cultural acts, and it is no wonder that middle-class readers and reviewers of 1800 resented having what seemed to them freely chosen preferences painted as a narcotic reflex. Reviewers objected bitterly to Wordsworth's "system," his "metaphysic" that ensnared modern readers in a remorseless cultural and social determinism.[3] Even worse, from their point of view, Wordsworth squares this audience's cultural cravings with the design of its languages: either a careless, "rapid communication of intelligence" or a calculated literary language, "poetic diction." Hence he describes the crude, almost behaviorist circle of a historically-conditioned need, a demand for "gratification," and a language that basely satisfies by creating ever greater need. What Wordsworth supplies the sociologist of mass culture, he also gives the literary theorist. Displacing the reading of Milton, the brutal sphere of textual consumption overwhelms the gentler world of textual "reception." The cultural commodity shoulders aside the cultural gift, overpowering the symbolic acts of giving and receiving. In a few broad strokes, the Romantic theorist establishes those antithetic modes of reading that will come in the next two

centuries, under rubrics of "consumption" and "reception," to signify the realms of mass and high culture themselves.

The 1802 Appendix crucially qualifies this perspective. The *language* of the middle-class audience is not, like the audience itself, utterly situated by historical circumstance, but rather floats free of any material attachment. Repeated from poet to poet, the original language of men loses its primordial referentiality: "A language was thus insensibly produced, differing materially from the real language of men *in any situation*." This language belongs nowhere, to no one. Yet "poetic diction" appears to all the senses a "real language" because it arrests just those faculties which might distinguish its falseness:

> The Reader or Hearer of this distorted language found himself in a perturbed and unusual state of mind: when affected by the genuine language of passion he had been in a perturbed and unusual state of mind also: in both cases he was willing that his common judgment and understanding should be laid asleep, and he had no instinctive and infallible perception of the true to make him reject the false; the one served as a passport for the other. (*Prose Works*, 1:160)

The loss of referentials suspends the poetic sign between "true" and "false"; in the realm of the passions, the counterfeit silently displaces the real thing. Wordsworth adheres unswervingly to the distinction between genuine and counterfeit that gives his ideological analysis its force. He attempts here to explain how the status of signs has changed, how the confusion between "true" and "false" signs marks the class distinction of the middle-class writer. "The true and the false were inseparably interwoven until, the taste of men becoming gradually perverted, this language was received as a natural language: and at length, by the influence of books upon men, did to a certain degree really become so" (1:161). To the 1800 Preface and its historical determinism, the 1802 Appendix adds Wordsworth's account of cultural production and its formative power. The historical transformation of the audience connects to a disturbing shift in the power of signs to merge the genuine into the counterfeit and the existential into the merely "literary." This position is hardly an empiricist one, as it is often described. Longing for recovery of all the referentials, Wordsworth comes to a position unmistakably "modern": a belief in the power of signs to transform the real itself.

The 1800 Preface claims no naive mimesis. What will be represented in the *Lyrical Ballads* is not the "real" but a "real language" all but inaccessible to the middle-class mind. The language of Wordsworth's own poems therefore becomes a metalanguage, a framework of highly qualified "poetic" language that carefully "selects," "adapts," "adopts," or "imitates" a "real language of men" as its object. Deprived of the real by the corruption of his own language, the self-conscious poet must now hypothesize another language—the language of the peasant poor—that preserves all the crucial referentials the poet can no longer summon himself. But Wordsworth's hope to recover a "real" language by representing it involves him in an infinite theoretical regress. In order to be *perceived* as representing the real language of men, Wordsworth's poems require the further, extraordinary step of a theoretical Preface—a second metalanguage to theorize the conditions of the first. The 1802 Appendix shows that no modern audience could distinguish "real" language from its counterfeit without such a preface. A theory of poetic signs has become absolutely necessary to arrest the historical, semiotic spiral in which it has become impossible for readers to distinguish true signs of value from the false. Still, even a theoretical preface cannot suffice. It, in turn, demands a larger theory of language, social order, and historical development that Wordsworth, in the opening of the Preface, apologizes for *not* writing:

> For, to treat the subject with the clearness and coherence of which it is susceptible, it would be necessary to give a full account of the present state of the public taste in this country, and to determine how far this taste is healthy or depraved; which, again, could not be determined, without pointing out in what manner language and the human mind act and react on each other, and without tracing the revolutions not of literature alone, but likewise of society itself. (1:121)

This is a breathtaking prospectus. It has now become impossible to write the smallest, humblest poem of worth without framing it with an ambitious theory of social transformation, individual and collective psychology, literature and the interpretation of signs. A whole sociology of literature is outlined here, greater and more eventful than much of what has since passed under that name. It was to be abortive: Wordsworth's struggle against the reviewing institutions over the next fifteen years reduced this grand surview to the lofty but hollow prospect of the 1815 "Essay, Supplementary to the

Preface." Once the agent of a momentous social and moral transformation, poetry will come to appear possible only in a realm apart from any society and its reading audiences.

Still, the resistance of the reviewing institutions alone cannot explain Wordsworth's retreat from cultural activism to a lonely, reactionary isolation. No matter how self-conscious his struggle to transform middle-class culture was, it argued something inherently contradictory, perhaps impossible. At its root lay the transcendent faith that reading itself may raise us above the social struggles that define us. At first, Wordsworth's argument is thoroughly materialist. To the displeasure of readers who wish to preserve the apparent freedom of their cultural preferences from social limit and cultural habit, Wordsworth claims that a distinctive "language" forms around each particular, class-shaped set of experiences and habitual predispositions. How can we deny, he wrote to John Wilson in 1802, that the audience poets address with "poetic diction" mistakes itself for humanity when it is only a part, a class: "Gentlemen, persons of fortune, professional men, ladies, persons who can afford to buy, or can easily procure, books of half a guinea price, hot-pressed, and printed upon superfine paper"? This class falsely proclaims its universality, "supposing that human nature and the persons they associate with are one and the same thing."[4] Rustics also compose a class and also generate a distinctive language. But this language, whose users have no power to proclaim themselves universal, admixes elements of a "real language of men" with gross provincialisms, profanities, and sentimentalities. Wordsworth now argues that one class-shaped language can be changed so that it represents another, socially alien language; the middle-class poet's language can "adopt" or "imitate" the peasant's. This is also the moment, however, when what is class-specific to *both* languages suddenly disappears. By reading one "language" through the frame of another, the materially imposed limits of both socially conditioned languages may be overcome in the revelatory palimpsest of a common "human" discourse. To "select" from, "adopt," or "adapt," above all to "imitate" a "real language" of the peasant poor, is to assert that such a language exists ontologically apart from the language of the urban middle class, and that the very framework of representation—where one language "imitates" another—will at last reveal yet a third language. Neither peasant nor middle-class, this language is the very "music of humanity." Here the ambitious, profoundly moral act of writing produces an audience that may escape its unacknowledged prisonhouse of language, its own class-limited cultural position, and gaze into the far freer realm of a humanity that "suffers" rather than "craves."

This humanist, apparently democratic project faces two great difficulties. The most familiar is the idealist's complaint. Far from discovering an alternative language of the poor, Coleridge argues in the *Biographia Literaria*, Wordsworth has in fact unconsciously *produced* one from within the grid of his own language. No language of the poor could be imagined that is not already a truncated projection of one's own: "I conclude, therefore, that the attempt is impracticable; and that, were it not impracticable, it would still be useless. For the very power of making the selection implies the previous possession of the language selected."[5] Likewise, the representationalist vocabulary Wordsworth wields—"select, imitate, adopt" and elsewhere "represent"—must give way to Coleridge's phenomenological vocabulary of connection and separation. At issue is not whether language can represent "reality" but whether one social language can represent another. Coleridge's strategy is to maintain that rustic language cannot be "sufficient"; it cannot be conceded the wholeness which would make it *a* language and thus representable by another. Such a language—if it exists—is radically incomplete:

> The rustic . . . aims almost solely to convey *insulated facts*, either those of his scanty experience or his traditional belief; while the educated man chiefly seeks to discover and express those *connections* of things, or those relative *bearings* of fact to fact, from which some more or less general law is deducible. . . . There is a want of that prospectiveness of mind, that *surview*, which enables a man to foresee the whole of what he is to convey, appertaining to any one point; and by this means so to subordinate and arrange the different parts according to their relative importance, as to convey it at once, and as an organized whole. (BL, 2:52–53, 58)

All attempts to make contact with a language truly *other* by "imitating" it constantly give way to the uncontrollable powers of Wordsworth's own linguistic productivity. The peasant's "culture" is not truly alien to the educated man's. Thus, while sharing Wordsworth's sense of a debased, class-limited middlebrow culture, Coleridge cannot imagine transcending it except by widening yet further its inadequately ideal powers. These powers cannot be discovered in any class, they must be constructed in that ultimate institution of the mind, the National Church.

The surprising similarity of Coleridge's arguments to those made by contemporary reviewers, however, partly suggests why he needed to frame

them in the imposing apparatus of German metaphysics. This passage from W. R. Lyall's 1815 essay in the *Quarterly Review*, for instance, begins with the argument familiar to any reader of Coleridge's "literary life," before it takes a wayward speculative turn:

> The truth is, if the language of low life be purified from what *we* should call its *real defects*, it will differ only in copiousness from the language of high life; as to the *rational and lasting causes of dislike and disgust*, it is plain that on the subject of language no such causes can, in any instance, be assigned. . . . Language, as everybody knows, consists merely of arbitrary signs which stand for whatever it may have pleased custom to enact, and whatever changes may happen among them are occasioned not by 'rational causes' but by accidental associations of one sort and and another, of which, in general, we defy the most profound metaphysician to give any philosophical account.[6]

In the *Biographia* Coleridge answers not only Wordsworth's purposive materialism of language, but also this random materialism that locates meaning in the happenstance collision of signs. It goes hand-in-hand with the reviewing institution's assault on *all* rational metaphysics and cultural theory. This willy-nilly notion of language and cultural history buttresses an entirely arbitrary institutional authority. The subtext of Coleridge's famous claim that language is both ideal and rational takes aim at a greater target than Wordsworth himself:

> The best part of human language, properly so called, is derived from reflection on the acts of the mind itself. It is formed by a voluntary association 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 nor reaped. (*BL* 2:54)

Wordsworth's theory is not only self-contradictory, Coleridge claims. It unwittingly gives comfort to an ideology more powerful than any of Wordsworth's texts.

But the other difficulty of Wordsworth's effort to recover a genuine cul-

tural language has greater consequences. Having described the middle-class audience as consumers of a brutalized popular culture fashioned for urban readers, Wordsworth seeks in the rustic's alternative culture a means to reverse that consumption into a form of "reception." He attempts to transform commodified textual relations into an older relation of symbolic exchange, opposing to popular German verse tragedies and the sentimental trash of the magazines new poems that call for an active, engaged response from the same readers. When he calls for a Reader who will answer the Writer's "power" with a matching power of response, in the 1815 Essay, he envisions a purely symbolic exchange that must stand in place of degraded commodity exchanges the middle-class public has become all too accustomed to accept. Despite its yearning for the cultural past, however, Wordsworth's proposed poetic language is irreversibly, in Jean Baudrillard's sense of the term, a "modern" sign: "[It] dreams of the sign anterior to it and fervently desires, in its reference to the real, to rediscover some binding obligation. But it finds only a *reason:* a referential reason, the real—the 'natural' on which it will feed. This lifeline of designation, however, is no more than a simulacrum of symbolic obligation."[7] Baudrillard's "modern sign" does not belong to those for whom representation still unproblematically binds words with things—the eighteenth century from which Wordsworth borrowed his associationist theory of language. It belongs to a new age in which the writer's language can at most only "represent" a truly representational language. This is the difficulty of attempting to return to the purely symbolic exchanges imagined in peasant culture with a language already saturated in the commodity logic that grips the middle-class audience of 1800. This Romantic writer yearns to return to the space of "reception" (symbolic exchange) from the historical ground of "consumption" (commodity exchange). Yet to restore the reading of Milton and thus to save literature itself, Wordsworth must ultimately produce the most paradoxical sense of "literature"—a discourse which can be "received" only in the absence of a real social audience. Wordsworth's effort to remake the existing audience of 1800 ends, in 1815, by inventing an audience in imagination he was unable to form in the world. Hoping to return his readers to the real activity of symbolic exchange, he unavoidably invents a now familiar notion of an audience, one utterly detached from social space. Under such conditions, the audience of literature can realize, to borrow Baudrillard's phrase, only a "simulacrum of symbolic obligation."

This crucial shift may best be glimpsed in Wordsworth's sense of the historical relations between the two worlds the 1800 Preface attempts to bridge. Wordsworth was well aware that these urban and rural cultures were

not simply notional opposites yoked together by the ingenuity of his own Preface; one had been, for the past generation, *becoming* the other. The men and women whose "real language" he theorizes had already begun migrating toward the cities to become what he describes in an 1812 letter to Catherine Clarkson, written from London: "The lower orders [who] have been for upwards of 30 years accumulating in pestilential masses of ignorant population."[8] The late-eighteenth-century "agricultural revolution" celebrated by Arthur Young had already turned rural populations into city aggregates and peasant communities into ignorant London crowds. Some ten to twenty years after this letter, those "pestilential masses" would be formed as an audience—the first English mass audience shaped in such journals as the *Hive*, the *Penny Magazine*, and *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal*. Wordsworth often idealized the ground tilled by "Men who are the Owners of it," the very "ground" of a "real language of men." But what happens when that ground is enclosed and monopolized, when those speakers of a "real language" are expelled from its nourishing substance and forced to mass pestilentially in the overwhelming crowds first glimpsed in Book VII of *The Prelude*? As if to answer that question, Wordsworth reminds Catherine Clarkson that this is by no means a new historical development. Despite "unthinking people [who] cry out that the national character has been changed all at once," the poet insists, "the change has been silently going on ever since we were born; the disease has been growing, and now breaks out in all its danger and deformity." The birth of the writer coincides with the death of the only culture that gives value to writing itself. Such a death gives Wordsworth common cause with the ethnologist and the archaeologist, who, as Michel de Certeau puts it, "arrive at the moment a culture has lost its means of self-defense."[9]

Hence a new link between cultural past and future—and yet another appendix to the 1800 Preface—appears in his letters of 1812. The poems of 1800 are not merely textual relays between two autonomous cultures. They compose the textual countermove against that vast social transformation that since Wordsworth's birth has been turning one (full) culture into another (empty) culture, as the peasants who speak "the very language of men" become historically the future urban readers who, at further and further textual removes, can at best read only *about* such a language in the poems the poet offers them. Thus the increasingly bleak strategy of a writer who casts the act of *reading* against ineluctable historical development itself.

Perhaps this is why, though Wordsworth had set out to address an urban middle-class readership sorely in need of regeneration, he sometimes

imagined writing *to* that very class whose language he only felt he could "imitate." Consulted as an authority on the culture of peasants, the author of *Lyrical Ballads* would advise ministers like Francis Wrangham that rustics themselves do little reading: "The labouring man in agriculture generally carries on his work either in solitude, or with his own Family, persons whose minds he is thoroughly acquainted with, and with whom he is under no temptation to enter into discussions, or to compare opinions."[10] No sphere of public discourse develops where the "narrow circle of their intercourse" connects mind to familiar mind. No "audience" displaces the face-to-face intercourse of a real community. Yet, Wordsworth acknowledges, there *is* a peasant's written culture:

> I find, among the people I am speaking of, half-penny Ballads, and penny and two-penny histories, in great abundance; these are often bought as charitable tributes to the poor Persons who hawk them about (and it is the best way of procuring them); they are frequently stitched together in tolerably thick volumes, and such I have read; some of the contents, though not often religious, very good; others objectionable, either for the superstition in them (such as prophecies, fortune-telling, etc.) or more frequently for indelicacy. I have so much felt the influence of these straggling papers, that I have many a time wished I had talents to produce songs, poems, and little histories, that might circulate among other good things in this way, supplanting partly the bad; flowers and useful herbs to take place of weeds. Indeed some of the Poems which I have published were composed not without a hope that at some time or other they might answer this purpose. (*Letters*, 2:248)

Wordsworth imagines himself delicately intervening in this homegrown garden of "little histories." But he knows these chapbooks were the indigenous product of the peasant culture itself, not written for the peasants by outsiders attempting—like Francis Wrangham—to impose their own culture on the rustic. Thus he warns Wrangham that any effort to impose culture wholesale from above—in this case, through "religious books for the Poor"—will be largely, but not entirely, useless:

> The kind of Library [of religious books for the poor] you recommend would not, I think, from the reasons given above, be of much direct use in any of the agricultural or pastoral districts of Cumberland or West-

> moreland with which I am acquainted, though almost every person can read: I mean of *general* use as to morals or behavior; it might however with individuals do much in awakening enterprize, calling forth ingenuity, and fostering genius. . . . The knowledge thus acquired would also have spread, by being dealt about in conversation among their Neighbours, at the door, or by the fireside—so that it is not easy to foresee how far the good might extend; and harm I can see none which would not be greatly overbalanced by the advantage. (248)

This model of cultural transmission amplifies the 1800 Preface. Firmly inserted in his social audience, the "Reader," who is both mocked and assuaged in poems like "Simon Lee," filters the impact of a text through his community, and at length, the poems transform the peasant audience itself. But it is clearly not a matter, as Francis Wrangham seems to believe, of imposing doctrine or any particular textual *content* on these readers. What matters is the form of reading itself ("awakening enterprize, calling forth ingenuity, and fostering genius"), an encounter that slowly transforms the heart of a culture.

Thus Wordsworth imagines the possible reception of his own poems as he contributes to this marginal literature of the poor. A secret ambition of the *Ballads*—unconfessable in public prefaces—is to represent the rural poor to themselves, to work in reverse the difficult act he proposes in the 1800 Preface. His own "songs, poems, and little histories" would edge out the bad texts (superstitious, indelicate), thereby transforming the peasant's indigenous culture in the same way that he would, for the middle-class audience, subtly transform its "real language" by eliding all its "rational and lasting causes of dislike and disgust." By shifting the frame of his audience, Wordsworth in this letter momentarily rewrites the *Ballads* themselves. Their subjects and language are no longer leveled upward to make the middle class confront what is most human in themselves, but now refract the rural poor back to themselves. The middle-class writer can reveal to them, in his "little histories," that greater narrative in which they are all singly inscribed. No moment so distinguishes the middle-class writer from his sympathetically drawn subjects than this desire to make a peasant reader glimpse, in a sudden recognition of his type, what was always hidden from himself. The poems would uncover what was "inoperative and unvalued" in the peasant's own mind, suddenly made legible insofar as he is now the reader of a very special, very hypothetical audience. Even when it actually crosses the deep divides of culture and class, Wordsworth's cultural production cannot embrace its audience without transforming it, and always in the same way. Leveling the peasant culture "upward" or the haughty middle-class urban culture "down," Wordsworth's writing aims at last to make an audience somewhere beyond the determination of class and the material habitus it effects. The *Lyrical Ballads* thus becomes a text woven between two incommensurate audiences, the one in whose surprised face they are flung, insolently prefaced, and the one—perhaps the only one—who could ideally confirm what no middle-class audience would bring itself to acknowledge, that "we have *all* one human heart." Wordsworth imagines what, in another way, the later mass writers will construct in the cities—an audience meant to recognize itself among its types and, in this way, fully absorb the text that Wordsworth's recalcitrant middle-class public can read only at arm's length, at every moment prepared to fling the text back.

Profoundly anthropological, Wordsworth's project seeks out an alien culture, the language of a remote social class, only to recover from it what was *always* there. To "represent" this language can mean only to rescue it from its otherness, like the modern anthropologist who tries to penetrate what is most opaque in an alien culture to make it familiar and unthreatening to Western eyes. There is, indeed, a fine line between the gesture which brings together two social languages in what Mikhail Bakhtin called a "heteroglot" encounter and the gesture that effaces their differences, rendering them "human" rather than social. Wordsworth rides this line throughout the Preface of 1800 and the letters of the next twelve years. The conflict within Wordsworth's conception is also, inescapably, the conflict among Bakhtin's own readers, for whom dialogic and heteroglot encounters appear either as "class struggle" in the "arena" of signs or, on the contrary, the ultimate human connection of "self" and "other." Wordsworth's critique of middle-class culture begins with his materialist calculation of taste and social circumstance. It becomes idealist the moment his argument no longer tries to clarify the differences between social classes, but now attempts to bridge and erase them.[11]

These dialectics of cultural transmission mark the *Lyrical Ballads* themselves as a veritable anthology of styles and cross-purposes, ranging from the *humilitas* of "Simon Lee" to the personal sublime of "Tintern Abbey." In those poems where the language of the self-conscious intellectual mingles with the language of the female vagrant or the mad mother, readers enter into something like Bakhtin's dialogism, where the diverse dialects of persons and cultures play against each other. Yet the irresolvable "dialogue"

theorized by Bakhtin finally shades into the Romantic poet's pluralist blending of differences, fused in a great high humanist style that shifts these dissonant, dialogical gears into the smoother workings of what Erich Auerbach called an Augustinian mode of *sermo humilis*, the humble sublime. It is this "real" Wordsworth—not the Wordsworth of heteroglot encounter between socially alien languages—that M. H. Abrams canonizes in *Natural Supernaturalism*. Wordsworth, he writes, "must therefore as poet establish that dominion over the spirits of Readers by which they are to be humbled and humanized, in order that they may be purified and exalted".[12] As the humble suffuses the sublime and the sublime exalts the humble, the encounter between alien languages translates into the mixture of styles, a representational language that "signifies" the human apart from all its social and historical configurations. Social conflicts reappear, in the mingling of social languages, as a liberal, comforting pluralism. Strikingly, it is the 1815 Essay through which Abrams reads Wordsworth, the text that projects both a humble-sublime mingling of styles and also sanctions a "Reader" apart from any historical audience in which he must be otherwise inscribed.

By 1815 Wordsworth had yielded up any relation between his "reader" and a historically situated audience for that "Reader" who will be realized in a distant prospect of time. Wherever he may alight in some unimaginable future, such a reader can be realized only as a prospective "power" commensurate with the agonized power the writer himself invested in his work. This difficult conception of a final symbolic exchange within the text concedes to the middle-class culture of commodity exchange its priority and enabling necessity. In 1815 it is no longer possible to conceive transforming that culture into its symbolic opposite. The 1815 Essay supplements the Preface only to replace it. Here the history of textual editions is oddly illuminating. The 1800 Preface dropped to the end of the 1815 two-volume *Poems*, with the Essay meant to be "supplementary" to the new 1815 Preface explaining how Wordsworth had ordered the latest sequence of poems. But in the 1836 edition of the *Poems*, the Essay shifts to follow the 1800 Preface, still at the end, in whose counterspirit it had always really been read. For the Essay announces that the fate of reading is no longer a question of reception *or* consumption, but of reception as the desperate dialectic *of* consumption. His project to remake the middle-class audience for poems now abandoned, Wordsworth imagines a readership that may arise only by renouncing its place among the Public that never ceases to "crave." This is, as Wordsworth writes, "the People, philosophically characterized" —philosophically, because it is now impossible to conceive it socially.

Hence it is both strange and revealing to see an 1815 reviewer of the Essay construe Wordsworth's "People" as the future, fully commodified mass audience yet to be born:

> Let our readers digest that which we are about to quote, and with which we shall be contented as an example of the author's prose performances, criticisms, or good auspices relating to his own future support from the *people*;—the *people*, whom he emphatically separates from the *public*; meaning, we presume, those who are hereafter to be taught to read, to *mox erudiendum vulgus*, the unborn children of Joseph Lancaster, as contradistinguished from the progeny of the universities or the literary swarm of the metropolis now in existence.[13]

Wrongheaded as this seems, the reviewer's mocking misreading bears its own ironic kernel of truth. The future development of mass culture will depend partly on precisely the formulation of "literature" Wordsworth proffers in the 1815 Essay. Literature is to be the dialectical negation of a fated world of textual commodity exchanges, a literature which never addresses itself to the social present but realizes its audience only at the end of time:

> 'Past and future, are the wings
> On whose support, harmoniously conjoined,
> Moves the great Spirit of human knowledge—'

> . . . Towards the Public the writer hopes that he feels as much deference as it is entitled to: but to the People, philosophically characterized, and to the embodied spirit of their knowledge, so far as it exists and moves, at the present, faithfully supported by its two wings, the past and the future, his devout respect, his reverence is due. He offers it willingly and readily; and, this done, takes leave of his Readers, by assuring them—that if he were not persuaded that the contents of these Volumes, and the Work to which they are subsidiary, evince something of the 'Vision and Faculty divine'; and that, both in words and things, they will operate in their degree, to extend the domain of sensibility for the delight, the honour, and the benefit of human nature, notwithstanding the many happy hours which he has enjoyed in their composition, and the manifold comforts and enjoyments they have procured to him, he would not, if a wish could do it, save them from immediate de-

> struction; —from becoming at this moment, to the world, as a thing that had never been. (*Prose Works*, 3:84)

Wordsworth's high hyperbole confronts the real structural impasse of the early-nineteenth-century British cultural sphere. The high humanist effort to bridge social and cultural difference in a powerful act of cultural transmission—explicit in the 1800 Preface, far less confidently confessed in the letters—founders against the deepening division of social audiences themselves. Even in 1815 the *Monthly Review* projects a degraded mass audience that has not yet fully come into being, yet is proleptically visible in the very dynamic of the powerful middle-class public Wordsworth has struggled to reform. Rewriting Wordsworth's national-spirit "People" as the middle-class reviewer's contemptuous mass-cultural "people," the journalist accentuates the cultural determinism Wordsworth now desperately seeks to escape.

In the event, Wordsworth found his audience. His growing "public," true to the 1815 Essay, came in the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries to read in him the quintessential "Romantic" unsituated in social space and time. What Jerome McGann calls the "Romantic ideology" displaces the real cultural and historical conflicts of the early nineteenth century with an essentialized "Romanticism," and Wordsworth, among others, successfully established the terms for that subliming of the historical in the ideal.[14] He did not do so without great pain. The choice he refers to at the end of the Essay—either *believe* in this suprahistorical audience he must hope for, or destroy all his own works—seemed forced on him. Forced it was, partly by a recalcitrant middle-class public and its defensive institutions of reading, and partly by Wordsworth's own commitment to an impossible faith. That the abyss between social classes and their cultures could be bridged in a heroic, high humanist act of writing, and that socially divided readers might transcend their differences in a morally renewing, redemptive act of reading—this belief failed him. Yet it survives in his works, and in the faiths of many who still read him.

II. Coleridge: The Institutions of a Misreading Public

Unlike Wordsworth, Coleridge could not conceive reading and writing except in the framework of institutions. He spoke late in life of "three silent revolutions in England: —first, when the professions fell off from the church; secondly, when literature fell off from the professions; and, thirdly, when the press fell off from literature."[15] What he meant was a historical fracturing of textual institutions, a "desynonymization" and weakening of their cultural authority. In response to this cultural confusion, whose product was "the luxuriant misgrowth of our activity, a Reading Public," Coleridge sought to construct an audience that was *also* an institution, a body of readers and writers capable of governing the relations between all the emerging audiences of the nineteenth century over whom, individually, no institution could claim control.

The clerisy was to be composed of protean readers capable of powerful symbolic interpretations, who were to instruct all other audiences, each according to its social space, how to read and how to distinguish between proper readings and those readings that must be ruled out. Coleridge recognized astutely the failure of earlier means of cultural control: censorship, the power of circulation, the exercise of taste. Crudest of all was the state's power to govern publication and propaganda by the force it levied against the radical public in 1794–95 and 1819–20. The censors' local success, as victims like Richard Carlile triumphantly pointed out, stood in inverse proportion to their moral legitimacy. By the early 1820s even the ministers' most apologetic acolytes recognized this corrosive delegitimation of the state, casting its hollow authority against the slippery resistance of a ubiquitous public text. More powerful appeared to be the grand arena of "circulation," in which tendentious viewpoints finally cancelled each other out in the greater consensus of a pluralistic public sphere. But Coleridge sharply perceived the internal contradictions of that circulation. Its attractive metaphoricity concealed a number of logical impasses and devastating moral and ideological evasions. Not least of these was the question of "taste," that overdetermined notion which for the previous hundred years had governed a complex discourse on the subject of cultural legitimacy and resistance to social change. This inward state—a state of grace—corresponded in its complexity and necessity to that outward political state whose cracked arches could no longer govern cultural production and reception in the postrhetorical, postrevolutionary world. Indeed the regeneration of taste—to which both Wordsworth and Coleridge were deeply committed—required for Coleridge the making of an interpretive institution that at once resituated the political state, reestablished a state of intellectual grace, and restructured the circulatory practices of reading and

37. On Wooler's theatrical background, see Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, 736. In the *Dwarf* Wooler often reviewed political melodramas like *Oroonoko*: "We can hardly afterwards contemplate that the mere force of will could give such energy to language, such inspiration to the sentiment, as Mr. Rae effects in his questions to the slave, who cursed himself and his masters, for having been some years in bondage—"*And do you only curse!*" went like electricity through every bosom. . . .Everyone should see this representation, the friend of freedom to open his soul to congenial daring—the sons of despotism, to learn the power of freedom." *Black Dwarf* 1 (1817): 48.

38. See especially "Appendix: The Curse" in Robert Elliott, *The Power of Satire* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1960), 285–92.

39. Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1976), 201, 203.

40. Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, 676, 770–74.

41. "An Appeal to the Public in Favour of the Working Classes," *Gorgon*, no. 17 (1818), 129–30.

42. Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, 674–75.

43. James Sambrook, *William Cobbett* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), 84–86, 88.

44. On parodies of Cobbett in the journals, see George Spater, *William Cobbett: The Poor Man's Friend* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982), vol. 2.

45. Hazlitt, "Character of Cobbett," in *Collected Works*, 8:53.

46. "Mr. Cobbett," *Athenaeum* 1 (1828): 97.

47. Hazlitt, "Character of Cobbett," 52.

48. William Cobbett, *Rural Rides*, ed. George Woodcock (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 315. Woodcock's edition follows the 1830 text Cobbett gathered from his previous *Political Register* articles.

49. *Cobbett's Political Register* 32 (1817): 358–61.

50. Quoted in Sambrook, *Cobbett*, 174.

51. For a survey of critical readings of Cobbett, see Martin J. Weiner, "The Changing Image of William Cobbett," *Journal of British Studies* 13 (1974): 135–54.

52. Cobbett, *Rural Rides*, 401–2.

53. Cobbett's medieval faith is much stronger in works like *A History of the Protestant "Reformation"* (1824–26); see also Sambrook, *Cobbett*, 136–42.

54. Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), 112.

55. In this purely formal way, Cobbett's strategy bears resemblance to the "historical trope" of Hegelian Marxism, as Fredric Jameson defines it in *Marxism and Form* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971), 6–10.

56. Alice Chandler, *A Dream of Order: The Medieval Ideal in Nineteenth-Century English Literature* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1970), 59–82.

57. "Mr. Cobbett," 97–98.

58. *Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, in *The Complete Works*, ed. Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck (New York: Gordian Press, 1965), 10:27, 58, 147.

59. "A Philosophical View of Reform," in *Shelley's Prose*, ed. David Clarke (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1954), 244.

60. "Essay on Life," *Shelley's Prose*, 173.

61. "A Defence of Poetry," *Shelley's Prose*, 278.

62. For recent discussions, see Michael Henry Scrivener, *Radical Shelley* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1982), 196–210; P.M.S. Dawson, *The Unacknowledged Legislator: Shelley and Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980), 65–75; Timothy Webb, *Shelley: A Voice Not Understood* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1977), 101–5; Art Young, *Shelley and Nonviolence* (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), 140–46; Gerald McNiece, *Shelley and the Revolutionary Idea* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1969).

63. For a fuller treatment of the problem of language in *Prometheus Unbound*, see Susan Hawk Brisman, "Unsaying His High Language: The Problem of Voice in *Prometheus Unbound*," *Studies in Romanticism* 16 (1977): 51–86.

CHAPTER FIVE: ROMANTIC THEORY AND ENGLISH READING AUDIENCES

1. Coleridge, *The Statesman's Manual*, in *Lay Sermons*, ed. R. J. White (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 38.

2. Wordsworth, "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*," *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W.J.B. Owen and J. W. Smyser (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), 1:129.

3. For a representative collection, see reviews by the *Critical Review*, *British Critic*, *Edinburgh Review*, *Eclectic Review*, and particularly the *Annual Review*, collected in John O. Hayden, ed., *Romantic Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1971), 3–38.

4. Wordsworth to John Wilson, June 1802, in *Literary Criticism of William Wordsworth*, ed. Paul M. Zall (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1966), 71–72.

5. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), 2:58. Hereafter, *BL* in the text.

6. I quote this passage as representative of the reviewers' stance against theory; Lyall's review, in *Quarterly Review* 14 (October 1815): 201–25, appeared in March 1816, while Coleridge was drafting the *Biographia*. Reprinted in Hayden, *Romantic Bards*, 76.

7. Jean Baudrillard, "The Structural Law of Value," in *The Structural Allegory: Reconstructive Encounters with the New French Thought*, ed. John Fekete (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984), 62.

8. Wordsworth to Catherine Clarkson, 4 June 1812, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. Ernest De Selincourt (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), 3:21.

9. Michel de Certeau, "The Beauty of the Dead: Nisard," in *Heterologies:*

Discourse on the Other, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1986), 123.

10. Wordsworth to Francis Wrangham, 5 June 1808, *Letters,* 2:247.

11. In a more restricted sense of the "dialogic," Don Bialostosky makes the parallel between Bakhtin's dialogism and Wordsworth's dramatic dialogues in *Making Tales* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984). The result is not enlightening: what is most social and interesting in both Wordsworth's and Bakhtin's sense of the encounter between socially rooted languages gets lost in Bialostosky's purely individual "dialogue."

12. See M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* (New York: Norton, 1971), 397; cf. Erich Auerbach, *Literary Language and Its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and the Middle Ages,* trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton: Bollingen, 1964).

13. From the *Monthly Review,* 2d ser., 78 (November 1815): 229.

14. Jerome McGann, *The Romantic Ideology* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1983).

15. 21 April 1832, *Table Talk,* Bohn's Standard Library (London, 1903), 158.

16. Coleridge to Humphry Davy, 14 December 1808, *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge,* ed. Leslie Griggs (Oxford: Clarendon, 1959), 3:143. This letter also makes clear that in the 1809 *Friend,* Coleridge's first attempt to organize what would become the clerisy, his mutual antagonists were the *Edinburgh Review* and *Cobbett's Political Register.*

17. The "connected" and "Anglo-Gallican" styles are most thoroughly discussed in Jerome Christensen, "The Method of *The Friend,*" in *Coleridge's Blessed Machine of Language* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1981), 186–270. I have learned much from this absorbing, difficult chapter. But the discourse it reconstructs is misleadingly self-enclosed and gives us no sense of what Coleridge elaborated such stylistic oppositions *for.* Restricting himself to the 1818 *Friend,* Christensen makes it a philosophical (or, given his perspective, a grammatological) *summa* rather than, as in 1809, a first real intervention in England's existing cultural and social relations, as I have interpreted it here.

18. *Logic,* ed. J. R. de J. Jackson (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 23. To clarify Coleridge's definitions, I have combined his table with Professor Jackson's translations from the Greek.

19. "For the Friend," Christensen writes, "style is a matter of hermeneutics rather than rhetoric" (*Blessed Machine,* 211). This is a false choice; "meaning" cannot be discovered in language apart from the shared commitment to articulate it in a certain way (for example, in a "connected" style). That shared commitment is fundamentally a rhetorical one.

20. Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero,* trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (Boston: Beacon, 1967), 14, 25.

21. 12 September 1831, *Table Talk,* 139.

22. Coleridge to Southey, 20 October 1809, *Collected Letters,* 3:254.

23. See, for the politics of "Kubla Khan," Norman Rudich, "Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan': His Anti-Political Vision," in *Weapons of Criticism,* ed. N. Rudich (Palo Alto: Ramparts Press, 1976), 215–42.

24. "The very connectives of sentences, those last remnants of that logic, which from the time of Socrates or the elder Zeno had distinguished the literature of Europe from the cementless aggregates of the oriental Sages, have almost disappeared in modern French books, and are shunned by the Professors of fine style, the admirers of Gallican Point and Terseness, in England." Coleridge, "On the Catholic Petition. Letter II" (1811), in *Essays on His Times,* ed. David Erdman (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 2:306–7.

25. Coleridge, *The Friend* (1809), ed. Barbara E. Rooke (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), 2:46.

26. Freud, "Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious" in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1960), 8:115. I am indebted to Daniel Cottom, "The Enchantment of Interpretation," *Critical Inquiry* 11 (1985): 573–94, for extending the problem of "misreading" both to jokes and to social discourses as such.

27. Robert DeMaria, "The Ideal Reader: A Critical Fiction," *PMLA* 93 (1978): 466–67. In *Coleridge's Poetics* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1983), 12–16, Paul Hamilton argues forcefully against these claims as they often appear in Coleridge criticism. But the Coleridgeans are not wrong to detect this aim in Coleridge's project; they simply "discover" the identity of reader and writer prematurely because, good Coleridgeans, they seek it everywhere.

28. Stanley Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Prose* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1972), 17–19. See also *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1981) for the remark, later retracted, that critical claims need not be true, but only interesting.

29. Christensen makes a similar point in *Coleridge's Blessed Machine of Language:* "Each circulative model has the function of both identifying and indemnifying a processive space safely apart from the labyrinth of letters where a person first loses his way, then loses his memory that there is a way to lose. . . .The implicit justification of the apparent auto-affection of the physiological model is the economic principle of homeostasis, the conservation of the organism's health, vigor, and life" (167–68). But this is too simple: Coleridge is withdrawing one kind of "circulation" from another—the one Christensen rightly calls "imagination" from another world that also circulates, the world of public reading, whose intense social and political contests threaten what Coleridge must preserve from its motions. Typically, Christensen reduces that social world to a purely typographic one, the ghostly world of "letters."

30. *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1956), 68–69, 76.

31. Annotation to Eichhorn, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament,* quoted in *Lay*